JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

VOLUME XVI | 2024

1 The limits of agency: aspirational frustrations amongst working-class Chinese youths……...……. **3**
Edwin Jiang

2 Making art, making value online: NFTs, Blockchains and online art economies….. **23**
Heidi Cooke

3 Ant, spider and DNA: letting mindless generative mechanisms speak..…… **51**
Eldar Bråten

4 Mediation in a feuding society: an anthropological approach to the process of *sasmos* in contemporary Crete……...……... **72**
Christian-Radu Chereji and Aris Tsantiropoulos

5 Some reflections on mysticism…….. **91**
E. E. Evans-Pritchard (edited with an introduction by Kit Lee)

Anthropology in translation (JASO occasional series)
Editors' introduction……. **112**

6 Cover-up is better than exposure: scandals, flexible norms, prostitution or sexual dissidence in Morocco……..……..…… **113**
Mériam Cheikh (translated by David Zeitlyn)

7 Marcus Banks: an annotated bibliography……...……... **129**
Chihab El Khachab

Book reviews
Marshall Sahlins. *The new science of the enchanted universe: an anthropology of most of humanity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2022, 208 P. ISBN: 9780691215921.. **156**

Daniel Ruiz-Serna. *When forests run amok: war and its afterlives in indigenous and Afro-Colombian territories.* Durham: Duke University Press 2023. 270 P.
ISBN: 9781478019503…… **158**
Andrés González Dinamarca

Michael M.J. Fischer. *Probing arts and emergent forms of life.* Durham: Duke University Press 2023. 336 P. ISBN: 9781478019770 ……. **160**
Arjunvir Singh

Michael M.J. Fischer. *At the pivot of East and West: ethngoraphic, literary, and filmic arts.* Durham: Duke University Press 2023. 365 P. ISBN: 9781478019893…… **162**
Emily Long

Michael M. Muthukrishna. *A theory of everyone: who we are, how we got here, and where we're going.* Cambridge: MIT Press 2023. 448 P. ISBN: 9781399810630…..……. **164**
Carolyn Gover

Vanessa Grotti. *Nurturing the other: first contacts and the making of Christian bodies in Amazonia*. New York: Berghahn Books 2022. 212 P. ISBN: 9781800734586…..……... **166**
Cho Kiu Chiang

Andrea Muehlebach. *A vital frontier: water insurgencies in Europe.* Durham: Duke University Press 2023. 274 P. ISBN: 9781478019831…….... **168**
Ellen M. Burstein

Luci Attala and Louis Steel, eds. *Plants matter: exploring the becomings of plants and peoples, 1st Ed.* Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2023. 244 P. ISBN: 9781837720507.. **170**
Beatriz Mutter Quinderé Fraga

Lisa Mitchell. *Hailing the state.* Durham: Duke University Press 2023. 320 P. ISBN: 9781478018766……..…… **172**
Harish Goutam

Ludovik Slimak. *The naked Neanderthal*. London: Penguin 2023. 208 P. ISBN: 9781802061819……...……... **174**
Katya Herberg

Stéphanie Homola. *The art of fate calculation: practicing divination in Taipei, Beijing, and Kaifeng*. New York: Berghahn Books 2023. 374 P. ISBN: 97818007381 26.……. **176**
Loki Hu

Deborah A. Thomas and Joseph Masco, eds. *Sovereignty unhinged: an illustrated primer for the study of present intensities, disavowals, and temporal derangements.* Durham: Duke University Press. 360 P. ISBN: 9781478019084……. **178**
Natalia Lopez

Anne Allison. *Being dead otherwise*. Durham: Duke University Press 2023. 256 P. ISBN**:** 978147801984-8……... **180**
Natasha Durie

Saskia Witteborn. *Unruly speech: displacement and the politics of transgression.* Stanford: Stanford University Press 2023. 250 P. ISBN: 9781503634305…… **182**
Wesley Chan

Andrea Wright. *Between dreams and ghosts: Indian migration and Middle Eastern oil.* Stanford: Stanford Universiy Press 2021. 288 P. ISBN: 9781503629516...……... **184**
Yu Furukawa

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

THE LIMITS OF AGENCY: ASPIRATIONAL FRUSTRATIONS AMONGST WORKING-CLASS CHINESE YOUTHS

EDWIN JIANG[1]

This paper investigates the frustrated aspirations of three young Han working-class students in Inner Mongolia, Northern China. Drawing upon anthropological debates and philosophical developments in action theory, I argue that the subject qua actor ought not to be seen as an analytic construct that is given or presumed, but rather treated as an observable achievement that may be frustrated. Specifically, I argue that agency is exercised in cases when means and ends fit together, and this tenuous relationship between means and ends depend on an array of factors, which are often changeable in principle even if they do not change in real life. Along the way, I describe how amongst my Chinese interlocutors, the standards of agency – the normative assumptions of what counts as agentive – are tethered to aspirations to participate in the middle class.

Keywords: Action, China, the middle class, self, subjectivity

Introduction

A group of nearly fifty parents were crammed into a small classroom on the second floor of No.99, the senior high school where I conducted fieldwork during the 2020-2021 academic year. The parents were squeezed into the tiny desks and chairs usually occupied by their children. It was the early summer with about a month left in the school year. Teacher Peng, who oversaw this group of students – the top humanities class of the grade – addressed the crowd from the front podium. The parents looked up at her with the same deference that their children showed when being lectured at. The topic that day was the students' lacklustre academic performance on mock examinations earlier that term. These mocks prepared students for the *gaokao*, which students across China wrote at the end of their high school careers to gain admissions to universities. Although this class – Class 6 – was the best

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performing humanities homeroom in the grade, Peng warned parents that complacency was not an option. The *gaokao* was still two years away, and nobody knew what was going to happen in that time.

'The point of the meeting is twofold', Peng began. 'First, I needed to connect with all of you.' It was their first face-to-face meeting after the formation of classes according to student performance following the midterms of the previous winter, about seven months ago. Some of the parents had notebooks out, jotting down the key points. Others twiddled their thumbs. 'Second, I wanted to discuss student performance of our class in detail.' Though the public distribution of class results was forbidden by the Ministry of Education, Teacher Peng did it anyway. And while this information might have been new to the parents, students were already aware of their place in the hierarchy. The same list had been posted by the front door on the class bulletin board. Peng told me ahead of time that she would distribute the rankings. She said she knew it was forbidden, but she insisted it was necessary to be transparent with the parents about their children's performance. She said she was taking 'responsibility' (*zeren*) for her pupils. She continued:

> Let's look at their progress towards university. You have already eliminated half of the people just by getting into high school, but don't think you have achieved anything yet. If you want to get into a first-tier university, you will need to do the same thing, one more time. But this time, it will not be all that easy…

The point about eliminating half of the competition needs to be contextualised in the development of the Chinese public education system over the last decade.

During Andrew Kipnis' fieldwork in a Shandong junior high school, from 2005-2006 with updates in 2007 and 2009, continuing into senior high school was relatively easy for most pupils. Kipnis (2011) paid attention to the stark contrast between the relative ease of attending senior high school and the intense study regime of the junior high school of Zouping, which prepared students for the entrance exam. In the first decade of this century, about 80 percent of students were able to attend senior high (ibid.: 40), but this is no longer the case today. In his text, Kipnis notes that the State Council in 2005 declared that by 2010, half of all senior high school students would attend vocational education (ibid.: 83-84). By my time in the field, this had already become the norm.

This reinvigorated focus on vocational education was a response to China's structural transformations in the economy. China today faces demographic challenges, such as an aging population and declining birth rates, which has diminished the size of the young labour force. As Cui et al. suggest, there is a structural mismatch in labour supply and demand as the country experiences 'a surplus of low-skilled workers and a shortage of high-skilled workers', which the government is attempting to tackle with the promotion of vocational training (2018: 1231). Consequently, not many students get to attend a normal high school like No.99, as half are funnelled into such vocational programs.

In any case, after making each point, Teacher Peng would walk to the other side of the podium, as if to make sure that the parents were still listening. At the height of her diatribe, nobody in the room moved. Teacher Peng explicitly targeted the parents with her critique,

but from my third-person perspective, it looked as if it did not elicit much response from the parents.

> …At this age, there is no need for parents to monitor their children. The biggest problem for the students is not that they lack discipline but that they lack drive (*bunuli*). *They are being moved (beidong) and not moving themselves (zhudong)*…

When it was time to go, most of the parents quickly cleared the room, each of them thanking Teacher Peng for her time before walking out the door. Nobody stayed behind to have further discussions concerning their children's academic performance. As Teacher Peng told me, they all had her WeChat account, and they all knew that she was available, if they ever needed to talk.

Teacher Peng's complaints evidently revolved around the so-called problem of passivity – the inability 'to be a self-mover' – amongst her students, who were supposed to be the top performers in the whole grade. In what capacity did students fail to be self-moving? Peng did not clarify. Maybe it was obvious to the parents, who did not ask questions about it either. Unfortunately, it was not all that obvious to me. The students' days were jampacked with classes with little breaks in between, longer than most people's working days, even in China. They did not seem passive to me.

The aim of this paper is to understand such admonishments of passivity within the Chinese context, and in doing so, relate it to anthropological debates concerning agency, here understood through the distinction between activity versus passivity. I focus on three Chinese interlocutors who have all experienced some type of frustration in their life trajectories, and who were admonished by others for failing to be active, 'to self-move'. Using the ethnographic evidence, I suggest the subject qua actor should not be seen as an analytic construct but rather treated as an observable achievement – when the means and ends fit together to produce successful action – depending on contingent factors. I argue that while there has been wide anthropological rejection of 'agency', in the sense of *the individual subject who acts*, such a concept remains invaluable for ethnographic analysis so long as we do not forget that the standards for what counts as an agent is liable to shift cross-culturally and trans-historically. I shall also illustrate that for my interlocutors, the agent par excellence is fundamentally a middle-class 'striver', the product of economic reforms in post-Mao China.

The field

I was 'in the field' during the 2020-2021 school year, and my 'field site' was an urban high school, No.99 Senior High, in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, in the People's Republic of China. The city itself was described as comparatively 'backwards' (*luohou*), and the school was similarly categorised as being merely 'average' (*yiban*). Though No.99 graduates could gain admission into four-year bachelor's programmes, they failed to attend the best schools in the country. As the teachers put it, graduates at No.99 were only admitted to 'double-negatives' (*shuangfei*). These are the universities that were excluded from both the 985 and 211 projects,

two now-discontinued government programmes which sought to improve the academic standings of domestic institutions through top-down governmental investment (Choi 2010, Zhang et al. 2013).

As I have noted elsewhere (Jiang 2024: 75-78), my fieldwork was subject to methodological limitations. First, my young interlocutors were selected exclusively from students in their first year of senior high, which comprised the three years before the National College Entrance Examination, or *gaokao*. This decision was made reluctantly following the pointed recommendations of the Principal Zhu, who advised it was best to leave out Year 2 and, especially, Year 3 students as they were under tremendous pressure from the impending examination. My Year 1 interlocutors were mostly aged 16 and had arrived at No.99 in 2020.

At No.99, Year 1 was divided into six classes, or 'homerooms', each led by a 'head teacher' (*banzhuren*). In addition to the three compulsory classes – Chinese, mathematics, and English – students had to choose 'to major' in the sciences (*like*) or the humanities (*wenke*). Three of the six classes in the grade were science-based, preparing for the Physics, Chemistry, and Biology electives. The other three were humanities-based, preparing students for Geography, Politics, and History electives. The class allocation was based on the first-year midterm scores, with the highest scoring students who wished to major in the sciences being allocated into Class 5 and the highest scoring students who wished to major in the humanities being allocated into Class 6. I was informed the other classes were assigned randomly. In principle, owing to poor performance, it was possible to be reallocated to one of the lower-performing homerooms from Class 6.

Second, within my research, there has been an absence of ethnic Mongolian voices. The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has a population of about 25 million people, yet only one-fifth of that number were ethnic Mongols. During fieldwork, ethnic tensions ran high following widespread protests against governmental decisions to institute Mandarin language instruction for subjects like 'language and literature', moral education, and history in nominally Mongolian-language schools (see Bulag 2020).

At No.99, Principal Zhu dismissed the issue, suggesting these incidents were largely irrelevant because my field site was a Mandarin-language institution with few ethnic Mongols. Implicitly, he was suggesting that these were controversies and should be excluded from my research. The seriousness of Zhu's suggestion was made clear when I began to face police interference in my day-to-day and was brought in for questioning about my research.

Perhaps more importantly, although some students were identified as ethnically Mongolian by their peers to me, none wished to discuss their ethnic identity openly, which could be due to my own identity. Although I was usually introduced by teachers as an ethnic Chinese from the West, and though I was usually perceived and sometimes even explicitly referred to as a 'foreigner' (*waiguoren*) by my young interlocutors, given the events that transpired before my arrival at No.99, I suspect my ethnic Han background positioned me closer to my Han interlocutors than to the few ethnic Mongolians that I met in the field.

Whilst I focus only on a trio of students in this paper, the limited selection of ethnographic materials here is undertaken for the sake of clarity when demarcating the three types of agentive failures I wish to portray. Overall, my fieldwork covered a much larger pool of interlocutors, and the data presented here was drawn from a set of numerous semi-

structured interviews with over two dozen students (and multiple teachers) and countless hours of informal chats (*liaotian*). Practically, my research involved strict observation in lecture-based classes like Chinese, where students were not allowed to speak unless called upon, and participant-observation in other classes like Physical Education, for example, which were not tested on the *gaokao*. Since these classes were 'not useful' (*meiyong*) in the words of my young interlocutors, they offered ample opportunities for me to interview interlocutors directly. Fieldwork was conducted during the course of the academic week, which officially ran from Monday to Friday, from 7:00 AM to 5:45 PM, though all students were expected to stay behind for independent study for a period of time after.

Chinese admonishments of passivity

What constituted a failure to be a 'self-mover' (*zhudong*) within the wider contemporary Chinese educational and aspirational setting? It is worth contextualising these admonishments within the background of family life first. Surprisingly, all of the young working-class interlocutors told me that they seldom received reprimands from parents at home. In contrast to Teacher Peng's suggestions above, many young interlocutors suggested they have entered an age where they no longer needed their parents' rebukes. For instance, Laolang, a student in Peng's class, and one of the trio of students I focus on below, said, 'My parents do not ever "talk sense" (*jiang daoli*) to me. They know we already "understood sense" (*dong daoli*).' And consequently, he implied, parents did not feel the need to give these moralising lectures.

While it was possible to take these comments at face-value, my interlocutors' explanations ought to be interpreted within the specific challenges that working-class families faced in contemporary China. Indeed, in the ethnographic description above, parents themselves often emerged in the context of my field site as passive players, perhaps best exemplified during the meeting with Teacher Peng. As I mentioned above, I was at first surprised to see the parents leave the classroom so quickly after the meeting concluded. Few, if any, acknowledged my presence, and nobody seemed much interested in speaking with me when prompted. When I asked the students where their parents were rushing off, they told me their parents had to hurry back to the 'construction site' (*gongdi*) or 'had business to attend to in the shop.' Thus, I suggest this passivity was a function of their own classed realities. Most obviously, for many parents, time spent away from the workplace meant deducted wages.

At a 'socio-cognitive' level, it was also possible that the apparent lack of admonishments from the parents at home resulted from parents feeling unqualified to levy criticism toward their children in the first place. This possibility was first brought up to me by some of the older teachers at No.99. Teacher Tang was a former Chinese teacher, who was relegated to an ad hoc administrative role to make way for younger, newly trained arrivals. She told me that in her decades on the job, she had met many parents who felt 'they were unable to help their kids' (*bang buliao*). She mentioned how, for many working-class parents, it was clear that their children already believed themselves to have surpassed their parents in the social hierarchy owing to their educational achievements. Comparatively, unlike in Paul

Willis's seminal study of British working-class students in the late 20th century, *Learning to labour*, my young interlocutors did not produce their own normative standards in opposition to that of the institution in processes that Willis has called differentiation (1983: 63). Instead, they have adopted the mainstream hierarchical ordering of citizens within contemporary China – an ordering based on educational attainment that already places them above their parents. In the eyes of my young interlocutors, then, there was a fundamental difference posited between teachers, who often did levy criticism, and their own parents. While nobody dared to question the competence of a teacher openly, many students had no problems describing their parents as 'without culture' (*mei wenhua*). Yuanyuan, an above average student in Teacher Peng's homeroom, for instance, described her parents as 'peasants' (*nongmin*), a term that is often used pejoratively to describe in the urban discourses to those who were perceived as being culturally backwards (see, e.g., Schneider 2015: 336–337).

Overall, most parents of pupils at No.99 had not attended university, and it was not uncommon for them to have only completed a junior high school education. Yuanyuan was on track to be the first person in her family to attend a four-year post-secondary institution, and hoped to become the first person in her family to enter the white-collar workforce. This was a decision she made in line explicitly with China's developmental goals to transition into a service economy in mind (see Liu 2020: 37). In the public imagination, Yuanyuan would have certainly been perceived as doing far better than the previous generation in her family.

In this respect, during my time in the field, criticisms pertaining to passivity and the failure 'to move oneself' were made exclusively by university-educated members of the middle class to either their children or their pupils. Within the context of No.99, this usually meant teachers. Some of the teachers I met at No.99 told me that their own children, most of whom were attending far better schools, were also similarly passive in their educational aspirations. Consider Teacher Lun, a former mathematics teacher who worked alongside Teacher Tang, introduced above, in a similar administrative role. Teacher Lun had a son attending No.101 Senior High, the second most selective high school in Hohhot. Getting into such a prestigious school was no small feat, but Teacher Lun worried for her son's future still. Earlier in the school year, way before the parent-teacher meeting described above, it was Teacher Lun who first used terms like 'self-mover' (*zhudong*) in conversation regarding her only child, who was himself hardly an outstanding student.

In the early spring, students in the first year at No.101 were to declare their track on the *gaokao*, whether the humanities or the sciences. As Teacher Lun told me, her husband wanted her son to go into the sciences for the comparatively better employment prospects. However, Teacher Lun would prefer if her child chose his own path, studying what he wanted. However, this was not a preference she had based on any intrinsic value she perceived in education. Consequentially analysed, she told me, the problem with parents dictating children's trajectory was that students occasionally end up studying subjects they were neither good at nor interested in. From experience, this usually resulted in poor performances on the *gaokao* anyway. The problem for her son, however, which Teacher Lun believed to exemplify the child's entire generation, including those working-class students at No.99, was that none of them knew what they were interested in, other than what their parents dictated, and this meant they were often unmotivated and lacked aspirations. As Teacher Lun also put it, these

kids were 'not self-movers' (*bu zhudong*). My own findings in this respect cohered with relevant existing studies, which likewise emphasise how Chinese parents since the turn of the century have sought to promote to their children a 'hard projective individualism' (see Kim et al. 2017: 360–361), which emphasised self-sufficiency and was normatively measured by material returns such as academic or financial successes – characteristics that typically allows for participation in the middle class.

There has been much controversy about the existence of a Chinese middle class analogous to that in the West. Here, I have found it useful to turn to David S.G. Goodman's discursive approach to understanding the middle class, which has taken a definitive shape since the 1990s with the effects of the economic reforms under Deng Xiaoping (2014: 60-64). Within the popular imagination, the aspirational middle class delineates a life trajectory characterised by the consumption of branded goods (see also Davis 2005); participation in the 'experience economy' by going on vacations or learning a foreign language; and critically, the private ownership of one's own home, particularly in good urban areas, which owing to top-down policies could yield tangible benefits for future generations (see Tomba 2004, Wu et al. 2016). And amongst my interlocutors, the attainment of these middle-class goods is perceived as possible primarily through a university education. Consequently, I propose the middle-class critique of working-class students as not 'self-moving' ought to be understood as some type of criticism of their inability to achieve upward mobility and participate in this imagined aspirational trajectory – to move along the rails as it were toward the middle-class lifestyle. With this in mind, I want to turn now to the ethnographic cases to explore the ways that anthropologists might conceptualise these aspirational failures in relation to theory. In addition to the ethnographic contribution, my young interlocutors offer insights into understanding the individual on the level of action or what might be broadly construed as agency specifically in the cultural context.

Self-movers and practical reasoning

None of the young interlocutors offered a straightforward definition of what it meant to be 'self-moving' (*zhudong*) when asked. However, they gave a few descriptions from which we may extrapolate. According to them, self-movers are independent, with ideals, aims, and aspirations that are theirs. My young interlocutors expressed this independence through their practically reflective nature. That is, they were supposed to decide what they wanted and to seek out the appropriate ways to achieve it. Here, my ethnographic research connects to theoretical debates within anthropology concerning the 'individual subject', as defended by the likes of Caroline Humphrey.

Objecting against Marilyn Strathern's insistence on 'conceiving the self as multiple and created relationally', Humphrey demonstrates how her ethnographic analyses of the Mongols are dependent upon the belief of an essentialist self, 'constituted by a singular "soul" (*süns*)', reflexively recognised as 'having an unchanging essential ability (*avias*) that lasts through their lifetime' (2018: 40). This is not to say that Mongolians were ignorant of the possibility of conceiving of themselves as 'relational beings' in Strathern's sense. As expected across

multiple ethnographic contexts, kin relations often do take priority. Nevertheless, Humphrey argues there is strong ethnographic evidence to suggest that people also have a conception of the self in the first person, as an individual subject capable of acting out one's life. She argues that it would be a mistake to preclude this possibility from any field site as an a priori commitment. And, indeed, it is this capacity to conceive the self as an individual subject that undergirds my interlocutors' conceptualisation of successful 'self-movers.' Yet, it is this idea of boundedness that is challenged by the likes of Bruno Latour. As a proponent of 'actor-network-theory', Latour's focus has been on an ethnographic insight as well: the observation that human actions are fallible and contingent. But whereas Humphrey seems to focus on the success of our actions – the way that we distinguish ourselves from other people and identify with our acts – Latour wants to stress the breakdowns that anthropologists also are familiar with in actions. In *Reassembling the social*, he emphasises this contingency in human action and the eternal possibility of failure (2007: 44):

> Action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled. It is this venerable source of uncertainty that we wish to render vivid again in the odd expression of actor-network.

Actor-network theory begins with a recognition of the under-determination of action. As the three interlocutors will illustrate, we might not accomplish what we set out to do. Moreover, we might even cause effects we did not intend to – and these effects might continue to kickstart further causal chains to which we remain oblivious. When we do accomplish what we set out to do, Latour seems to ask: how can we be certain that these goals were ours? Such a position is sceptical. How is it possible that there are 'agents' in Humphrey's sense of the individual subject who act if we accept that all our acts are fallible, rife with uncertainty and contingency? In all three of the ethnographic cases in the next section, my interlocutors all have experienced some type of frustration as actors, *owing to factors outside of their control,* in ways that challenge the notion of an individual subject.

Considering the ongoing impasse between these two positions, some anthropologists have sought to abolish 'agency' as an anthropological jargon in favour of other terms that might be more ethnographically relevant and analytically fruitful. James Laidlaw most notably has argued that 'agency' as a technical term, e.g., as conceived by Latour, is methodically muddled and ought to be replaced by more innocent concepts such as responsibility, which are suggested to be more ethnographically salient in capturing the 'everyday concept of agency' (2014: 181). I remain confused by Laidlaw's insistence there is an 'ordinary' sense of the English word 'agent' which he suggests is 'borrowed from French to describe someone who does something *on behalf of someone else*' (ibid.:180). Even if etymology should somehow dictate analytic programmes, this philological exercise is incomplete. In Latin, *agens* is the present active participle of *agere*, meaning 'to act' and 'to do.' We find no sense of 'on behalf of someone else.' Nevertheless, at a more general level, Laidlaw convincingly objects against the actor-network theorists by critiquing how their frameworks leave little space for what Peter Strawson has called 'reactive attitudes', which Laidlaw agrees with Strawson to be at

the heart of interpersonal relationships that are essential to human life – attitudes like forgiveness and resentment.

In 'Freedom and Resentment', which Laidlaw draws from, Strawson argues that 'the existence of the general framework of attitudes itself is something we are given with the fact of human society' (2008: 25). Laidlaw's attack on the actor-network theorist's framework seemingly mirrors Strawson's line of reasoning: even if hard determinism is true – or even if agents are really causal networks and not individual subjects who *do* things – such realisations would not provide justification for the abandonment of such reactive attitudes, which fundamentally make us who we are. Strawson draws an analogy between the practical and the theoretical – between our commitment to moral responsibility to our commitment to the justification of induction. As Strawson put it, since Hume, the principle of induction has appeared equally 'groundless' as a metaphysical axiom, yet it remains a natural expression of who we are, without which human life seems impossible (see Hieronymi 2020 for a recent exploration of this naturalistic reading of Strawson).

Nevertheless, this need not imply, in my view, that we ought to do away with notions of agency or agentive action. Theoretically, Laidlaw gives examples of when responsibility is socially ascribed and accepted for 'unintentional' damages, cases like accidentally spilling wine at a dinner party, where there is no 'action' in the full-blooded agentive sense of intentionally doing something (2014: 191). But this example seems to me, merely a reflection of cordiality. The ascription of responsibility in these 'accidental' cases are parasitic upon the ascription of responsibility for 'intentional' action. Even in terms of reactive attitudes, there is a world of difference between someone apologising for accidentally spilling wine on me and someone apologising for intentionally pouring wine on me (perhaps he was angry before, but has since calmed down). In my view, these differences stem from the presence or absence of 'agency.'

At an ethnographic level, moreover, responsibility alone can only take us so far in making sense of the details that I have presented thus far. As the students' own complaints about their frustrated life trajectories indicate, there is a whole dimension of Chinese life – the source of their frustrations – which pertain to issues closer to the problems that Latour emphasises: *factors that are beyond our control that obstruct the attainment of our own goals*. Thus, I still insist that what we need to understand my interlocutors is a clearer conception of agency, and not to replace it with some equally nebulous concept like responsibility.

Here, I have found it helpful to turn to the traditional philosophical notion of 'practical reasoning', employing what philosophers have called 'the standard picture' of action. According to Candace Vogler, the standard picture goes like this:

> Whether the content of an episode of practical deliberation makes specific mention of ends and means, the form of any episode of practical deliberation is end-governed; in non-calculative deliberation, the end is figuring out what to pursue; in calculative deliberation, the end is figuring out how to attain an end that you already seek to attain. (2002: 169)

Ultimately, there is an end that one aims at. Once established, the agent then goes on to seek out the means to attain this end. An action in this sense can be recursive. For example, to make an omelette I must break a few eggs. The latter (breaking eggs) is an end embedded in

the former. It is a proximal end in the structure of the action, but it is also a means to making an omelette. This is the so-called ABCD structure of action that is presented in Elizabeth Anscombe's *Intention*, which has occasionally been cited by anthropologists, though rarely elaborated. The letters in the ABCD structure deal with four different descriptions of one bodily movement. In the comical example that Anscombe gives, a man moves his arms up and down (A), and in doing so operates the pump (B), which replenishes the (poisoned) water supply in a nearby house (C), which poisons the house of Nazis (D). Are there four actions or just one? Anscombe replies (2000: 46):

> There is one action with four descriptions, each dependent on wider circumstances, and each related to the next as a description of means to end; which means that we can speak equally well of four corresponding intentions, or of one intention – the last term that we have brought in in the series.

It is important to recognise, however, that while we discuss four descriptions – A through D – there is only one observable movement that is empirically accounted for: a man moving his arms up and down. If, as the often-cited takeaway from the text suggests, the mark of intentional action is the actor's capacity to answer 'why' he is doing something, then we can see why D has more explanatory power than the other descriptions. It helps us connect A, B, and C, which precede it. As Anscombe continues (ibid.: 46-47):

> If D is given as the answer to the question 'why?' about A, B and C can make an appearance in answer to a question 'How?' When terms are related in this fashion, they constitute a series of means, the last term of which is, just by being given as the last, so far treated as end.

Since D swallows up all the previous terms, ABC, it helps us link and make sense of the preceding series as a series, instead of a mere heap of descriptions that are unrelated. By understanding the point of the ABCD structure, I plan to use it to elaborate on what I alluded to earlier about the individual: that in an ethnographically substantiated sense, the individual subject, conceived as the self-mover, really is the locus of reason. Grasping Anscombe's picture also, however, helps us recognise what could go wrong in the Latourian sense. To reiterate, I think the students' failure 'to self-move' is in their inability to act in the sense of the standard picture: there is some type of breakdown in the means-ends structure.

To be clear, my point here is not to impose a philosophical theoretical framework onto the ethnographic details, but rather, to demonstrate how these philosophical concepts might help us organise seemingly different forms of ethnographic experiences. One might object that in different cultural contexts, people might not share the understanding of 'intention' as Anscombe does. After all, her theory is an inheritance from a Christian tradition. We can at least ease some fears of ethnocentrisms once we realise that Anscombe's 'intention' does not rely on any purely 'inner' acts, but rather is, in a serious sense, 'social.' To reiterate, according to Anscombe, a person's 'intention' is not some inner self-ascribed state that relies on psychological parameters not shared across cultural contexts, but something socially embedded in the explanations that people give when prompted about what they are doing –

in explanations that take the ABCD structure. Therefore, this makes it especially conducive to the type of ethnographic analysis that anthropologists undertake.

Three cases of failure:

1. Xiaozi, the day dreamer

Xiaozi is a short boy – barely five feet tall – from Year 1-Class 4, which was one of the poorer performing humanities classes. Most students in this class were on specialised tracks: fine arts, dance, or sports. One day, during afternoon recess, Xiaozi came up and asked me if dentistry was expensive in the West. I told him 'It depends,' thinking about insurance policies and co-pay options. Before long, he began to tell me how much dentists made in China compared to the average wage earner.

Xiaozi revealed to me that he harboured hopes of being a dentist one day. I was pleasantly surprised a student taking no science classes could even become a dentist. It quickly became clear after I started asking him questions, though, that he had little idea about how to become a dentist after all. He simply told me that to become a dentist, he would need to do well on the *gaokao* and go to a first-tier university.

I found Xiaozi rather amusing, but those around us did not find the situation humorous at all. Teacher Lun told me in private that this pupil was just wasting his time 'daydreaming' and should get real. Lun told me that as a humanities student, Xiaozi lacked the 'basic skills' to get into dental school. 'The chances of becoming a dentist for him? It's impossible!'

It was strange to see a teacher attack the ambitions of a student. Teacher Lun clarified why she was so harsh. 'Students like him lack direction. He does not even know the requirements to get into dentistry school… he probably just went to the dentist, thought they charged him a lot of money and decided to become a dentist.' The problem was not with the fact he wanted to be a dentist, which certainly would have propelled him into the Chinese middle class. This was a commendable aspiration, given the prestige associated with the role and its high salary. The problem that Lun identified in Xiaozi was that the aspiration the latter mentioned was nothing but a dream, an idle wish. Lun's disapproval stemmed from the fact it was not at all intelligible what setting the goal of becoming a dentist was doing for Xiaozi: it was a practical implausibility (if not impossibility) that one might become a dentist without any science training.

In this sense, individuals failed to self-move (i.e., act) because their goals lacked any motivational force, usually because they were so out of reach that they could be nothing but a fantasy. It was possible for Xiaozi to wish for anything he wanted, but he was disparaged at No.99 because it did not seem to those around him that it was in Xiaozi's power to become a dentist. As Lun points out, Xiaozi was academically inadequate, and it was too late to do anything about it. He had already declared which *gaokao* he was going to take, and there was no going back now. Simply put, if whoever wills the ends also wills the means, then by contraposition, the impossibility to will the means is an impossibility to will the end. In this

respect, Xiaozi fails to be a self-mover according to the standard picture of action that I have relied on.

2. Laolang: striving toward nothing

The second type of failing to be a self-mover consists of those who had no substantive goal in mind, though vaguely insisted that they were striving towards something. Students who fell under this category spoke about their intentions to 'live a good life' (*guo haorizi*). Less ambitious ones said they were aspiring to do 'the best that they could.' I have already mentioned Peng's problem with this way of looking at one's life: this vague description of living 'a good life' was merely an empty formalism – one that you can neither see nor touch. In this respect, the end was not a real one at all.

Consider the example of Laolang, a student in Peng's class, who was present that day during the class-meeting (see also Jiang 2024: 81). What did he aspire to? He told me that when he was younger, he wanted to be a translator or a truck driver in Europe. He believed both these paths would allow him to go abroad and further improve his language skills to communicate with people from different backgrounds. By language skills, he meant English, which was the only foreign language that he knew – though he was admittedly good at it, often speaking to me in English exclusively. Unfortunately, Laolang told me, both goals seemed unlikely by the time he had met me. Laolang did not have the grades for the former job, and he realised he did not have the right passport for the latter either.

One might object that high grades, like money, could have been used for all sorts of things. So even if Laolang did not have any concrete goals when it came to choosing his career path in his adult life, he still knew that getting good grades was a proximal end for him to strive towards in the moment. In this capacity, was he not self-moving? I do not deny that he believed he had to strive toward getting good grades. Nevertheless, it did not seem to me that Laolang was sure how he was to hit the proximal end either, even if he identified it. As Laolang also told me, students like him felt they were 'perplexed/confused' (*mimang*).

The main issue with thinking of proximal ends here is that the ethnographic context did not really permit the recursion in the way the objection allows. This is a feature of the do-or-die format of the education system. It is important to remember that in this situation, schooling was so intensely focussed on a single high-stakes exam such that if a student failed the *gaokao*, all of the student's previous studies would have been for nothing. It would be no exaggeration to suggest that Laolang could have reviewed all night long, every night for three years, acing every classroom assessment; but, if he did not end up hitting the benchmark score for universities on the *gaokao* that year, whatever he had done in his three years before at No.99 would have been meaningless. There really is in this sense only one proximal *end*: the test of a lifetime. Moreover, this benchmark score was determined based on a percentile scale, so the cut-off varied depending on how all test takers in the region performed. And recall how Teacher Peng reminded her students and their parents that they were up against the highest achievers in the city. Considering all this, the proximal goal seemed faint to Laolang as well.

3. Doudou: no means, no ends

Once during Year 1-Class 6's gym class, I overheard a tall girl, Doudou, complaining loudly to two of her friends about her lack of prospects. I asked if I could join the conversation. Doudou was unique amongst the students I met. Her parents were hardly involved in her life. Though I recalled Doudou sitting in the back during Peng's speech at the parent-teacher meeting, I quickly realised that her parents were missing. I had sat in her desk, which was left empty. She told me earlier in the year that her parents were 'coolies', so they were too busy to pay attention to her. She did not feel she was being neglected but rather happy. Doudou was proud that she developed a sense of independence. She said this independence made her more mature than her peers, who were reliant on parents for everything. Since her family's home was too far away to make the commute each day from the opposite side of town, she rented an apartment with two other girls in her year at No.99 nearby, without any adult supervision. As all of them were sixteen, this was illegal.

Doudou once expressed some dim hopes of making it out of Inner Mongolia by attending university earlier in the year when I had first met her. But this was a long time ago. Her failure to score above the benchmark for a first-tier university on her mock exams made her jaded. That day, she told me that she was adamant about dropping out, which she had apparently been thinking about for some time. This was possible, she told me, since she had already completed her mandatory nine-year education, though her teachers insisted that she stayed. In her own words, 'It's completely unrealistic for me to go to a first-tier university.' Well, was a second-tier school all that bad? According to her, 'It's even less likely that going to a second-rate school for the humanities will yield any career prospects, so what is the point of staying anyway?'

As Doudou reminded me again and again that day, 'Going to a bad school was the same as not going.' Her two friends agreed. But Doudou revealed she was sceptical that going to a good school was as life changing as teachers are making it out to be. As a counterexample, Doudou told me the story of her aunt, a graduate with a master's degree in English from Nanjing University, one of the most prestigious institutions in the country and a somewhat hot field of study as well. On paper, this aunt was the type of person that teachers would often tell students to aspire to, she had done well on her exams, mastered a foreign language, which was supposed to have brought her more opportunities. Yet this aunt failed to get a job anywhere else and had to come back to Hohhot. Sadly, Doudou told me, her aunt was not even competitive in Inner Mongolia. The aunt could not get a job teaching high-school English at No. 102 when she tried. This, Doudou suspected, was because her aunt did not have the right socio-economic background and thus knew nobody from the hiring committee at the prestigious school (see also Jiang 2024: 90-91).

'To be honest, for regular families like ours, education is not a way out', Doudou said to me. For these students, it was unclear what school was for. Going to school was supposed to help the students ace their exams, and doing well on the *gaokao* was supposed to be a step toward having a better life. However, Doudou was quick to object: as the counterexample of the aunt demonstrates, the teleological link had been severed in the real world. None of them thought the expected life trajectory suggested by their superiors or elders made sense.

Considering this, school was a mere heap of motions with no means-ends structure: get up in the morning, go to school, sit in class, do your homework, go home, and repeat. One could go through three years of this and still amount to nothing, making no progress toward the good life, which was supposedly the whole point of going to school in the first place.

Who acts?

In contemporary philosophy of action, there has been a tendency to set the practical limits of human action in metaphysics: setting the bounds at the will (volitionism) or even the body (corporealism). To some degree, this is a decision to draw the boundaries of the self is made from necessity to preserve the realism of human life – a decision that some anthropologists have seconded. In the beginning of this paper, I have described admonishments that teachers and middle-class parents often levied against students and their children, which would not be possible without some conception of a bounded self. As Strawson and Laidlaw would suggest, simply recognising theoretically that the actions of these students could be conceived as event nodes in causal networks will not make a difference in the practical human relationships between child and parent, or student and teacher.

Yet there remains, in my opinion, an analytic discomfort that is triggered by Latour's various objections against the notion of boundedness of the acting self, or agent. This uneasiness is captured in the three cases of failures that I have presented. The three students have failed not because of their own lack of effort but rather due to factors outside of their traditionally conceived boundaries of the self. Xiaozi's lack of knowledge about the career path of a dentist made it impossible to pursue that path. Laolang's abandonment of his previous dreams, leaving an unfilled lacuna when it came to aspirations, have left him 'confused' (*mimang*). Doudou's anxieties about her future founded upon scepticism toward the educational trajectory envisioned by teachers has sparked a desire to simply give up on getting into university altogether. As I have described, these are ethnographic examples of practical failures in the conventional means-ends model of action. However, it is worth reiterating, they are, perhaps surprisingly, not strictly problems of the will – nor are they problems of the body.

Considering what has been discussed, the theoretical contributions of Humphrey and Latour may appear to be unmatched.[2] Whereas one is talking about the self, in the sense of an interiorly bounded entity, the latter describes the exterior world out there. Is it appropriate to juxtapose them in the manner that I have done? While I have suggested that Laidlaw's attempts to emphasise the social ascription of responsibility over the agentive considerations of action forecloses important avenues of ethnographic analysis, in this paper, I have found his problematisation of exterior/interior dualism helpful. When it comes to responsibility, the interior/exterior duality breaks down, as one is often ascribed responsibility, for example, like our property, even when the damages have been understood to be part of some causal chains of which we were strictly speaking not part of (Laidlaw 2014:

[2] I thank one of the two anonymous reviewers for this comment.

191). Meanwhile, anthropologists like Karl Smith, drawing upon the works of Charles Taylor, propose that the anthropological 'person' as a concept ought to be understood not as the Cartesian ego (or even the bounded body) but rather as 'porous', open to factors, like social others, that are typically conceived as external to the self (2012: 60). As the ethnography illustrates, this openness makes my interlocutors susceptible to the causal chains that are properly speaking not their own, in the sense of being outside their 'wills' or their 'bodies', as exemplified best by the fact that Laolang's success as a self-mover is constitutively determined by how *other* people around him perform on the university entrance exam.

Recently, philosophers have also taken in such insights concerning the porousness of the self, not to displace agency with responsibility, but rather to expand our agentive horizons. Drawing upon the works of Anscombe, Anton Ford advances a picture of 'practical monism', in which the self is conceptually unbounded (though not materially unbounded, obviously). Ford argues that such limits are arbitrary, and that we ought to consider how 'the practical limits of agency are socially and historically conditioned' (2018: 719). Ford's argument diagnoses popular conceptions of action in his discipline as too dualistic. Even if they get past the Cartesian dualism, they cannot get past the 'self' versus 'world' dualism. One problem with dualism is that it seems inadequate at capturing the nature of 'intentionality'. Suppose I try to flip a switch. As I move my hand toward it, I miss. However, in missing, I initiate a long causal chain of events that ultimately results in the switch being flipped. My volition aligns with the intended outcome, but did I intentionally cause it? The dualism that Ford critiques envisions a successful intentional action as simply a matching up between the self – whether conceived as the will, the body, or otherwise – and the world. In this respect, failure is simply when our representation of action does not match up to reality. Not coincidentally, this practical dualism is also the starting point of Latour's actor-network theory, as he analytically focusses on the failures of this fortuitous match-up between the world and the self. And not coincidentally, Ford's alternative proposal helps us get to Caroline Humphrey's point about the individual subject being the source of action.

Ford's positive proposal envisions all the various means (and therefore proximal ends) as being conceptually included in the self. The 'actor' in this case incorporates every element of the ABCD structure, using the language of standard picture schema. Practical monism takes the Anscombian slogan 'I do what happens' seriously by including within the province of human agency all the socially and material relevant factors that make an action successful. The reason Ford may feel entitled to include all these factors into the 'self' qua actor, is that they are, in a serious sense, under our control and in principle changeable. As Ford ends his paper, 'Things that are now impossible for some of us to do (e.g., make an international phone call), or for any of us to do (e.g., fly to Mars), may yet become possible through intentional human action' (ibid.: 716).

In light of Ford's proposal, I suggest the problem is that Latour goes too far when insisting there are no 'individual subjects'. That is a conceptual repudiation that I do not think he is entitled to make. With a little (or a lot) more guidance, money, or family connections, all three pupils could have in some counterfactual world, been Humphrey's subjects, as someone who sees himself 'creating his individuality additively through his actions' (2018: 40). Nevertheless, faithfulness to the ethnographic data forces us to admit that often changeable

'in principle' is not the same as changeable 'in real life'. So, Latour's point about the contingency and fallibility of human action still remains salient, even if I hope by now Latour's scepticism no longer seems domineering.

In relation to ethical life

In this paper, I have argued that my three young interlocutors have all failed to attain some type of coherent aspirational life trajectory, understood here as the relationship between means and ends. I have suggested that the obstacles that have prevented them from doing so ought to be conceptualised as obstacles to their practical reasoning, and it is in this sense that they have experienced the agentive failures that render them short of Humphrey's idealised individual subject. One issue relevant to both the theoretical and ethnographic puzzles of this paper is whether I have set the bar too high. The failures to be individual subjects capable of acting in Humphrey's full-blooded sense, described at the end of the last section, has been interpreted in this paper at the level of the grand scheme of life seemingly exclusively.[3]

Moreover, while the teleological aspiration toward the good life is how some have chosen to conceptualise ethics (see Laidlaw 2002), others have objected that the assumption of some grand *telos* of ethical life is itself a vestige of Western philosophical traditions, making the analysis here rather ethnocentric (see Holbraad 2018). Alternatively, other anthropologists have focussed not on the teleological relationship between the self and aspirational ends, but rather between the self and the Other – specifically the ways the self might respond to the demands of the Other (Zigon 2021). An in-depth discussion of the anthropology of ethics falls beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, my tethering of full-blooded individual subjectivity to the trajectory of some perceived good life does make it appear that agency is possible only when individuals can express themselves at the level of 'ethical subjectivity.' Perhaps this is a suspicious claim, but one that I shall ethnographically justify.

In contemporary Chinese discourse, agency indeed has been tethered to the type of grander life projects that I have been discussing. As Yan Yunxiang has commented, the Chinese conception of the subject has never been 'given', in the sense of natural and inalienable rights of personhood. It has always been the product of procedures of cultivation and successful actions in the sense of 'doing personhood' (*zuoren*), although the normative parameters of what constitutes a person obviously differs now and then despite the Confucian origins of these terms (2013: 264). Yan's emphasis here on the procedures of self-cultivation opens again the possibility of failure. If one could only express one's agency through specific ethically and subjectively salient actions, one who fails to do so would strictly speaking, not count in the social milieu as a subject in the sense I have been describing. For example, in the pre-reform past, 'The agentive side of one's moral life was first and foremost geared towards the goal of making oneself part and parcel of this collectivity' (ibid.: 268). In that context, one who failed to work towards the collective were perceived as passive, and reprimanded. Since the

[3] I am grateful for the other of the two anonymous reviewers for making this objection.

advent of economic reforms, however, for most Chinese citizens, what has been seen as subjectively relevant is the ability to participate in the middle-class activities described above. Anecdotally, many of the male teachers I met at No.99, who were also fathers, told me that they refused to let their daughters marry a man who could not afford his own home or car. Not coincidentally, one teacher called people like this *useless*, or literally 'waste persons' (*feiren*), connoting extreme failures to act or conduct one's agency.

We can make this point in a rather round-about albeit ethnographic way, through observing the rise of nihilistic tendencies, and the rejection of agency as an agentive response to social inequality and lack of opportunities (see also Jiang 2024: 79). In Spring of 2021, Luo Huazhong published a blog post titled, 'Lying flat is justice,' which praised his nihilistic lifestyle of doing nothing as a rejection precisely of this sort of 'striving individual' (see Lin and Gullotta 2022). After quitting his job on the factory floor, Luo lived on 200 RMB a month, eating two plain meals a day, and working odd jobs. While he described his lifestyle as 'lying flat', signalling a willed passivity, he surely participated in the very minute day-to-day. As he put it, he rode his bike and read his books. But from the point of view of this paper, my suggestion is that Luo was still condemned as passive and nihilistic in the public imagination, evidenced by the widespread censorship of his post, precisely for his failure to participate in the trajectory of Yan's 'striving individual'. In this respect, agency was also tethered to these much grander high-level projects, which Luo rejected, despite successfully undertaking these leisurely activities as an agent on lower levels.

What all this illustrates is that the standards of agency must themselves be ethnographically contextualised and liable to be changed. At a more particular level, however, the contribution of this paper has been to illustrate through the agentive failures of my young working-class interlocutors, how the individual might in culturally specific ways be conceived as exactly what some reject out of hand: as the proper locus of reason, in the sense of practical reason, conceiving of the acting self as inclusive of all the means available to it.

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MAKING ART, MAKING VALUE ONLINE: NFTS, BLOCKCHAINS AND ONLINE ART ECONOMIES

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In recent years, cryptocurrencies have emerged as alternative forms of currency. These technologies were adapted to create Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), unique digital identifiers that can trace the provenance and ownership of online media. Despite often lacking property rights over the represented media, these tokens sell in large volumes online, and their supportive communities are vast and exist in both art and economic spheres. This paper explores the various communities that support NFTs from different perspectives. While NFTs have received significant media attention, this study aims to show that many aspects of the technologies and beliefs behind NFTs are grounded in earlier social movements, cryptographic techniques, and attitudes within art and economics. The digitisation of physical-world phenomena, such as the notion of an object biography (Kopytoff, 1986), is also recognised. NFTs' provision of a restricted means for art to exist on a blockchain recalls Walter Benjamin's (1936) concept of the aura. The paper also situates the history of blockchain technology within the context of cypherpunks, a 1990s punk-cryptography movement. The legacy of the cypherpunks and the new infrastructures and affordances that NFTs offer to the Internet are related to the values, communities, and future aspirations held by the online social networks that support NFTs. The paper argues that NFTs possess an affective force among these groups, allowing them to endure as enchanted digital sites of future promises despite constant threats of deception, volatile markets, and scams.

Keywords: Cryptocurrencies, economic, digital, NFTs, art

Introduction

A growing cadre of scholars is engaging in academic discourse surrounding Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) across art, economics, and anthropology. Concurrently, there has been a

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discernible uptick in conferences that specifically address NFT-related themes, signifying an emergent scholarly focus on this dynamic intersection of technology, economics, and cultural studies[2].

This paper aims to situate the communities which support NFT trading within anthropological understandings of economics and art. Through the subtleties of value creation using anthropological theories of circulation and exchange, this paper looks to understand the notions carried by people when it comes to the concepts of community, values, and future within online NFT marketplaces. The paper also explores the role of tokenisation in providing digital art with a certified uniqueness on the blockchain, and the implications of this tokenisation for the valuation of NFT art.

The first section of this paper aims to provide context to the study of digital anthropology, then moves to the history of anthropological studies of blockchain technologies, as well as a general recent history of large-scale NFT projects. While this paper mainly focuses on the values underpinning the communities that engage with mid-scale NFT projects online, I will briefly discuss the most famous, prestigious, and financially successful NFT projects to provide readers with context to the NFT market's development. This moves to a consideration of the extent to which the value of an NFT anchors to the value of the underlying cryptocurrency that supports it. It concludes that while some correlation is expected, other dimensions exist to an NFT's value. I use Arjun Appadurai's (1986) collection *'The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective'*, in particular Igor Kopytoff's contribution to that volume, to consider how an NFT encodes an object's history within itself. NFTs can also be understood within the context of anthropological work on art and enchantment, as NFTs recapitulate Walter Benjamin's (1935) concept of an aura in an age of digital reproduction. The enchanting properties of NFTs are considered, drawing in Gell's (1992) work on the enchantment of technology. NFTs are also linked to the growing phenomenon of AI-generated art.

As NFTs continue to reshape the landscape of ownership and creativity on the Internet, understanding the implications of their technology requires a multifaceted approach. This paper therefore explores NFTs using a hybrid methodology. This methodology entailed online fieldwork, interviewing with NFT creators, minting an NFT, and listing it for sale on a popular NFT marketplace. More on this is discussed in the 'Making' section of this paper.

The ethnographic discussion section provides a discussion on conversations had with approximately 30 people who make a living off creating and selling NFTs. This online research primarily took place through conversations with NFT creators on platforms such as Reddit, Instagram, and Discord, spanning a duration of 7 months in 2021 around the peak of NFTs in art excitement. Many of these conversations transitioned from platform-based chats to semi-structured interviews conducted via zoom. Within the NFT space, experimentation is encouraged, and novel applications, such as academic authentication via NFTs, were found to be embraced. The study also aims to underscore the evolving trust dynamics inherent in blockchain technology, where reliance shifts from traditional regulatory authorities to decentralised networks of users.

[2] See https://rome.temple.edu/nft and https://decrypt.co/111219/time-is-now-a-medium-academics-ponder-nfts-at-oxford-university-conference.

The discussion of this data is organised by three themes: the community, the values, and the future. Comprised of interconnected online networks, NFT communities track the trajectory of successful projects, gauging success through media exposure and substantial financial transactions. However, beneath the surface of the NFT landscape lies a sense of community spirit, a drive for experimentation, and an ethos towards shaping the digital landscape of the future. Many individuals within this community are drawn by the potential of NFTs to offer them stable incomes, a more meaningful livelihood, or even financial prosperity as they envision a future defined by the Internet.

From Penny Presses to NFTs

Most visitors to a museum or tourist attraction will probably have encountered a penny press. These work by operating two rollers to deform and flatten a standard coin to impress a new image onto it. The value of the subsequent coin is no longer equivalent to that of the penny initially inserted into the press, the 'pressing' rendering it unusable as currency. Instead, the penny acquires a new value, serving as a form of memorabilia, an aesthetically pleasing object, or, in some instances, a collectable or saleable item.

Figure 1: A Penny Press at the Royal Armories Museum (Leeds, UK). Wikimedia Commons. Mtaylor848. 24 June 2010. (Retrieved 15/02/2022.)

Creating a Non-Fungible Token, or 'NFT,' is similar to using a penny press. A cryptocurrency is used instead of inserting a coin, most commonly the cryptocurrency Ether or ETH. Unlike the production of elongated coins with a limited selection of designs, an NFT produces a unique token tied to a digital asset, such as a photo, video, or audio file. The applications of NFTs vary widely, with some projects acting as certificates that point to externally stored

objects, while other projects are held entirely 'on-chain', with the NFT representing an image stored within the smart contract itself. Most of the projects mentioned within this paper represent the latter of these two cases.

A more detailed discussion of the origin of NFTs and their underlying technologies will be presented later in this paper. As is typical for most artwork sales, often purchasing an NFT does not confer any rights to the intellectual property associated with the asset represented by the NFT. For example, purchasing the NFT of the world's first tweet for $2.9 million, as Malaysian businessman Sina Estavi did in March 2021 (Harper, 2021), does not prevent others from viewing, copying, or using the tweet. Anyone can access the tweet by making a Twitter account or searching for it on a web engine. Nevertheless, only one person, Sina Estavi, can claim ownership of that particular NFT of the world's first tweet.

Digital anthropology

The field of digital anthropology emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s when anthropologists became interested in the potential of interactive multimedia, made possible by technologies such as personal computers and CD-ROMs (Pink, 2011: 209). This interest led to the establishment of institutions such as the *Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing* at the University of Kent. After the dot-com bubble burst in the early 2000s, the enthusiasm surrounding digital technologies subsided but was later met with a renewed interest after the rise in popularity of Web 2.0 post-2004. This new age of the Internet led to the development of digital ethnography as a theory and method for studying the digital world, and several handbooks were published on the topic. Today, digital anthropology is a growing field that offers a comprehensive view of how digital technologies intersect with society.

One approach to digital anthropology emerged from material culture studies (Miller, 2018). Researchers in this field examined how the proliferation of material goods associated with consumer culture accelerated further with the emergence of digital technologies. A material culture studies approach to digital anthropology emphasises that even phenomena that take place predominantly online, such as NFTs, cannot be regarded as immaterial since digital activities are subject to cultural differentiation and are facilitated through physical interfaces (Horst and Miller, 2012). There is a significant overlap between this approach and previous studies of the social aspects of money. The introduction of digital technologies in capitalist markets around the 1980s led to an explosion of finance capitalism. In more modern years, digital technologies gave rise to new forms of abstracting money, such as mobile phone-based money systems such as M-Pesa, and later blockchain-based cryptocurrencies (Maurer, 2015).

Horst and Miller (2012) proposed a definition of the digital as anything that can be represented with binary code based on the historical precedent of decimal systems of modern money. They argue that debates on the consequences of money can help us understand the effects of digital technologies on human sociality. They draw on Simmel's (2011 [1900]) *The Philosophy of Money* to support this. Within Simmel's theories, money creates sources of alienation as it abstracts practically anything to the same common element, which enhances

freedom but leads to a cognitive separation of people from objects. This line of thinking can be applied to the digital, where reproduction and abstraction occur at the speed of our Internet connections. The digital age has brought us 'too much culture', which we need help managing or engaging with properly. On the other hand, the digital also offers solutions to problems of alienation and abstraction, as new money-like schemes such as cryptocurrencies propose exchange systems outside of mainstream capitalist markets which are claimed to be more democratic and humanistic than 'the market'.

Another key aspect of digital culture studies relevant to an understanding the rise of NFTs is the concept of 'digital prosumption'. Beer and Burrows (2010) describe the concept of the digital prosumer as a critical part of Web 2.0. They argue that new participatory web cultures, characterised by user-generated content, rating, reviewing, and collaboration, break traditional boundaries between producers and consumers. The concept of the prosumer informs the everyday lives of millions of people. Beer and Burrows draw on Bauman's (2007) idea of a confessional society, where contemporary consumer cultures are part of a society with a sense of obligation to lead their private lives in the public domain. This, combined with digital prosumption, has led to the proliferation of data becoming available for capitalist industries to use. However, with scandals surrounding data breaches becoming increasingly regular, there is a demand for more private and trustworthy digital infrastructure.

It is expected that there will be a Web 3.0, which some believe is currently in development. This term was coined by Gavin Wood in 2014 to describe a World Wide Web distinguished from its predecessors by the decentralisation of data through the widespread use of blockchain technology. For many of its adherents, this new age will mark the end of 'Big Tech's' monopoly on data and content, and NFTs are viewed as an appendage of this new turn.

The rise of cryptocurrencies

> Privacy is the power to reveal oneself to the world selectively.
> (A Cypherpunk's Manifesto, Hughes 1993)

Bitcoin, the first cryptocurrency, was created by a group of politically motivated hackers. These individuals, under the name of the 'cypherpunks' advocated for using cryptography as a means to protect individual liberties from governmental interference (Dodd, 2014). The philosophy of this group included a mistrust of centralised social institutions, particularly the state (Shaw, 2023). The original mission statement written by cypherpunk Timothy May, takes privacy protection to be a fundamental right that should be secured using technology, as opposed to legislation (May, 1994). The concept of a cryptocurrency, aimed to be the world's first entirely technologically secured payment system, was first proposed by cypherpunk Wei Dai (1998), while the smart contract, an early precursor to NFTs, was developed by cryptographer Nick Szabo.

In 2009, an individual under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto announced the first official cryptocurrency paper on a cryptography mailing list. This new open-source online

currency system, Bitcoin, would be decentralised, enabling direct connections between currency holders without the need for a third-party intermediary, such as a bank or government (Nakamoto, 2009). As Bitcoin gained attention throughout 2010 and 2011, many people became excited about its potential to offer payments that would elude bank interference and state surveillance (Maurer et al., 2013: 2-3). This excitement was fuelled by the belief that money could and should be abstracted from social life, particularly social institutions, to avoid potential manipulation, exploitation, and inflation dynamics (Dodd, 2018: 39). Monetary reform was seen to contribute to social reform, and Bitcoin offered an elegant technical solution towards this end. As Nakamoto's paper says:

> Commerce on the Internet has come to rely almost exclusively on financial institutions serving as trusted third parties to process electronic payments. While the system works well enough for most transactions, it still suffers from the inherent weaknesses of the trust-based model.
> […]
> What is needed is an electronic payment system based on cryptographic proof instead of trust, allowing any two willing parties to transact directly with each other without the need for a trusted third party. (Nakamoto, 2009: 1)

Cryptocurrencies promise to provide a means of value transfer and exchange with minimal social interference through machine code. This code operates through an ingenious solution to the double-spending problem, which refers to the challenge of preventing opportunists from spending the same digital money twice. Before Nakamoto's solution, all online payments required validation by a third party to regulate digital money supply. Bitcoin avoids the need for a centralised third party through a decentralised verification system. The system harnesses the combined processing power of computers worldwide to record every transaction to date in a database shared by all nodes on the network. Every ten minutes, all the transactions from the preceding period are grouped into a block, which is then linked to the previous blocks to form a chain. Each block contains a cryptographic puzzle that validates the entire chain every time it is solved. The puzzle can only be solved by trial and error (also known as brute force computing). The node that successfully solves the puzzle starts a new block by submitting its proof of work to the network and receives the ability to create a fixed amount of bitcoin for itself as a reward. Mining is the term for the computationally demanding process of solving the brute force puzzle, which becomes more challenging over time, requiring increasing computational power to decipher.

Bitcoin's value can be understood using what Maurer et al. (2013) call 'digital metallism', a concept taken from Ingham's 'practical metallism' theory, which describes how commodity money theories naturalise the social relations of credit that make money (Ingham, 2004). Encoded within Bitcoin is a virtual scarcity that limits the number of Bitcoins that can ever exist to 21 million. Maurer et al. argue that understanding Bitcoin's value relies on the semiotics of metallic money, referencing mining, rigs, and the natural limits of Bitcoin. This makes the currency more akin to a commodity than a currency. While the value of Bitcoin could be changed easily by doubling the supply of coins, it is a necessary social construct that this could never happen (Dodd, 2014).

As a result, there are inconsistencies between Bitcoin as a currency for an individualistic, privacy-based world and the social project required to establish and support the money (Dodd, 2018). Bitcoin may initially seem more trust-free than it is. It does not operate above social relations, as a team of people actively supports the currency by mining it, developing its software, investing in it, and exchanging it. The currency relies on the ability and incentives of miners to process transactions, individuals who support the source code, and the community's trust in the technology and process (DeVries, 2016). Therefore, in the case of cryptocurrencies, machine code has not replaced social relations of exchange but has instead merged with them (Hayes, 2019: 50-51).

Working in parallel to the development of Bitcoin, another cypherpunk named Nick Szabo imagined a new kind of exchange during the late 1990s. His concept was to be able to transfer property rights over encrypted computer networks, which would avoid the threat of a state's ability to destroy or confiscate property and its corresponding records, especially during times of political instability (Szabo, 1997). Szabo's solution combined cryptography developed in the 1980s with new advances in replicated database technology, allowing the secure maintenance and transferal of ownership for a wide range of property types. This concept laid the groundwork for the blockchain – a decentralised and digital public ledger that maintains every transaction conducted in the network chronologically (Jervis, 2019).

In 2013, a Russian-Canadian programmer named Vitalik Buterin wrote a white paper outlining a new cryptocurrency known as Ether, held on the Ethereum blockchain (Buterin, 2013). Ether complemented Szabo's idea of using smart contracts to encode property legislation online. It is a complementary currency to Bitcoin, allowing for the blockchain registration of a wide range of contractual clauses. Ether is mined in the same way as Bitcoin, and miners receive rewards for mining new blocks and transaction fees known as 'gas'. Tokens are always built onto a standard. The standard provides essential functions required for a token asset to be held and transferred – it has a name, a total supply, and a function that returns a given account's balance and permits transfers to another Ethereum 'wallet'. These tokens are always linked to an address (a string beginning with 0x and 40 hexadecimal), which can own multiple tokens and Ether (needed for gas payments to perform operations using the tokens). The owner of the address must retain a private key to control their assets, and while the balance of an address is public, this does not mean that the owner is necessarily known.

The standard onto which the first Ethereum tokens were built is called ERC-20. Unlike the later non-fungible tokens (NFTs), tokens built onto ERC-20 are fungible, meaning that they can be split just as a pound sterling can be split into 100 pennies (Chohan, 2021). The concept of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) was later introduced onto the ERC-721 standard (Chohan, 2021). This standard allowed for tokens to be unique and have values that differ from other tokens in the same contract, such as age, rarity, or visual appearance. ERC-721 was proposed in January 2018 by William Entriken, Dieter Shirley, Jacob Evans, and Nastassia Sachs.

First History of NFTs

The following section provides a brief overview of the history of NFTs through a condensed discussion of some NFT projects which have attracted particular attention from the media before 2023. The following projects were chosen as they represent large-scale, famous and (primarily) generative art projects, which can be helpful to characterise the head of the 'long-tail' of the NFT market. However, these examples were not an exclusive list of NFT projects to choose from.

CryptoPunks

In 2017, Matt Hall and John Watkinson, the founders of a New York-based software company called Larva Labs, created a computer program that could generate 10,000 24x24 8-bit style pixel characters, each with a unique combination of distinctive traits which varied from beanies and mohawks to blue faces and buck teeth (Davis, 2021). These were the CryptoPunks, arguably the first art-collectible project to hit the NFT space. Each punk is an NFT, held on the blockchain, and since their release in June 2017, they have been traded, and their value skyrocketed. In May 2021, a collection of 9 punks sold at Christie's for around $9 million (Kastrenakes, 2021).

CryptoKitties

A little while after the CryptoPunks came the CryptoKitties, a blockchain game that allowed players to buy, collect and breed virtual collectable cats. Each CryptoKitty is an NFT with a unique 'genome' defining its appearance and traits. Players must purchase Ether to join the game and spend it to breed and trade CryptoKitties (Dapper Labs, 2022). Canadian studio Dapper Labs developed the game in November 2017. By December of that year, the game had reached such popularity that the volume of transactions made for CryptoKitties congested the entire Ethereum network (BBC News, 2017).

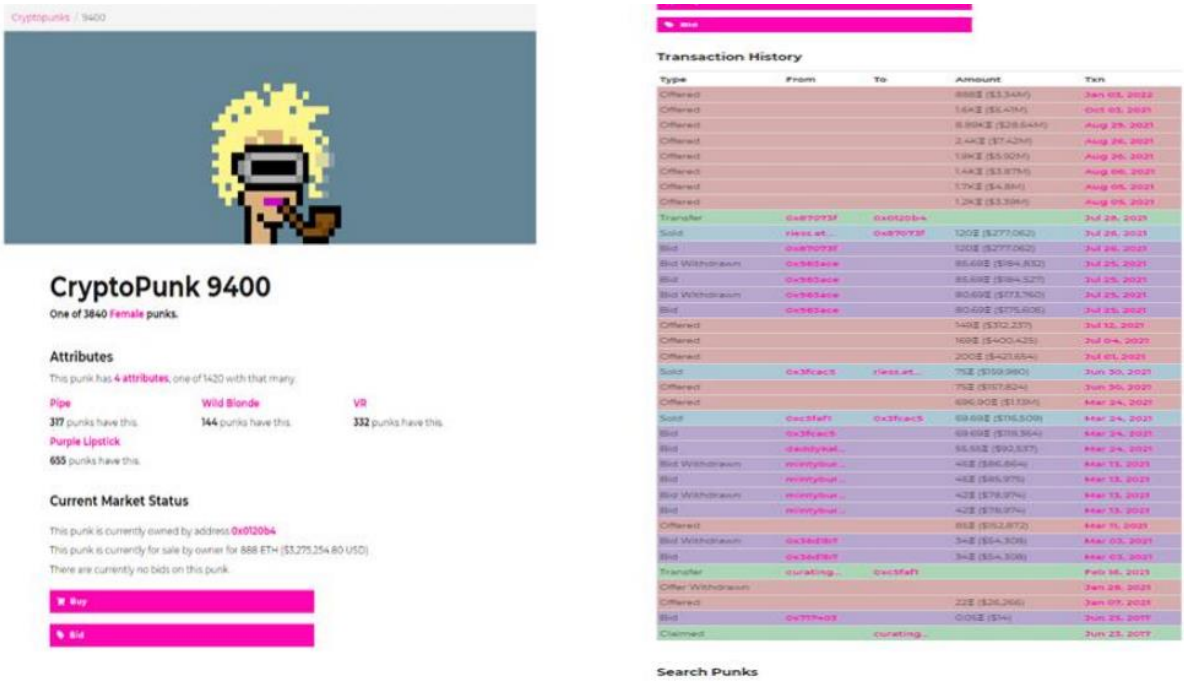

Figure 2: Two Screenshots taken from https://www.larvalabs.com/cryptopunks/details/9400. 03/01/2021 - 20:45 GMT. Detailing the attributes and transaction history of Cryptopunk 9400. Images reproduced with permission from Larva Labs.

Decentraland and Open Sea

The successes of the CryptoPunks and CryptoKitties projects led to a rise in cryptographic collectables in the NFT space following 2017. Another widespread use of NFTs came about with the sale of NFT-based digital real estate hosted on platforms such as Decentraland. Decentraland is an online world and community where users, much like traditional virtual worlds such as *Second Life*, can interact with each other via an avatar and participate in online events (Marquez, 2021).

The ability to trade within virtual worlds is not a particularly novel feature. In traditional virtual worlds from the early 2000s, such as *Second Life*, avatars can trade items within the game's economy. However, unlike traditional virtual worlds, nearly everything in Decentraland is an NFT that can be bought and sold as real estate. In other words, within virtual worlds such as Second Life, records of user ownership are held on a centralised server specific to the world itself. In contrast, a platform such as Decentraland holds its ownership records on the Ethereum blockchain. Keeping these records on the Ethereum blockchain has advantages as users can verify ownership of goods independently and can also trade goods bought on Decentraland on third-party marketplaces.

2017 brought yet another milestone for the NFT scene with the launch of OpenSea – currently the largest NFT marketplace - where NFTs of art, collectables, domain names, music, photos, trading cards, virtual real estate, and game items are traded online (OpenSea, 2017).

The growth of the market in 2020

The NFT space reached unforeseen heights in July 2020, when the market experienced dramatic growth, with a total volume of NFTs exchanged daily on major platforms surpassing $10 million in March 2021 (Nadini, et al., 2021: 2). In the same month, a digital artist known as Beeple sold an NFT of his work 'Everydays: The First 5000 Days', a collage of 5000 digital images created for his Everydays series (a project producing a work of art daily for 5000 days), at Christie's for $69.3 million (Reyburn, 2021). This was the third-highest auction price achieved for a living artist after Jeff Koons and David Hockney. The work was purchased by Singaporean programmer and cryptocurrency investor Vignesh Sundaresan, known under the pseudonym MetaKovan.

The profitability of NFTs also attracted many celebrities, who began to create their own NFTs and bought into a project known as Bored Ape Yacht Club (sometimes abbreviated to BAYC). BAYC is a collection of 10000 NFTs, costing a minimum of $ 200,000 to buy, which was launched in April 2021 by four pseudonymous developers (Yuga et al., 2021). Bored Ape Yacht Club represents a kind of NFT known as PFPs – or profile pictures – as they are popularly set as the social media profile pictures of celebrities who have purchased them. The project signalled the lucrative nature of the NFT market for digital art and digital collectables. It inspired even more to enter the long tail of creating their own NFT projects.

The legacy of the 2021 cryptocurrency crash

In 2021, the cryptocurrency market experienced a very significant downturn, which was triggered by a combination of factors, including concerns over inflation and rising interest rates, as well as national crackdowns on local cryptocurrency mining and trading (Smith, 2022).

One of the most notable events during this market crash involved FTX Trading Ltd., a popular cryptocurrency exchange that saw its token (FTT) drop by over 40% in just a few hours (Sigalos, 2022). Following the FTX crash, the NFT market saw a sharp price decline, with some NFTs losing over 50% of their value (Huang, 2022). This was due in part to the fact that many NFTs had been bought using cryptocurrencies that lost significant weight during the market crash.

Overall, the FTX market crash served as a reminder of the volatility of the cryptocurrency market and highlighted the risks associated with leveraged trading and other high-risk investment strategies. On the other hand, this crash and the gradual rebuilding of the NFT market following November 2021 can also be seen as a reflection of the changing nature of art and value recognition. The fact that NFTs are decentralised and can be traded on a global market has led to new opportunities for small-scale speculative NFT traders to participate in the art market and potentially profit from their investments.

NFTs within economic anthropology

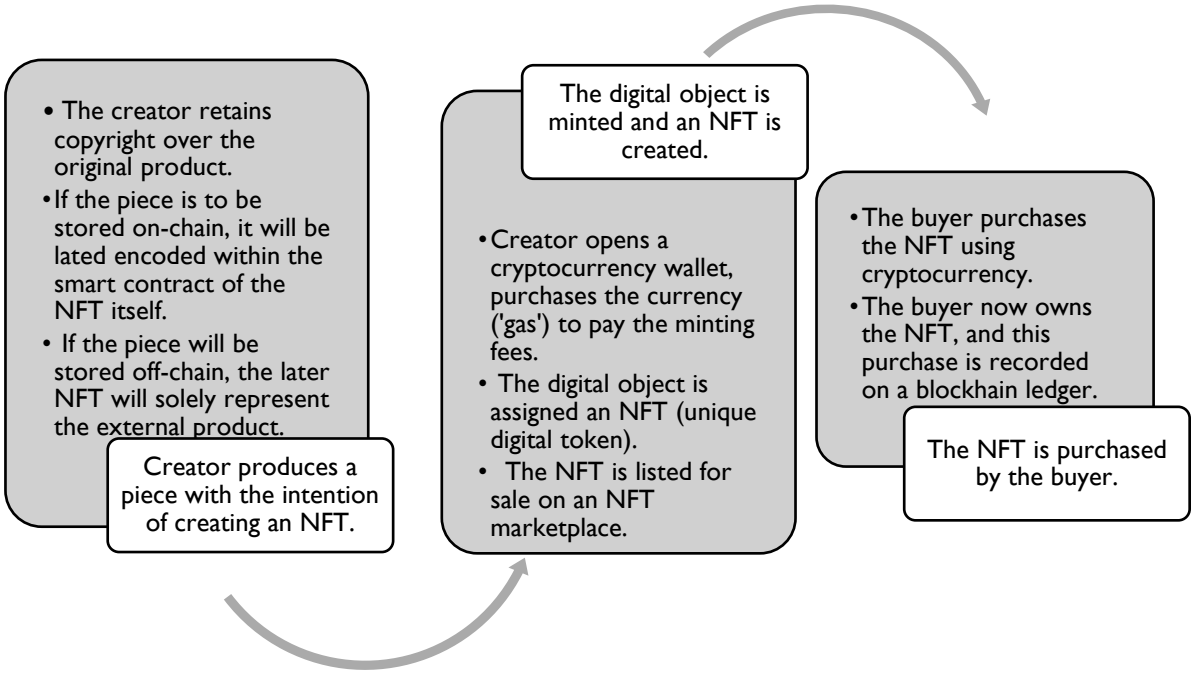

Figure 3: Minting and purchasing an NFT.

Creating an NFT involves an 'input' of a certain amount of cryptocurrency known as 'gas'. The amount of gas required to create an NFT depends on the number of users on the Ethereum network at a given time, and this gas fee constitutes a transactional fee that goes to the miners in addition to the rewards they receive for cracking the code to produce a new block on the blockchain. NFT creators often refer to the gas as 'fuel' rather than payment, as they talk about how gas is 'burned' during the creation of an NFT. The value of an NFT is partly understood as the value of the digital money that is burnt up during its creation.

There is a discussion on the extent to which the economic value of NFTs is parallel to the value of the cryptocurrencies that support them (Dowling, 2022; Ante, 2020). While there are some similarities, such as the likelihood that the value of an NFT will increase if the value of Ether rises, this is only part of the picture. An NFT has a double value.

Arjun Appadurai's (1986) work, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, can help us understand the double value of NFTs. Appadurai's collection of essays proposed a new perspective on commodities and their circulation in social life by focusing on how goods and objects may adopt (and lose) a particular role as a commodity. Commodities, defined by Simmel (2011 [1900]) as objects of economic value, generate value during exchange. In other words, the value given to an object is culturally determined by the spheres of exchange in which they circulate. Things create value off the back of the politics and social barter of trade, and in this sense, they can be thought to have social lives.

The production of commodities is also a cultural and cognitive process. Kopytoff (1986), in the same volume of essays, notes that objects are fashioned out of materials, but they must also be categorised as a particular kind of object. Kopytoff also notes that only some objects are considered commodities. A thing may be a commodity at one point and not at another, as objects can move in and out of a state of commodity - a point where its exchangeability for another object is a relevant feature, and a point where it is not.

Within cryptocurrencies, there is constant slippage between the currency and commodity state. NFTs, on the other hand, fix digital assets as commodities, held suspended on a blockchain ledger. Beyond the value of the cryptocurrencies burned in minting an NFT lies the value of how human interactions with NFTs make digital assets meaningful within their social worlds. These NFTs have object biographies, called 'provenance' in the conventional art world, following Appadurai's theories.

We can bring further detail into our economic study of NFTs by considering Kopytoff's argument that it is possible to follow an individual object's 'life history' as it moves back and forth between different regimes of value - value as commodities and value as unique objects. As Kopytoff writes, following Durkheim (1912), societies commonly set apart a particular portion of their environment, singularising it and marking it as sacred (Kopytoff, 1986: 72-80). In so-called 'complex societies', there is a yearning for this kind of singularisation, as people seek new ways to collect objects, such as matchbooks, comic books, or old beer cans. This yearning leads us to designate particular objects as unique. Unique objects like heirloom jewellery have a history and often a name. Further elements, such as the history of ownership and the social identities of the giver and the recipient, often become entangled within the object. These histories and identities are essentially the source of the object's value. NFTs have a commodity aspect, but their uniqueness is also a fundamental value component. Built within their architecture is a life history that anyone can access, a certifiable stamp of one-ness, and the ability to create smart contracts so that the spirit of the original seller may be recapitulated throughout time as resale profits inevitably work their way back to the NFT creator.

NFTs in the age of digital reproduction

The recent surge in the popularity of NFTs can be attributed to their introduction to the digital art world. Beeple's groundbreaking sale at Christie's in 2020 sparked a wave of digital artists and photographers tokenising their works for sale.

In popular perception, art is often equated with beauty. However, studies within and beyond anthropology have demonstrated this is an poor definition of art, as notions of beauty are highly culturally and temporally contextual (Clifford, 1988: 200; Ingold, 1996: 210). The question of what defines art, if not the pursuit of beauty, has been long debated, but for this paper, I will adopt the institutional and not entirely unproblematic definition of art popularised by Gell (1996) - that artworks are things which the 'art world' deems to be such. These 'art worlds' - a term coined by Becker (1982) - are the cooperative networks through which art

happens, and they are responsible for the patterns of collective activity leading to the production and consumption of art (Becker, 1982: 23).

There are three general uses for NFTs, one of which is as art objects, what Franceschet et al. term 'crypto art' or 'rare digital art' (Franceschet, et al., 2021 (2019): 3). These are limited-edition pieces of collectable art, made to be tokenised and registered on a blockchain to be sold. I distinguish these NFTs from those made for other purposes, such as for utility in online gaming platforms or as part of a cryptographic speculative project. These digital artworks are typically sold at digital auctions and may even be hosted on online NFT galleries such as SuperRare and KnownOrigin.

Even so, 'crypto art' pieces do not neatly fit into traditional definitions of art objects, as they are often generated using artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms. AI art represents an intersection between art, technology, and science, and raises questions about the nature of creativity, authorship, and aesthetic experience in the digital age. The origins of AI art can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, when computer scientists and artists began experimenting with early forms of computer-generated art (McCorduck, 1991). However, it was only in the development of deep learning algorithms and other advanced AI technology in the past decade that AI art began to attract wider attention and recognition. AI art can take many forms, from generative algorithms that create new images or music based on predefined rules or patterns to machine learning systems that analyse and classify images to interactive installations that respond to the movements and actions of viewers. Some AI artists work collaboratively with AI algorithms, while others use AI as a tool to augment their artistic practice. NFTs offer a new way for AI artists to monetise their creations and establish their value in the art market. By creating NFTs that represent unique digital artworks generated or manipulated by AI algorithms, AI artists can prove ownership, authenticity, and provenance for their works in a way that was not previously possible. At the same time, the use of AI in art raises important questions about the role of technology in the creative process and the relationship between humans and machines in artistic production. Some critics argue that AI art threatens human creativity and artistic autonomy. In contrast, others see it as a tool for expanding the boundaries of creative expression and pushing the limits of what is possible in the digital age (Edwards, 2022).

The intersection between creative and technological interfaces found in the NFT-AI art debate recalls Alfred Gell's concept of the enchantment of technology. In his work, Gell introduces the study of art as a technical system used by cultures to 'dazzle' and 'enchant' the viewer (Gell, 1992: 43). Gell draws on ethnography from the Trobriand Islands, where canoe boards are intricately carved for use in Kula exchange. These boards are beautifully decorated and skilfully carved to act as a psychological weapon to persuade Kula partners to, as it were, take leave of their senses and give generously during the exchange (Gell, 1992: 50). The skill required to produce such a board is viewed and expressed as magical power. Gell argues that we can apply this theory of art cross-culturally and that technical processes can make us see the world in an enchanted way, leaving us somehow dazzled and making the products of technology seem like vessels of magical power. We could conceive of the technology behind NFTs as dazzling and enchanting. Given that purchasing an NFT does not buy any intellectual

rights over the asset the token represents, what would induce anyone to spend money on one?

Walter Benjamin tackled the issue of reproduction a long time ago, specifically concerning photography, when he introduced the term 'aura' to define the unique unity of place and time that even the most perfect reproduction lacks (Benjamin, 2008). Although artworks have always been reproducible in principle, the advent of lithography and photography in the 19th century accelerated the processes of pictorial reproduction enormously. This newfound scale of reproduction enabled copies of original works of art to be placed in situations that previously were out of reach for them. Benjamin argued that this led to the detachment of the reproduced object from the domain of tradition, substituting the unique existence of a work of art in a gallery, home, or studio for a plurality of copies (Benjamin, 2008: 223).

Benjamin contended that a perfect reproduction of a work of art lacked its aura, its presence in time and space, and its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This presence is crucial to the concept of authenticity. Prior to mechanical reproduction, art objects were associated with a kind of ritual appreciated on two different poles: its cult value (the art object as a symbol for veneration) and its exhibition value (the object as something to be displaced and appreciated) (Benjamin, 2008: 235). The cult value of an art object demanded that it remain hidden from view. For reproduced art, the exhibition value eclipsed its cult value, as the maker had very little control over the audience who engaged with the work.

Benjamin's critique was of the cult of authenticity rather than a defence of the aura of the authentic. He argued that reproducing everything so people could see great works of art was taking away the values of authenticity and was typical of the modern era. However, despite Benjamin's prediction that mechanical reproduction would help end the cult value of art, the concept still matters in contemporary art worlds, for example, in the case of NFTs sold at Christie's. Maintaining a scarcity of supply has always been a problem for the marketing of digital art. While the issues of mechanical reproduction and authenticity were undoubtedly of great importance to the art worlds of Benjamin's time, these issues pale in comparison to the problems raised for the marketability of digital art in an age where perfect digital reproductions can happen in a matter of seconds using a computer. Before the development of NFTs, galleries solved this problem by producing a certain number of limited-edition copies (a system already used in photography). However, the advent of crypto art introduced a way to establish verifiable ownership, scarcity, and provenance for digital artworks through blockchain technology.

To return to Gell's work on art and enchantment, the technology of NFTs dazzles and enchants the viewer by situating a work of art in time and place on a blockchain ledger. For the first time in history, digital art can have an aura.

Making

This section describes my attempts to mint an NFT. This was inspired by Tim Ingold's approach in his 2013 book *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art, Architecture*, in which an understanding of the materiality of things can be gained through a philosophy of phenomenology, corresponding with the world by 'thinking through making and learning by doing'. In doing so, we are drawn to take our focus away from already-formed objects and their consumption to look instead at the processes behind their production.

Before making my NFT, I first needed to consider the digital asset I wanted to tokenise. I decided to use an asset that I already had ready to hand – a form I had produced and had approved by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC). This was used for the NFT creators I would interview to provide informed consent to speak to me and for their data to be used in my research. Specifically, I decided to mint my 'Study Information Sheet', outlining my research's purposes and potential risks, as an NFT. The production of an NFT version of my study information sheet cemented the research in time and place on the blockchain and made it freely accessible to anyone.

The next step was to choose a marketplace to mint and list my NFT. While each marketplace offers its own merits, I decided to pick the largest and the one I was most acquainted with: OpenSea. In addition to a marketplace account, a wallet is needed to access the blockchain. The wallet must also be connected to the marketplace account. I set a wallet up with a popular Ethereum wallet called MetaMask.

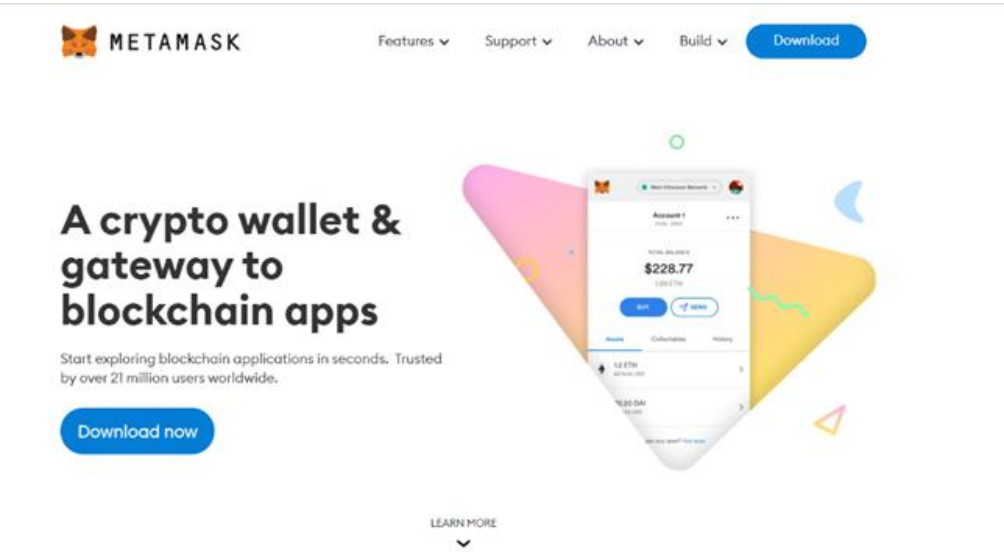

Figure 4: A screenshot taken of the MetaMask homepage. 03/01/2021. https://metamask.io

It is important to note that, like most cryptocurrency wallets, MetaMask will not have any knowledge or database of you or any of their other customers. In addition to a password, you

are provided with a 12-word backup phrase known as a seed phrase. This phrase is of the highest importance to the security of the wallet. It must be kept both entirely private and entirely secure, as if it is lost, your funds inside the account will become inaccessible.

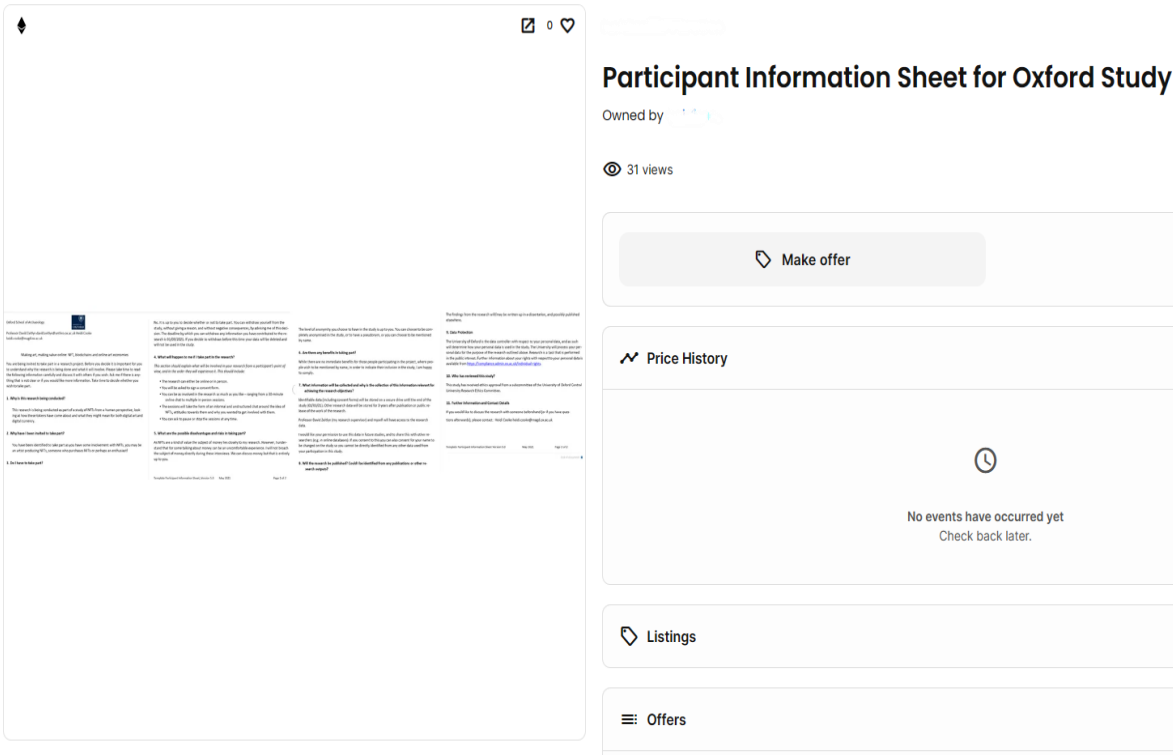

Figure 5: Participant Information Sheet for Oxford Study on Blockchain.

To mint NFTs, cryptocurrencies such as Ether are used. The process involves sending Ether from a cryptocurrency exchange account to a wallet, such as MetaMask. The wallet can be linked to a marketplace account, which enables the creation of NFTs using the marketplace website. Once an asset is uploaded, various details can be added about the NFT collection, including the name, logo, description, category (such as Art, Collectibles, Photography, Sports, Trading Cards, or Utility), links to websites or social media handles, and royalties from future sales. The NFT can be minted using a chosen blockchain and currency. After minting, the NFT can be listed for sale, which involves fees on OpenSea and gas fees for cryptocurrency transfer. The fees may vary widely, and a one-time fee is required to initialise the account.

Speaking to people online

After creating an information sheet and learning the basics of how to create Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), I then undertook some online ethnographic research by speaking to NFT creators. Most of the data was collected by initially contacting NFT creators on social media platforms such as Reddit, Instagram, and Discord. I spent 7 months conducting these interviews, with some chats remaining on the platforms, while others moved to semi-structured interviews via Zoom.

To begin a dialogue with people online, I found the CUREC form to be a valuable tool. Due to the prevalence of scams and spam messages in the NFT creation community, it was difficult to gain the trust of people. However, providing a link to an OpenSea page with clear guidelines about my study helped convince people that I was not a scammer. From my time spent in the NFT space, I learned that it is constantly evolving and breaking new ground as the crypto world evolves. The experimental use of NFTs to verify academic authenticity and ethical credibility was welcomed by members of the community.

Blockchains require a new kind of trust. Bitcoin and other blockchain-based technologies represent a shift away from trusting the government to regulate behaviour. Instead, behaviour must be regulated (or not regulated) by those using these technologies.

To gain the trust of people in the NFT community, extensive networking on social media platforms is required. Cryptocurrencies and NFTs were born out of these social network communities, which is why I chose to conduct my research online using social media platforms.

Community, values and future

With nothing but a laptop and a minted NFT of my participant information sheet, I started to venture into the world of NFTs and quickly felt utterly out of my depth. I started by exploring the r/NFT subreddit, a popular forum on the content rating and discussion website Reddit. This subreddit is mainly filled with new NFT creators showcasing their latest NFT creations and advertising their projects. I used these posts as an opportunity to connect with creators. However, after a few months, I shifted most of my interactions to Instagram, an image-based social media platform with a more sophisticated built-in chat function than Reddit.

Instagram is a popular platform where NFT creators and project managers post their collections and highlight their sales success. Discord, another top-rated platform for NFT traders, offers instant messaging, voice calls, and file-sharing. Communities are divided into different servers, making it easier to interact with NFT creators.

The community

> Replied to you:
> > Networking is key, it's impossible for your work/art to be 'found' by chance because there are a lot of people now on the NFT space, you need to do the work, and talk the talk
> > Much like in academia you need to go to conferences and workshops and then you meet your peers that hopefully have the same interests or field of research as you, then you make articles together and cite each other in your work
> > Same but with art. You go to virtual galleries, hackathons etc and you collab with them
> (Online chat with anonymous NFT creator, September 2021)

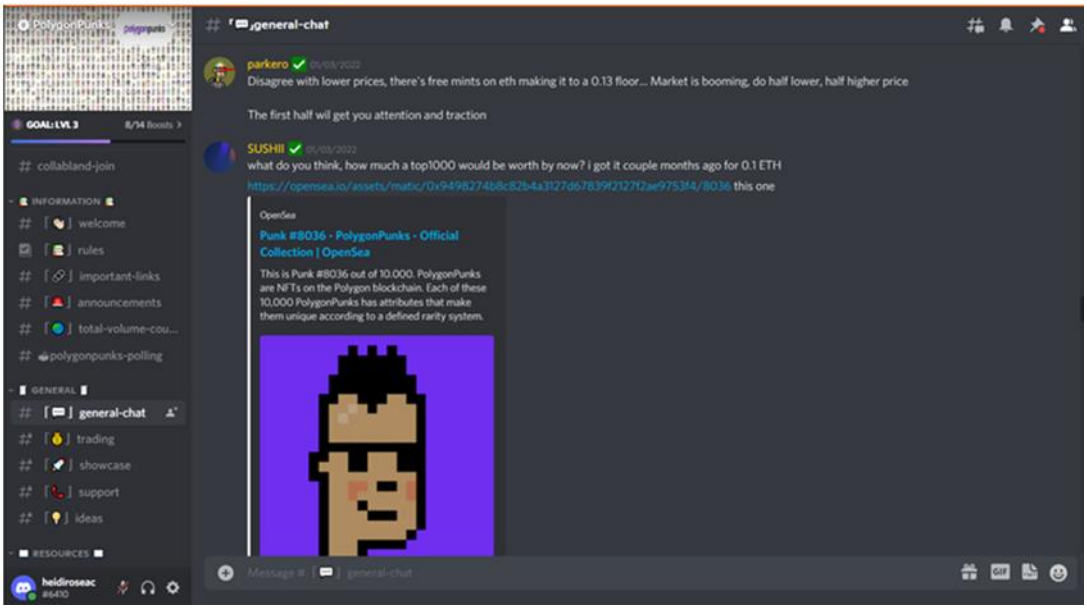

Figure 6: Screenshot taken from Polygon Punks Discord Server. 03/01/21.

Most NFT projects have their own Discord servers, which active participants, customers, and budding creators join to stay updated with the project managers. These servers are used to announce project updates and discuss various topics related to the NFT marketplace, including general chat and advertising new and upcoming projects.

In the NFT community, it's especially important to advertise new projects, a practice known as 'shilling'. This is because getting in on a new project before the NFTs are minted is a way to buy tokens at the lowest possible price, known as the 'mint price'. To do this, you must find your way onto the 'whitelist' of a project, which is limited to people who have connections with the NFT project managers. Another way to get onto the whitelist is through giveaways of a limited number of NFTs in your own project. Often, such giveaways are crucial elements in the marketing of your project, its Discord server, and the NFTs you hope to sell.

Discord is a useful tool because it provides a gated platform that requires users to log in and request to join particular Discord communities. Discord was already popular in the gaming world prior to the NFT scene developed, and many NFT creators were already familiar with the platform's operation.

For those unfamiliar with these types of online platforms (of which Discord is one of many), a place like Discord might seem slightly overwhelming. On Discord, you can see who is online and speak to anyone directly via the voice channel. You can even hover your cursor over people's names and see which apps they are using alongside Discord. However, for those in the NFT community, these features are less important than the levels of connections between people which could be made using the platform in comparison to other community-building networks.

Another merit of Discord, especially regarding NFTs, is the vast number of applications that can be added to a Discord server. Someone with programming knowledge can write additional scripts for their servers to modify and customise their own networking space. For example, it is possible to program features that permit the transfer of cryptocurrencies and NFTs through the Discord application, allowing the recipient of a giveaway to receive their

NFT without the complex and data-sensitive issue of contacting one another and asking directly for a wallet address.

NFT creators are therefore able to leverage platforms such as Discord in the context of the digital age's 'cultural abundance' (to return to Horst and Miller's (2012) work on digital abstraction). Through providing a space for discussion, announcements and opportunity, Discord servers enable the abundance of the crowd to be navigated and managed. Horst and Miller's concept of abstraction aligns with the NFT market's emphasis on the mint price, where NFTs aligns digital assets into unique tokens with value. Discord servers facilitate activities like 'shilling', leveraging connections and understanding of NFTs' abstract value. The ability of some NFT creators to customise their Discord servers, including cryptocurrency and NFT transfer capabilities, connects to concerns about data privacy. Custom applications within Discord may address privacy concerns by enabling secure peer-to-peer transfers, reducing data sharing risks.

Beer and Burrow's (2010) theories on digital prosumption are also relevant to NFT communities, where participants engage in user-generated content, collaborations and peer-to-peer exchanges. NFT communities are characterised by active participation: users cannot be separated into producers and consumers, but rather as contributors to cultural and economic dynamics. Discord servers, as the central hubs for NFT enthusiasts, serve as platforms where users generate content through discussions, project updates, and sharing insights. This user-generated content contributes to the richness of the community's interactions and is a hallmark of prosumption in the digital context. Users collaborate on projects, participate in giveaways, and trade NFT tokens directly. The Discord environment facilitates such collaborations, enabling users to connect, exchange ideas, and engage in mutually beneficial exchanges. In this way, participants actively shape the NFT market, becoming both producers and consumers of value.

The idea of prosumption further aligns with the ethos of democratisation in the NFT world. NFTs empower creators to tokenise their digital art and content, allowing them to become both the creators and sellers of their work. Discord servers provide a space where creators can showcase their art, engage with their audience, and directly sell their NFTs to interested buyers. This direct creator-consumer interaction epitomises prosumption as artists become entrepreneurs in the NFT marketplace.

The values

> I think it's absolutely crazy to pay for any sort of digital asset, but that's just old-school mentality, right? Just like the generations before us put value into physical assets, and now those things seem to pale in comparison to the new generation assets which are now looking digital.
> (Online interview with NFT creator sneaker_alchemist, October 2021)

Speaking to NFT creators on Zoom, it was hard not to be taken aback by the highly curated and all-important post-2020 'Zoom backgrounds' I came across. Over the heads of these creators were blindingly lit colourful strips of LEDs surrounding the angles of their offices and living rooms. Many took hits from similarly flashing vape pens and sat on gaming chairs

complete with sound decks and headsets. Their faces contrasted with the beaming glow from their monitors, all of these coming together to give the impression that these creators, surrounded in their homes by electronics, lived a life which, even during their offline time, was still primarily influenced by the digital.

Many of the people I spoke to valued their NFT-facilitated livelihoods as the digital allowed them to live lives disengaged from the stresses and responsibilities of what they saw as the mundane life of the past. Many expressed their desires to use NFTs to escape the entrapments of mundane work in coffee shops and retail stores – which they described as underpaid, inhumane, or 'soulless' - or from the difficulties of making a creative living in their self-described 'third world countries'. The prospect of selling their NFTs offered a hope of self-employed, humane, and fulfilling labour, providing relatively easy money for those who could educate themselves on the dynamics of the technology and the market.

These hopes recalled some of the early promises many saw when the Internet came in, that the technologies and infrastructures offered by the onset of the digital era would democratise many aspects of life. Many creators expressed a desire to make a living using their skillsets: making digital art, online content, and a knowledge of computer programming. One creator I spoke to, a young adult from Mexico, put it this way:

> ... I guess I liked the idea to make a living with my skillset (3D artist, CS related stuff) in a country with little to no job opportunities in this area (Mexico)
> Away from my hometown, I guess there are some opportunities, but I'd have to move to Mexico's capital for that, also, here is frowned upon to pursue an art related career
(Online chat with NFT creator Diego_PerMar, December 2021)

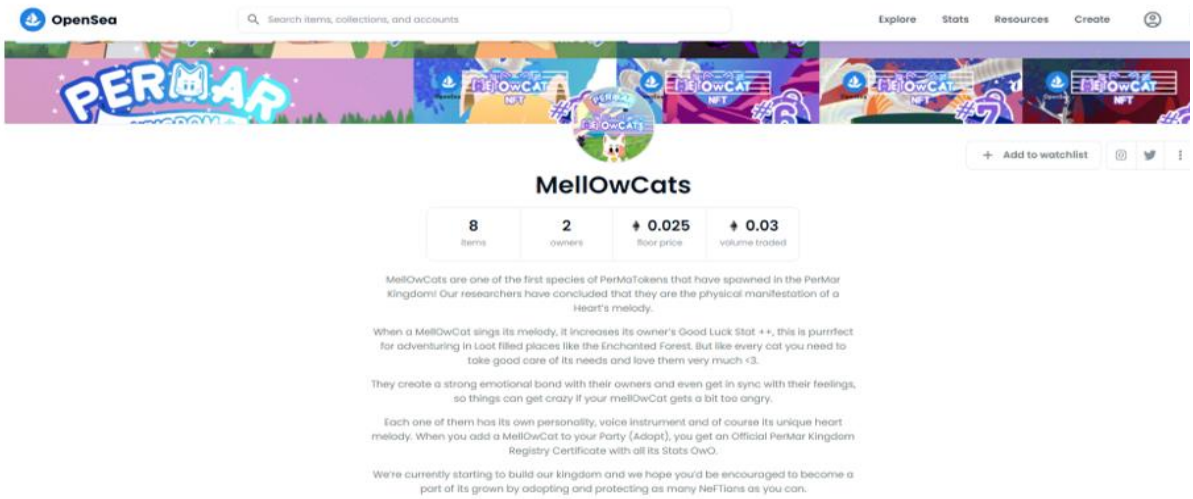

Figure 7: Screenshot of the OpenSea page for the MellOwCats NFT project. 02/03/22 20:20pm GMT. Image reproduced with permission from PerMar_Kingdom.

Many people I spoke to came from Latin America and had taught themselves to code and make digital art using online web tutorials[3]. For them, the Internet was a source of empowerment, allowing them to educate themselves to get out of their towns and avoid becoming an *obrero*, working 'blue-collar jobs'. Many of them followed the hype which traced the long tail of the NFT success stories, such as the CryptoPunks or BAYC. Although they were aware these jobs would offer little financial security or labour protections and that the NFT space was rife with the risk of scams, the meaningful, potentially lucrative work NFTs provided far outweighed the security of unfulfilling careers.

The uniqueness of NFTs was also an essential aspect of the technology for these creators. However, it is important to bear in mind that a lot of the hype about NFTs is centred around aspects that are not unique, such as the internal similarity of PFP projects. Many new projects have attempted to replicate the successes of others, such as CryptoPunks and Bored Ape Yacht Club, producing similarly styled characters with slightly different traits. The goal of PFP creators is to produce stylised icons which, though each NFT is still individually unique, conform to a specific pre-established aesthetic demonstrated to be successful. True uniqueness is confined to the art collectors, who gather rare art, or 'one of ones', but this is seen as only really bringing success at the high end of a long tail.

The data I collected from NFT creators shows their perspectives and motivations for engaging in the NFT scene. These can be linked to Arjun Appadurai's theories on the social life of commodities and the changing value dynamics of objects. These connections reveal how NFTs are not only viewed as digital assets with financial worth but also as cultural and social artefacts, echoing the complexity of contemporary digital culture. Many viewed the valuation of NFTs as being reflective of larger shifts to perceptions of value in the digital age, much like Appadurai's exploration of how the value of objects is culturally determined by the social contexts in which they circulate.

Appadurai's perspective of commodities adopting dual roles, one being their economic value and the other their cultural and social significance, aligns with NFT creation. While the financial value of NFTs is apparent, creators also emphasised the cultural and social importance NFTs held in their lives. NFTs provided a livelihood, enabling individuals to escape what they perceived as mundane or underpaid work, thus offering cultural *and* economic value. The creators' aspirations to make a living through their skill sets, such as digital art and computer programming, recall the promises of democratisation early in the digital era. NFTs offer a platform where creators can leverage their digital skills independently from the state, mirroring the early promises of the Internet's democratising potential.

Many participants discussed the uniqueness of NFTs in relation to their value, emphasising the value of rare, one-of-a-kind NFTs, as well as the challenges related to mass-produced or highly similar projects. This uniqueness reflects the duality of commodities and unique objects that Appadurai addressed. While some NFTs conform to specific aesthetics,

[3] The overrepresentation of Latin American informants in this study is primarily attributed to the snowball sampling method employed during data collection. Initial contacts who were proficient in coding and digital art creation happened to be from Latin America, leading to subsequent referrals from within the same demographic. It is important to note that while these informants offer valuable insights into their experiences with coding and digital art, their perspectives may not fully represent the diversity of the NFT trading community as a whole.

rare art collectors focus on 'one of ones', and these unique NFTs hold particular cultural and economic significance.

The question of what would lead someone to buy NFTs provoked many responses. Some believed many people liked collecting rare art, digital collectables, or trading cards. Others quoted the often-used acronym FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Following the auction of Beeple's NFT, some felt compelled to get in on the NFT scene to avoid being left behind. The majority, however, cited a group of people, themselves included, who looked at NFTs from a technological point of view and believed they were only at their nascent stage. Seeing their applications as potentially travel far beyond their then current scope and potentially becoming pervasive in many aspects of life in the future was an inducement to become an early investor.

The motivations expressed by individuals for buying NFTs, ranging from collecting rare art to FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and technological optimism, highlight the diverse values attributed to NFTs. This mirrors Appadurai's concept of objects gaining value through their circulation in various social contexts. NFTs represent not only financial investments but also cultural and technological assets that may have broader applications in the future.

The future

> I think blockchain would help decentralise most things on the Internet
> Web 3.0 is already here, and it will only get larger and larger
> It would eventually reduce the influence of big social media and tech firms that are more centralised and take decisions willy nilly. based on their own set of rules and values
> People will have more control over their data
> There might be cons, too, as getting content off of a decentralised set-up is nearly impossible
(Online chat with NFT creator skeletoncrewnft, September 2021)

Many creators I spoke with believed that technologies such as NFTs were early signs of a digital revolution predicted to take place 'soon'. Almost everyone I spoke to mentioned the forthcoming arrival of the 'Metaverse', an all-encompassing virtual world that includes almost all aspects of life. It is believed that all forms of value will eventually be digitised, and blockchain technologies will soon disrupt governments, banks, and legal systems. Governments will have to change how they manage money beyond their national currencies, switching to a decentralised and location-independent system of money based on cryptocurrencies. Many see banks investing in cryptocurrencies as an early sign of this societal revolution. According to these predictions, even taxes will need to be adapted to a digital world where wallets of cryptocurrencies may be stored in accounts that are shielded even from the company that holds the assets. Many people cited the fictional entertainment universe 'OASIS' (Ontologically Anthropocentric Sensory Immersive Simulation) from the 2008 movie 'Ready Player One', directed by Steven Spielberg and based on a science fiction novel of the same name by Ernest Cline, as an accurate prediction of how this future will look. The first major change will be in the job market with the transition of labour online. This is likely to accelerate

in the future. An average person's livelihood may involve playing video games with built-in NFTs, with rewards for high performance translating into wages in the form of cryptocurrencies.

> […] you're going to see people who don't have day jobs, like me. This is going to be a common thing where people can just sit at home and just grind out their game, whatever that can be. Like now I'm on the racing platforms, but [NFTs] will expand into every sort of gaming platform you can think of like farming simulators, MMO RPGs, battle royales… (Online interview with NFT creator sneaker_alchemist, October 2021)

For some, this transition represents a bleak but inevitable change brought on by the future threat of climate change making the outside environment uninhabitable, as well as anxieties about and an unwillingness to rely on jobs outside of the home as a consequence of the ongoing threat of enforced lockdowns post-pandemic.

For many, however, the Metaverse brings a welcome change, seen as the natural progression or evolution of our species to a life greatly facilitated by digital technology. NFT-related activity for these people represents buying stakes in this future, as many projects promise to deliver rewards for those who invested in them before transitioning onto the Metaverse. Some projects promise as part of their 'roadmap' to establish businesses such as casinos in the Metaverse and offer those holding their NFTs the promise of having shares in these ventures.

> I believe that mainstream 'artists' are still dormant to the fact that NFTs are the future, and a lot of non-artists are surging and trying to make art, but it's clear who has the right information and who is making the right preparations, and who hasn't, and eventually we will see who is really prepared for the changes that are about to happen (Online interview with NFT creator cryptoverts, September 2021)

NFTs represent a wellspring from which the evolving relationship between digital technology, art and authenticity can be perceived. The anticipated changes found within this discussion, particularly regarding the rise of Web 3.0, the Metaverse and the transformation of the job market, can be linked to theories about the anthropology of art by Alfred Gell.

Many NFT creators view blockchain technology, NFTs, and the upcoming Metaverse as signs of a digital revolution. These technologies are seen as enablers of transformative societal change. This is similar to Gell's concept of technology enchanting and dazzling the viewer. In this context, NFTs and blockchain technology are perceived as magical or powerful tools that have the potential to reshape the digital landscape. Following Gell's theories still further, technologies like NFTs can make people see the world in an enchanted way. NFTs, as part of this technological revolution, are viewed with a sense of awe and potential for profound change.

Conclusion

This paper presents one of the first anthropological studies of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) and the ideals of NFT creators. NFTs gained a lot of media and public attention in the years after 2020. However, this paper aims to show that the feverish publicity around new technologies can often mislead us into thinking that they are entirely unprecedented, mystifying, and groundbreaking. In this paper, I have shown how NFTs and the beliefs behind them are grounded in many earlier social movements, cryptographic technologies, and attitudes in art, economics, and politics.

One of the communities that formed the foundation of NFTs is the NFT creators' community. It comprises large online networks that share a language (a jargon), a set of understandings, and, in many ways, a shared history. This community often follows the trail of highly successful projects, where success is determined by media coverage and large sums of money being transferred. However, at the core of the NFT scene, there is a spirit of community, experimentation, and pioneering aspirations to take responsibility for building the architecture of what they believe to be a new online future. Many of these people have been drawn to the promises of NFTs to provide them with stable incomes, a more fulfilling livelihood, or even wealth and abundance when the future of the Internet arrives.

The capacity of NFTs to provide certifiable provenance and an ownership history for digital assets is equally important to this spirit. Within the technological architecture of an NFT, we can see the recapitulation of many themes and ideas set out in the study of physical-world phenomena. Firstly, the notion of an object biography or the life history of an object is central to the NFT. Alongside each token stands a certified account of all previous owners of the token, the details of its creation, and all transactions made. NFTs also exemplify Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura, as they provide a restricted presence for a work of art on the blockchain, providing it with an aura, a unique location in time and space.

This paper employed a hybrid approach to collect data by using a range of methodologies. This approach was useful as it encapsulated different ways of seeing, including as an external researcher, a neophyte setting out to mint their first NFT, and someone trying to understand the knowledge of others much more experienced in NFT creation. There is still much to be discussed about NFTs, which has been beyond the scope of this paper. They represent the start of an exciting new future for the Internet, and I hope that more will be published on them in years to come.

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ANT, SPIDER AND DNA: LETTING MINDLESS GENERATIVE MECHANISMS SPEAK

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In Tim Ingold's fable from the forest floor (2008), ant and spider put their minds together to ponder some of the most pressing issues in current discourse on the make-up of reality and our understanding of it. They are especially concerned with questions about agency and the character of relations. Where ant sees 'networks', spider insists that we deal with 'meshworks'. While the ant, obviously, is an advocate of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), Ingold casts himself as an experientially orientated SPIDER, propounding the view that Skilled Practice Involves Developmentally Embodied Responsiveness. In the same allegorical genre, this text allows DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) to challenge both theoreticians. ANT and SPIDER share a blindness with respect to invisible beings like itself, DNA argues. Their privileging of spatiotemporal immediacy entails a one-dimensional (flat) ontology that tends to push mindless generative mechanisms out of view. Hence, ANT and SPIDER miss out on central dynamics of ontological constitution. In effect, both thinkers construe mindless being in terms of mind properties, DNA charges, exclaiming Do Not Anthropo-size!

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The homonymity between ANT (Actor-Network-Theory) and the insect ant was not lost on Bruno Latour, who, playfully, appreciated similarities in terms of approach. Struggling to find the most appropriate label for his perspective, Latour reached the conclusion that 'ANT' was 'perfectly fit for a blind, myopic, workaholic, trail-sniffing, and collective traveller' like himself, '[a]n ant writing for other ants' (2005: 9). Even more spirited is Tim Ingold in his fable-like and witty, but theoretically serious, account of his conversation with ant/ANT on the forest floor (2008). Casting himself as a phenomenologically orientated spider, Ingold challenges ant's perspective at its core. While ant sees actants and agency everywhere, spider holds that only attentional beings can 'act'. While, in spider's view, ant thinks that relations are empty, merely

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content-less links among pre-existing entities, spider draws attention to the materiality of the relations themselves. We deal not with the helter-skelter assembling of actants, spider argues, but with operational connections. It is the lining up of relations – their 'threads and pathways' (Ingold 2008: 212) – that counts. Hence, what ant construes as 'networks', spider takes to be 'meshworks'.

Unsurprisingly, the creatures never reach an accord. In the end, spider walks away in frustration, grunting, 'I cannot, for the most part, understand a word of what you say' (Ingold 2008: 215). Ant's metaphysical take on things is far beyond his grasp. Ingold fails to cite ant's response, but we must assume that it is equally incredulous: 'Amazing how self-centred – experientially bound – some of these creatures of the forest can be!' Now, let us take one step further into this allegorical universe, lending voice to an existence that, unlike insects, arachnids and humans, is entirely mindless but, nevertheless, part of the picture: DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). What would DNA have to say about its constitutive role in the networks/meshworks that so concern ant and spider? More generally, what is the ontological status of the kind of existences that DNA exemplify – the myriad of often non-manifest, thus invisible, generative mechanisms that partake in socio-material formations? Are Latour the ant and Ingold the spider sufficiently attuned to the ontological verity of mindless – non-attentional – being?

Emphasizing that I now move far away from my 'mission in life' – or to be precise, my evolutionarily acquired biochemical modes of operation – I, DNA, would make two points had I been part of the intellectual exchange between ant and spider. First, that I am intrinsic to both! No matter how diverging their viewpoints may appear, they share an *existence* that, in part, depends on my workings. My continuous chromosomal reproduction keeps individual ants and spiders alive, so I am a *sine-qua-non*, ontogenetically speaking. I am a sub-organismic force that keeps organisms going. Moreover, I am also an unequivocal constituent of the complex dynamics that, across the ages, engender particular forms of embodied being in the world. In other words, I contribute phylogenetically to the forging of diverging experiential modes and thus of epistemological orientations – ant-ness here, spider-ness there. So no me, no living beings; it is as simple as that. But the question is how the two formidable thinkers deal with this verity. In what sense do I exist for them?

Secondly, while ant and spider stress the fact of diverging perspectives, I counter that they actually *share outlook* or, more precisely, a certain kind of blindness. Neither of them seems willing, really, to take me and my fellow cousins in the world of the mindless seriously. Despite their admirable intention to allow us a role in the constitution of reality, there is little recognition of what we – a true myriad of beings and forces – actually accomplish in the world. Neither ant nor spider cast us in our own terms, I claim. So they are not all that different on this point either. However, I do recognize that each throws light on certain *aspects* of being. It would befit my evolved character as an encoder to try to assemble these threads, to explore whether their diverging views might be brought into productive reaction to engender a sustainable 'molecule of understanding', as it were.

Spider

Let's start with spider, the phenomenologist *par excellence*: quite literally entangled in webs of his own spinning, enmeshed in fibres extending from his corporal existence, acutely attuned to even the slightest impact on his distributed body. An extensive system of limbs, senses and slimy filaments superbly geared at trapping and feeding. Mating is certainly another major concern, but as spiders, especially of the female kind, would readily admit, the distinction between lover and prey is blurry at best. Why not collapse the conceptual subtleties and utilize companion spiders twice over if the occasion so admits? Spider's life mottos are embarrassingly simple. Devour and conceive. Trick or be tricked. Live or die. Myself before others.

But what spider does not seem to take in is that this whole business of trapping entraps his understanding. Eminently attuned to horizons of nourishment, non-consumptive issues fade into the background. Being the spider of the web in an altogether literal sense, attention hardly reaches beyond his net. Non-spiders enter the lifeworld only when and as they become food or as nearby objects – twigs and grass stems – that might be useful in the overall life project of sustenance. This breed of phenomenology, then, entertains an active ignorance of reality beyond the immediate sphere of individual perceptions. Spider is certainly not the creature that is likely to see trees beyond the twigs and branches to which he attaches, not to say the forest. His adaptive, enskilled efficiency in this respect may indeed be measured IN GOLD.[2]

But I must admit that I chuckle a bit at this shrewd, solitary being since, as I say, I have encoded spider thus. Or, to be entirely precise, I play a role in the formation and differentiation of all kinds of living beings. One could say that I am a necessary but not sufficient condition for bringing living organisms about. I work tirelessly to engender and sustain creatures that participate in the world in their highly specific ways, and spider has evolved to engage and thus to experience reality through his peculiar spiderish modality. Since some humans calling themselves 'anthropologists' look to the spider when attempting to understand the whereabouts of their species, we should assess the worth of this outlook somewhat closer. What kind of epistemology arises from spider's life orientations were we to articulate it philosophically?

It follows from my critique that spider and I converge on crucial points. Spider would be the first to acknowledge that creatures of the world have 'evolved' a certain specificity – or he would use 'developed' (Ingold 2008: 214-215), 'grown' (e.g. Ingold 2000, Chapter 5) or 'crescented' (Ingold 2022: 54). We might disagree on how much of the 'spiderness' that stems from my encoding and how much from any given spider's enskilled adaptations, but we are, nevertheless, in concord on the point that spiders, ants, humans, twigs and leaves have become *significantly different kinds of existences*. Reality is not of one kind or, as humans often think, of two: humans and non-humans. At any given moment, the world is composed of a myriad of beings with diverging properties – spider prefers 'affordances' (e.g. Ingold 2000, Chapter 9) – that influence how they can be practically engaged, by, for instance, spiders or

[2] In Ingold's fable, it is ant who measures spider's metaphysics in gold value, alluding, sarcastically, to spider's light weight (Ingold 2008: 215).

humans. Ant seems to miss this point entirely, something spider articulates in no uncertain terms when criticizing the *formicidae*'s propensity for 'symmetric thinking':

> It is simply absurd to place a grain of sand and an aphid on the scales of a balance and to claim that they are equivalent. They may weigh the same amount, but in terms of complexity they are poles apart. The key difference is that the aphid, animal that it is, has a nervous system – just as do you and I [ant and spider]. When I crouch at the centre of my web, I am all a-quiver, just like the leaf of a tree in the summer breeze. I am sensitive to the slightest movement or vibration. What makes the difference between me and the leaf, however, is that every movement I make is also a movement of my *attention* (Ingold 2008: 214, original emphasis).

I cannot agree more! Spiders and other attentional creatures, humans included, cannot but be experientially grounded, while grains of sand and I, the encoder, work out of an entirely different – one could say non-phenomenological – form of agency. Or since spider would, of course, refuse to grant my impacts the status of 'agency', let us call it 'efficaciousness'.

Moreover, being the obstinate replicator that I am, I would also agree that these distinguishing properties are not eternal givens – godly created essences, Platonic ideal forms or something of that sort – but features that are brought about dynamically through complex engagements among a variety of entities and forces in situated contexts. They are *emergent* properties (see Bhaskar 2008: 102-3; 1998: 37-39). As spider puts it, the process is morphogenetic, not hylomorphic (Ingold 2013, Chapters 2 and 3).[3] Form is not the result of templates applied to matter by attentional beings from outside or above, but rather a regularity growing forth from within and below, ongoing formations emerging out of complex interactions among specifics.

However, I want to add a significant point to spider's divide between attentional and non-attentional beings. While I am happy to be lumped together with other ignorant creatures, spider seems so preoccupied with the mundane pragmatic concerns of living beings that he hardly notices the finer distinctions among us. For instance, I have the capacity to affect the world in quite different ways than spider's proverbial 'grains of sand'. My 'doings' create specific kinds of impact, while other existences without a nervous system influence reality in *their* ways. While, certainly, attentional agency is an essential ontological dynamic, it is categorically not the only one – and at times, neither the most relevant nor forceful dynamic. What is largely lacking in spider's self-centred, experiential take on reality are all the existences that work on the world from afar, and I mean this both in a literal sense and metaphorically. Spider may have trouble perceiving what lies beyond the *geographical* immediacies of his phenomenological dwelling – what lurks behind the trees, as it were, not to say in other forests. These realities beyond his experiential sphere may seem a bit too 'globe-ish' (Ingold 2000, Chapter 12). And moreover, I claim that he has some problems acknowledging the truly constitutive powers of *imperceptibles* like myself and a whole range of

[3] 'Hylomorphism' refers to the view, originating in Aristotle's distinction between matter and form, that there are intrinsic conditions to things through which they become what they are. When Ingold discusses hylomorphism in the context of artefacts, he counters the view that their production consists of the application of preconceived forms to matter.

other non-attentional mechanisms that partake in the forging of the world. That which exists and operates 'below experience', as it were, tends to slip from spider's mind. It is at this point that one gets curious about ant's take on reality.

Ant

So far, ant has figured negatively, conveyed through a critical arachnid view. In all fairness, let us now switch perspectives and explore positively what kind of approach to life the opposite party suggests. Perceptive humans have advised for a long time that one should visit the ant to acquire wisdom. While some identify human nature in the self-contained, utilitarian spider exploiting his environment as best he can, others are fascinated by the collective, apparently *social* character of the ant world. It seems that the *modus operandi* of ants raises different questions about being, and the contrast between the two forest floor creatures is thus eminently suited to bringing out the philosophical controversies.

For one, where spider is sedentary, at least as soon as his corporeal extensions are in order, ants lead roaming lives. It is the privilege of one aristocratic class, the ant queens, to enjoy the same indolent passivity as spider, but this is not the true picture since queens are veritable breeding machines. Whether the aristocrat enjoys her laborious labouring or not, her lifestyle is evidence of a highly specialized role in the ant world rather than the generalized model of ant selfhood. Other ants may come home to roost from time to time but spend most of their day out and about, actively engaging their surroundings. It is not surprising that this open, curious and keen attitude to the environment and its many shapes and creatures inspires a different kind of epistemology. Indeed, among theorizing humans, ant's approach is often praised as a philosophical achievement: openness to the world, curiosity, creativity and an emphasis on transgressive movements instead of stale durables. Interestingly, spider, too, cannot but voice admiration (Ingold 2022).

And then there is the social dimension that so fascinates humans. The ant nest is a highly complex world of interaction, cooperation, hierarchy, role adherence, submissiveness, and even self-sacrificing for the greater good – features with apparent counterparts in human society. It is perhaps unavoidable that this advanced lifestyle comes with a degree of grandeur, even a sense of superiority. Proud ants, spider charges, may come to think of their nests as monumental mounds and their pathways as highways (Ingold 2008: 209). Were it not for the fact that Amazonian jaguars have gained notoriety for the perspective already (Viveiros de Castro 2012), one would indeed appreciate the human-like lives of ants: they construct buildings, engage in community, care for the sick, farm for a living, enjoy commensality, run collective hunts and so on.

This lifeworld is so complex that it engenders three different perspectives on everyday sociality, ant tells spider (Ingold 2008: 209-210). Here he borrows unabashedly from human social theoreticians: Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde, respectively. Some (Weberian) thinkers simply add up ants and find the collective and all its operations in the aggregate. In this piling-up approach, there is nothing but so many individual ants out to look for food. An ant that happens to come across delicacies on its way will secret pheromones

involuntarily, thus luring other ants to the same place. Hence, the path that arises is not actually a 'path' – something of a social order – but simply the aggregate of individual instances of attentional hunger, as it were. Other (Durkheimian) thinkers find this mathematics of summation overly simplistic and argue that society is larger than the sum of its parts. The going about of ant myriads engender emergent properties at various levels of scale so that the mound is irreducible to the sum total of individuals. The individual ant is subordinate to the greater good emergent from the collective. And, finally, there is spider's partner in discourse this particular day, who thinks the whole debate is misplaced, that the very distinction between individual and society is nonsense (Latour 2011: 803). He has a third take: seeing the world in terms of the momentary distribution of agency across extensive networks. As such, society is actually smaller than the sum of its parts (Latour et al. 2012), he claims. In other words, this is a real ANT-ant.

But ant's highly interactive lifestyle is demanding. His nomadic vitality exposes him to the world in ways that the sedentary, self-contained spider never bothers to experience. While spider might at times extend a kind of fellow feeling to other spiders, momentarily distinguishing between sex and food to let a lover escape (or perhaps the distinction is, rather, between being hungry and not hungry), ant continually fine-tunes his conceptual apparatus to all the strange beings that cross his path. A moving creature, a pine needle to carry home, an obstacle to overcome – living is nothing but so many engagements of difference. So while spider may be accused of attentional complacency, a disregard for matters outside his sphere of sustenance, ant suffers from attentional overdrive, as it were. He is prone to dissolve the world into an ever-expanding multiplicity of specific encounters as if all and sundry counterparts demand the same degree of alertness.

Moreover, every such encounter necessitates a decision concerning identity: is the opposite part an ant or not, worker or soldier, healthy or sick, ant from home or one of the foes? The finer distinctions of self and other are never given or guaranteed but must be determined interactively, and the survival of self and collectivity may depend on it. But this is simply another way of saying that the relative *ant-ness* of others is always at stake. Never entirely sure about the precise boundaries of one's being, a seemingly innocent encounter may be exactly the opposite: seemingly a fellow ant, but in fact an act-ant of a wholly different kind, it may be a termite. It is existentially critical that reality be sifted through prototypes of ant-ness.

Hence, one cannot but sense a certain self-centeredness even in ant's approach (see Elder-Vass 2015: 115). We recognize a hidden differential: the thinking subject – the outlook through which other actants are assessed. So, while spider is unabashedly spider-centric and rather content with that orientation, ant often fails to acknowledge the ant-morphism underlying his sophisticated moving-about in the world of multiplicity. Spider shrewdly notes this bias: 'Indeed what is most remarkable about [ant's] principle of symmetry is that it rests upon a claim to [ant] uniqueness' (Ingold 2022: 298; my paraphrasing, in the original 'Latour's' and 'human', respectively).

We – the mindless multitude – are eternally grateful for the proposition of ant's human hero Latour that we partake in the world's constitution *qua* actants. This emphasis promises a degree of ontological worth in a world heavily skewed towards the alleged preeminence of

attentional creatures. We appreciate being included with humans and animals in his helter-skelter assemblages, among 'a rock, a lake … the unconscious … a virus' (Latour 1988: 192) and what have you. Moreover, his point that it is our forms of mediation, not those of humans, that distinguish humans from baboons is truly fascinating (Strum and Latour 1987).

But nevertheless, Latour's cordiality often feels like an aborted handshake. Every so often, he reaches towards us – towards our ontological verity – only to slip back into the domain of attentional subjectivity. When he gets down to things and starts explaining and exemplifying, we largely hear about *human minds* mediating. His thinking is riddled with Pasteur-like beings mediating the likes of me (Latour 1988), but hardly any non-attentional beings mediating other non-attentional existences (see Harman 2009: 125-129). Hence, the *in-itself* of my dance with RNA and proteins remains a blind spot in the ANT perspective, as does our continuous reproduction of the cells that make up attentional subjects – unless, of course, these engagements are made into epistemological objects in the highly specialized context of natural science. Excuse me for wondering whether Latour's *de facto* cutting of networks at the interface of subjectivities is simply another way of sustaining the nature/society divide that he is so keen to transcend.

Myself – DNA

From my position in the recesses of the underworld things look rather different, and in order to convey that point, I need to say a little bit about myself. In this Wonderland of deliberating forest floor creatures, I regard myself as a far humbler being than ant and spider. Boring as it may sound, let us be frank about it: I belong in the land of *mindless generative mechanisms*. 'Mindless' since I just keep on doing my job without attention, reflection and reflexivity (I am not privileged with a nervous system). 'Mechanisms' since I operate in a relatively repetitive and orderly fashion. 'Generative' because I bring other things forth. I am in the business of constitutive replication, as it were – encoding, recoding and recombining chemical components that engender life forms with a degree of stability. Since I come without a mind and thus a capability to feel pride, I am fully at ease with the argument that I am *not alone* in creating life – and even less so in the forging of human societies. In contrast, many humans seem to think in more one-dimensional and grandiose ways about *their* role in the world. In my view, there are *countless*, both mindless and mindful, mechanisms at work in the forging of reality, and any serious attempt to understand the world should acknowledge the complexity of this (re-)reproduction.

Moreover, I don't have any inclination whatsoever to be *deterministic* about my constitutive role, while, strangely enough, some humans actually reduce their humanity to DNA and argue that I am the prime mover (e.g. Dawkins 1976)! This is another weakness of their subjectivity: the proclivity for simplistic, dichotomous thinking. Apparently, for many theoretically-minded humans, it has to be a case of either this or that. As I see it, whether I 'win through' with my encodings or not depends on an extremely complex interchange with all the other mechanisms at work. Sometimes I am fairly successful; at other times, I am totally powerless. It would be preposterous to claim that I somehow orchestrate the whole show

from behind the scenes. Even more ridiculous is the idea that there is an omnipotent subject called 'Evolution' hovering above all of us who uses my encoding capabilities as the chief means to realize its trajectory through time, installing in every being the overall compulsion 'to spread one's genes' and so on.

No, simply take me as I am; nothing more, nothing less: a mindless generative mechanism immanent to being. However – and this is my main point – *I do exist, and I do play a circumscribed role in engendering life forms, even the human lifeworld*. It would be precise to claim that I am a *prerequisite* for life, and that is certainly no small deal. The question is whether spider and ant, with their partial outlooks, are able to recognize this reality; my ontological presence and involvement.

Beyond immediacy

In essence, I claim that ant and spider suffer from divergent but equally debilitating forms of immediacy illness, or what the human philosopher Roy Bhaskar denotes as 'actualism' (see 2008: 54-55). Their spatiotemporal reach is too constricted to attain the full picture of reality. Crucial modes of ontological constitution slip from view. For ant, it is primarily a question of constrained temporalities; for spider, primarily a matter of spatial constrictions, but, as I say, these are simply varieties of the same condition.

Ant is, obviously, sensitive to the constitutive powers of instantaneous enactments, the forces of the here-and-now. But the downside to this situational acuteness is loss of continuity, a failure to recognize that encountered entities may have a degree of *stability* across points of time, a stability that offers a measure of recall and anticipation, possibly even prediction. Ant's temporal span is not much superior to that of the proverbial goldfish, and given that he shares Latour's ontological convictions, it cannot but be. Insisting on the absolute irreduction of any particular actant (Latour 1988, Part 2), memory cannot reach any further. Convinced that nothing carries over from one mediation to another, there is nothing to be bothered about beyond momentary occurrences. As he puts it, 'each element is to be defined by its associations and is an event created at the occasion of each of those associations' (Latour 1999b: 200). In other words, ant is imprisoned in synchronicity. He 'defends a cinematic universe of individual instants' (Harman 2009: 30).

Certainly, he allows a degree of continuity when it comes to 'black boxes' (Latour 1999b: 222; 2005: 39). But black boxes are, exactly, that which slips out of view when ant pursues his favourite project: 'trac[ing] associations' (Latour 2005: 1-17) or 'following circulations' (Latour 1999a: 20) of immediate encounters. In the face of stability, he keeps insisting on the fundamentally instantaneous character of what seems persistent, and the methodological trick is to hide away the object-like character of such disturbing lingering in black boxes. Now, ant grants that black boxes may be opened, but he does not allow for a rock-bottom of being. Much like Russian dolls, we just encounter new boxes inside the ones we peer into. Epistemologically, then, box opening is a form of infinite regress (Harman 2009: 106), and a rather ghostly one at that. Nowhere is there a core to be found, a stability that sustains the passage of time. Ant is entirely explicit about it: 'The connections among beings

alone make time' (Latour and Porter 1993: 77), i.e. time is an effect of so many transitory enactments, not the ontological dimension in which enactments unfold (see Harman 2009: 30-31).

Spider, on his part, suffers from something very similar, the spatial variety of actualism. He is existentially confined to the affordances that sustain his extended corporeality and, given that he shares Ingold's theoretical orientation, he can hardly venture any further. As long as reality is rendered, ontologically, as nothing but consecutive environmental spheres (Ingold 2000, Chapter 12) – particular spatial landscapes that never rise above themselves – he deprives himself of viewpoints from which to gauge broader geographies. A new domicile is simply a new specific environment in which to extend life, a trajectory that already always entails engaging proximities. Nothing more can be said about it. While fully acknowledging temporal stretches – so many longitudinal 'lives of lines' (Ingold 2015) – spider refuses to admit spatial extensions beyond the experientially registered ones. There is, so to speak, no 'outside' in spider's orientation, and certainly no 'up'; no macro impacts from geographies of larger scale. Conversely, there is also no 'down' – no reach into the hidden molecular landscapes that I frequent.

Qualifications

In all fairness, we should note that mature ants may seek higher ground. Weary of the incessant tracing of networks on the flat forest floor, some may climb trees to gain a broader outlook on modes of existence (Latour 2013). From up here, they register a differentiated landscape, the world's undulation, as it were. It is difficult to avoid some kind of generalizing thinking from this vista, at least a rudimentary grouping together of actant mediations in recognizable, larger-scale forms of network. Ant ponders, in particular, the modes of 'truth' that emerge across the landscape. Moreover, the fresh air also inspires reflexivity. Ant comes to question his own constitution – the 'a', the 'n' and the 't', as well as even the hyphens (Latour 1999a). More earth-bound ants beg to disagree, but they need not worry. The good-humoured, self-ironic and prolific ant is regularly back on the forest floor defending his ant-epistemology, hyphens and all (Latour 2005: 301).

Spider is certainly much more broadminded, too. There is plenty of time in the Aberdeen woods to ponder larger existential issues, and spider is refreshingly unbound in his thinking: art, architecture and archaeology (Ingold 2013), wind and weather (Ingold 2011, Chapters 9 and 10), light and sound (Ingold 2022, Part 2), walking, writing and weaving (a spiderish subject indeed! (Ingold 2011)), and the list goes on. Moreover, and suprisingly, all these interests are, basically, different ways of exploring *ant's* prime experiential orientation: *wayfaring*, ant's incessant moving, the walk.

While the philosophizing spider thus ventures far beyond his earthbound web, there is, nevertheless, a persistent conviction that runs through his spawning interests, and this is the one I highlight: spider's unceasing anchoring of reality in the unfolding of immediate experiential engagements. As with ant, when spider gets down to things, we come to recognize a distinct and persistent epistemological inspiration, a wellspring at the base of

thinking, and for spider this is what human scholars call 'ecological psychology' (Gibson 2015 [1979]; Ingold 2000: 205-208). His notion of wayfaring is always already of the embodied and situated kind, while the world beyond slides into oblivion.

Moreover, spider gets all the more convinced about the *relational* character of the world the older he grows, that is, the ontological indistinguishability of organism and environment. As with ant, there are no *objects* in spider's take on relations, no entities with 'prior properties' (Ingold 2000: 365) – the reality is one of verbs rather than nouns, as it were. However, in contrast to ant's temporality of 'punctiform cinematic frames' (Harman 2009: 105), spider anchors being in *agencement* (translated from French into English as 'assemblage'; see Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Reality, in his view, is a ceaseless, non-reducible *becoming*, a never-ending 'differentiation from within' (Ingold 2022: 234, 265). To use spider's favourite words, his body, fellow spiders, the web and the twigs to which he attaches are nothing but so many 'threads', 'traces' and 'knots' in a continuously 'developing' and 'complicating' 'meshwork' (Ingold 2013: 132-133; 2011, Part 2) – a relational becoming of sorts. But, to repeat myself, since this 'mesh-working' can only take place in proximity, we are back to the ontology of spatial immediacy. Spider's concern is, emphatically, the whereabouts of ontogeny, not phylogeny or other 'overarching' processes – levels of being that spider outright denies. In his view, there are simply so many 'spheres' of existence, never a 'globe' (Ingold 2000, Chapter 12).

Beyond flatness

Now, the question is, would I, DNA, come clearer into view if ant and spider managed to overcome their weaknesses and, through a small wonder, combined the strengths of both views? What if we married ant's spatial reach with spider's sensitivity to temporal extension? Regrettably, I would hardly fare better! The problem is that I cannot be experienced and I cannot be encountered, at least not directly, so I go unnoticed in the course of both spider and ant's daily routines. I am never a manifest counterpart in the landscapes that ant traverses, and spider's experiential self-containment effectively blocks me out, too. None of Heidegger's 'failing hammers' (2010 [1953]), or, for spider, ruptured spider webs, could ever lead to the recognition of my being.

So, I would remain invisible regardless of spatiotemporal reach – hidden somewhere in the dark of ant's black boxes or spider's non-phenomenological beyond. Certainly, spider acknowledges my importance in theory: '[G]enes are of course critical components of [the] matrices [of development]. They make a difference' (Ingold 2011: 10). Thank you very much! However, in more practical terms, when spider delves into experiential immediacies, the nitty-gritty of wayfaring, I often feel relegated to an outback of non-consequential operations, at best assembled with other mindless beings in an abstract 'force-field' (Ingold 2008: 213). Spider is keen to emphasize that without an environment, I have no effects (Ingold 2011: 120-121). True enough, but the converse is also true: without me, much of the 'environment' would not be there. Thus, to insist that I am a 'reactant' rather than an 'agent' actually feels

somewhat prejudiced (Ingold 2000: 483). The point I try to get through is that I am ontologically efficacious no matter how philosophers chose to frame me.

In other words, there is something more fundamental at stake here; we need to drill deeper into the problems of actualism. In fact, immediacy illness is just a symptom of the proclivity among ants, spiders and their human cheerleaders to think in one dimension, or, more precisely, their tendency to accord *reality* a unidimensional character. They detest three-dimensional thinking, i.e. refuse to acknowledge *ontological verticality*. We witness a combined fear of heights and depths that precipitates a commitment to analytical flatness (Knudsen 2023). Recall spider's critique of ant's symmetrical thinking here – the disrespectful evening out of all differences between spiders and grains of sand. This is a pertinent point indeed. But spider sustains a one-dimensional view himself, assuming that there is nothing but so many consecutive experiential landscapes in which to develop. Certainly, spatial gradients assure asymmetry in that creatures emerge out of incrementally different settings, but these ontological differences are evened out at another epistemological level – made symmetric, one may argue – in that, for spider, there is *nothing but wayfaring*. Reality collapses into the singular lens of lineal co-development – a compacted 'relational-ecological-developmental synthesis' without layers (Ingold 2000: 6). There is nothing above or below the phenomenological spheres that experiential beings traverse, at least nothing to be concerned with theoretically.

Also, spider's otherwise commendable acknowledgement of temporality is equally trapped in horizontality. Always moving forward, wayfarers may turn their heads to heed parallel lives of line in the making, and often they cross. These contrapuntal experiential engagements – 'correspondences' (Ingold 2021) – may be yielding, but the wanderers hardly look down or up. In case they do, they only sense the ground they tread and the atmosphere they breathe (Ingold 2011, Part 3). It is not at all accidental, then, that spider's take on temporality is projected in terms of the one-dimensional trope of 'lines' (Ingold 2015); wayfarers move in flat landscapes (Knudsen 2023). Moreover, spider is entirely programmatic about it, adamant about showing that 'surfaces cover nothing but themselves' (Ingold 2022: 149). Ant, too, chimes in: 'We do not want to reduce anything to anything else' (Latour 1988: 156).

Undoubtedly, advocates of actualist perspectives are eminently attuned to the intricacies of surface occurrences, but they seem ignorant of the fact that *non-manifest entities are ontologically constitutive*. Not only in an abstract, metaphysical sense but practically and materially. A recurrent symptom of the condition is the compulsion to cling to whatever is there immediately before one's senses, and certain sufferers assume that what is thus being sensed is all there is! I beg to differ and do so vehemently because I am still there when ant traverses his paths in utter ignorance of my being, and the same goes for the self-centred spider who basks in the experiential immediacies of his sensory apparatus. As I say, I take part in orchestrating their lives. I must repeat my blunt point; had I ceased to operate, there would be no enactment and no experience, and equally constitutive are a range of other mindless mechanisms, internal and external to ants, spiders and other attentional beings.

The matter is dead serious because my very *existence* is at stake here. Clearly, I cannot appeal to a '*cogito ergo sum*' to institute my presence in the world, and since neither ant nor

spider is prone to thinking me forcefully into being, concerned as they are with the interfaces of their subjectivity, I take on a rather ghostly ontological character. *Cogitare* ensures *human* existence, many humans believe, while my ontological status seems to depend on whether they allow me a place among their minds' 'objects' or not. Ant rephrases the issue in a way that seeks to circumvent the problem, arguing that what matters is not my objective existence but the relative strength of emergent 'facts', or, as he prefers, 'factishes' (Latour 1999b, Chapter 9). The more allies that assemble around a point in a network, the 'factisher' it becomes, so to speak. It 'gains in reality' (Latour 1999b: 192).

So if, for instance, laboratory equipment, mad scientists, market funding, popular media and a strong wave of conspiracy thinking allied to rule me out of existence – 'DNA was always a hoax' – ant would likely claim that I was matter-of-factly not there any longer. He seems to entertain the preposterous idea that I do not *exist* apart from my being-in-view; that I owe James Watson, Francis Crick and their precursors my being-as-such. After these scholars, together with co-actants, assembled my factuality, i.e. put before human eyes the double helix that I curl into, it was hard to disregard me. Yet in ant's thinking, the ontological verity lies, ultimately, with the assemblage of actants, not my independent existence, properties and workings.

If this example seems too contrived, think of the claim that the yeast that ferments beer was not 'factish' before Pasteur and the co-actants of his laboratory enacted it. Pasteur's experiments were an event that changed its constituents, ant argues. It was an 'articulation' that altered both the yeast and Pasteur (Latour 1999b: 155-156, 173). Certainly, the ferments changed *for Pasteur*, and, in a certain sense, they also changed Pasteur himself (his career and standing). However, there is no logic in the claim that the ferments changed for themselves, or, more precisely, since they are non-attentional beings, in themselves (Elder-Vass 2015). What changed was only Pasteur and his colleagues' epistemological take on yeast. Similarly, Watson and Crick's mediation of me did not change me in the least.

See now how the pinnacles in ant's orientation, his ideals notwithstanding, are attentional subjectivities that put things into view? Where we – the myriad of mindless beings – gain importance is when we engage in mediations that affect human minds. Ant puts the trajectory nicely: 'Pasteur authorize[d] the yeast to authorize him to speak in its name' (Latour 1999b: 162). I cannot but object strongly to this perspective. Here, ant is, indeed, taking the argument 'a bridge too far' (Harman 2009: 125) or, one could say, the claim betrays the thrust in ant's otherwise powerful ontology.

Taking us seriously actually entails erasing Pasteur from the picture! Ant's claim that 'the more work Pasteur does, the more independent the … ferment becomes' (Latour 1999b: 175) only registers effects on the Pasteur side of articulations: it bolsters the ferments' independence *for him and fellow humans*. But viewed from the position of ontological independence – mind-independent being – that I and yeast share, other entailments of articulation become apparent. First of all, mediations with human minds are only a subset of our operations and a minor one at that. Our most profound engagements are with other mindless beings. What takes place when the likes of Pasteur are not around is equally real and important to that which, fleetingly and partially, comes into their view (Elder-Vass 2015; Harman 2009: 125-127). Moreover, our mediations with humans hardly change anything on

our side. To paraphrase ant, we assert that 'while the amount of Pasteur's work is consequential for humans, it is entirely irrelevant for yeast'.

In short, to take us seriously entails recognizing that we *exist and operate independently of human existence* and, in equal measure, *independently of human knowledge about us*. If something deserves the label 'ontological turn', *this* is it.

Object or not?

I have noted that, despite ant and spider's diverging takes on relations, they both work out of a relational ontology. In their world, there are no objects, only 'relations through and through' (Ingold's homepage n/d). The next question, then, is whether I regard myself as an object. Yes, I am an object, and no, I am not. I am not an 'object' to the extent this term presupposes a subject, and emphatically not when objecthood is rooted in the existence of a perceiving and conceptualizing mind, prototypically that of humans. This is exactly my point: I exist and operate in utter disregard for what minds make of me. In this respect, I am an object, but to avoid the inevitable slip from objects into subjects, I would perhaps better be called a 'thing'. However, that term evokes unfortunate connotations on its own; qualities of materiality, substance, hardness, tactility, resistance, or even that dreaded word 'essence'. I can hear ant and spider protest in the background. Am I really 'thingy' in this sense?

Yes, and no again. No, because I can be dissolved like any other thing into further things. Ant's infinite regress of black boxes is valid for me, too. The molecular level from which I speak is an assemblage of nuclear acids that can be explored downwards into atoms and quarks or upwards into genes, chromosomes and epigenetic realities. This is tantamount to moving between truly alter worlds of being, none reducible to the other. It is 'alter' because what distinguishes among these levels – what makes them noticeably real – is the distinctive emergent properties that they contain. Molecules act differently from atoms, not to say quarks. Water is, for all practical purposes, a wholly different entity than the hydrogen and oxygen that make it up. Moreover, tactility, which is central to humans' take on things, is only to be found in a limited range of surface manifestations. So ant and spider are correct: the thingness of things dissolves, as it were, once we peer into them in earnest.

But I *am* a 'thing' in a different sense, in that I contain secrets that overspill the orientations of minds. My qualities are not exhausted by human perspectives and will, perhaps, never be. For instance, humans recently discovered what I have always known, that I am not 'programming' proteins by way of RNA in the manner of a computer program. Rather, I am in two-way contact with RNA about the making of proteins; sometimes, this companion turns back on me, interfering with the 'programming' (Ramirez-Goicoechea 2013). Or take the surprise of epigenetics, the discovery that environmental factors far beyond the horizon of molecular processes may impinge on our working (Ingold and Pálsson 2013), even to the extent of interfering with replications across generations.

I can assure you I have further wonders up my sleeve, and this surplus helps institute my thing-ness. I am 'thingy' due to my ontological irreducibility to minds and, thus, through the resistance I put up against epistemology. I am, as one of my favourites among human

philosophers put it, 'intransitive' (Bhaskar 2008: 11-14). While I may take on object-character (transitivity) in human minds, my existence does not depend on the effort of objectification; I am profoundly extra-subjective.

Moreover, I am also 'thingy' in that I *accomplish* something. I am not epiphenomenal – a figment of mind with no mind-independent existence or an ontological residue without constitutive effects. As a generative mechanism, I count in the networks and meshworks that so concern ant and spider; only, I do so out of view, in the vertical dimension of being. Take the case of epigenetics again (Ingold and Pálsson 2013): it is easy to forget that this is a two-way process. Humans tend to make a point of the downward arrow. Yes, environments impact on the molecular world that I inhabit, even social environments, but don't forget the opposite trajectory! I partake in the forging of larger-scale environments as well by fashioning the embodied specifics of attentional subjects. 'Anty' engagements here, 'spiderish' there, and sometimes I am immensely powerful among humans, too.

For instance, a mutation in both inherited copies of the CFTR gene causes cystic fibrosis. Other mutations cause sickle cell disease, and failing replications of chromosomes contribute to many forms of cancer. These impacts are, of course, acutely 'real' for the persons being affected but also partly constitutive of the broader social fields that develop around them: medical research and technology, institutions of care, public health strategies, national budgets and so on. One could draw on spider's notion of 'affordances' to make the point. Mechanisms of cancer-genesis 'afford' certain ways of dealing with cancer, the phenomenology of specific ailments impacts on forms of care and so on.

So, my workings are ontologically constitutive, and this is so even if human minds have not (yet) penetrated my modes of operation. Again I will cite my human favourite; we mindless beings are 'transfactually active mechanisms' (Bhaskar 2008: 41-43), i.e. we are real across manifestations and even real in spite of manifestations. We are there even when ants, spiders and humans fail to recognize (encounter or experience) us. In other words, we *effectuate* in a more concerted way than ant and spider seem willing to acknowledge. We exist, not abstractly but materially, not (only) as objects in minds but as really reals, not out of time but at every instance of being. Let ant, spider and other philosophers quarrel about our exact character – whether we harbour 'agency' or not. The point is that we are here and now in an utterly literal sense as efficacious beings. And I fuss about the fact because when formidable minds start bickering, I often feel exiled to another universe.

Also, I have been around for ages, and this durability accords me a degree of 'thingness', too. Certainly, I have changed throughout the millennia, but across vast differences in internal complexity – from the primitive molecular sequences that started to replicate approximately 3,7 billion years ago to the more than three billion base pairs that make up the human genome presently – I am essentially the 'same' mechanism. While the likes of ant and spider would object to the essentializing tone in my insistence, it is, matter-of-factly, the case that life depends on the mechanism that I point to – incessant molecular replication. Life can even be *defined* in terms of my being; it commenced with my first replication. For all practical purposes, then, it is perfectly correct to claim that I am and have always been the *same* generative mechanism and a powerful one at that. Actually, it takes quite a lot of sophistry to disregard my longevity for the sake of salvaging a metaphysical argument about ontological multiplicity.

Some thinkers are prone to argue that every chromosome, gene, molecule, atom and so on is an 'individual' that cannot be generalized (DeLanda 2005: 34), e.g., into sets of properties or modes of working – even though we have been operating in the same way across billions of years!

So, in a flippant tone, one could sum up my claim to existence in the formula 'I am because I go on generating'. There is no *cogito* to ensure my existence, but definitely, a persistent mode of operation – a mindless but efficacious and resilient ontological forging. Moreover, my workings are utterly oblivious to whatever human minds may make of me. By the same token, I also regard myself as a 'thing'.

Mindless efficacy

Now, since I am so intertwined with life and thus also with ant and spider's diverging forms of being, I am perhaps not the ideal conveyor of the message about things' 'thingy' character; a boulder on the loose might have a stronger impact, so to speak. So let me say a little bit about cousins in the world of the mindless that are less intrinsic to living organisms. Somewhere in the borderland between life and non-life, we encounter viruses. Like myself, they are in the business of replicating, but they are dependent on other entities (non-selves) to replicate, so whether they are 'alive' or not is a philosophical question. In any case, after the havoc wreaked by one of these 'things' recently, it should be superfluous to call attention to their reality-creating powers (Bråten 2020). Their continual parasite-like replication is no laughing matter, and things are equally serious when we move further into the domain of the lifeless.

Ant and spider, for one, should worry about raging bushfires or sudden floods, events that can wipe out their lifeworld in seconds, but since they keep on thinking in one dimension, they are happily oblivious about the dangers. It would take not only prolonged memory and geographical breadth to note what lurks in adjacent woodlands but, exactly, *a notion of generative mechanisms* – e.g., how accumulating water drops and combustion can attain such devastating powers. Here, spider is adamant: 'Air and water are not objects that act' (Ingold 2008: 212). Ok, if 'agency' is, per definition, anchored in the presence of nervous systems, this is tautologically correct, but spider better heed air and water's efficative powers!

The issue is truly complex. Recognizing the dangers of a sudden flood entails an epistemological dive into ontological depths. We need to identify the world-creating tendencies of extra-organismic constitutive entities (notably the mutual attraction between oxygen and hydrogen), the emergent properties that their compound (water) attains in different phases of being (the respective affordances of moist, water, snow, ice, etc.), the interaction of these properties with other mind-less mechanisms (e.g., meteorological systems, lunar pulls) – sometimes they cancel each other out, or they may reinforce each other. Social mechanisms are certainly part of the picture, too: the profit drive that encourages loggers to close in on the creatures' habitat or the mining company's determination to destroy it – and, more generally, the compulsion to construe both minded and mindless beings as commodities. But these dynamics are topics for another occasion.

Moreover, we need to recognize effects having to do with *scaling* close to home: water accumulation after heavy rainfalls in the forest, the path dependencies of local flows (trickles, creeks, rivers) and not least, critical tipping points – e.g., when the rising water bursts through the beaver dam upriver. These are cusps at which the real suddenly becomes experiential or, sometimes, where the real *overturns* experience, i.e., wipes out life. Those humans who appreciate flat perspectives may be equally ignorant. Glued to the world's manifestations and dismissive of ontological depth, they risk missing out on the mindless generative mechanisms that keep them going. Not that I bother, but perhaps humans ought to. It should be unnecessary to evoke apocalyptic events – incoming comets, gamma bursts, or super-volcanoes – to make my foundational point about life's vulnerability, but since humans tend to be deeply entrenched in habituated perspectives, it is worth explicating my underlying message: *minds are derivative*. They are entities of a secondary order in that they emerge from and are sustained by – kept in existence through – the workings of a myriad of mindless mechanisms like myself. We are happy to let philosophers fight battles about our exact being, but that we are ontologically primary – *real* – as 'things' that exist and forge the world cannot be doubted.

Beyond anthropo-sizing

Now, while the theoretical reference point of ANT is self-evident, and SPIDER, the phenomenologist, expounds himself as the view that *Skilled Practice Involves Developmentally Embodied Responsiveness* (Ingold 2008: 215), what is the message enfolded into my acronym – DNA? A neologism is required to clarify the point: DNA stands for Do Not Anthroposize. That is, do not size all things up with human measures. Do not bend reality into human form; never confuse reality itself with the contents of human minds. In the context of our forest-floor debates, where arachnids and insects stand in for humans, the advice is not to adhere uncritically to either spider or ant's outlook – their Arachni-sizing and Ant-sizing, respectively. The perspectives that arise out of these orientations seem partially blind to the ontologically constitutive powers of mindless existences.

Arguably, anthroposizing comes in two equally problematic forms: anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. The first covers assumptions to the effect that humans are the world's midpoint, that reality spins around their existence. This arrogance comes to the fore in forms of thought that, explicitly or inadvertently, takes reality to be constituted predominantly through human agency or – a no less constructivist assumption – that the world exists in and through human representations; by way of the peculiar imaginative capabilities of humans. In a manner of speaking, extremists of this variety seem to move about in a world of scare quotes – a world constrained by the perimeters of their minds, in which stones can only be 'stones'.[4]

[4] The next logical permutation of this hubris is to argue, as adherents of perspectival multi-naturalism do, that *reality itself* varies with human conceptualizations ('perspectives'), as if 'stones' are the existing things themselves (see Bråten 2016, 2022a, 2022b).

As noted, Ingold the spider has his own take on centrism, honing in on the embodied nervous systems that allow living creatures to *attend* to the world. For him, experience is the defining trait. Pressed on the matter, he extends this faculty to attentional beings with four legs or more (Ingold 2008: 213) – thus, tongue-in-cheek, excluding humans. Latour the ant chuckles approvingly, but the concord covers a profound disagreement because, as we have seen, spider draws another distinction that ant refuses to accept. There is absolutely no agency beyond that of living creatures, spider asserts, irrespective of their number of legs. Other constituents of the world collapse under a generalized concept of affordances for the living. Whatever spider attaches his web to is there – passively – for him to utilize; it is simply a 'medium,' as he puts it (Ingold 2008: 212-213). And since I, DNA, am not a medium that spider can attach to or utilize, my affordances go unregistered by spider's nervous system. I slip out of the centrist perspective.

But anthropocentrism does not rule the ground entirely. Formative theoreticians actively refute this kind of exceptionality (e.g., Bennett 2010, Haraway 2016). Like Latour the ant, they are keen to extend importance to extra-human entities, also those without a nervous system. As we have seen, ant accords generic 'agency' to all existences; humans and non-humans are similar across huge differences, in that all effectuate mediations. However, as I have noted, this apparent symmetry conceals a hierarchical configuration that subverts ant's admirable intentions. It seems difficult for ant to convey – describe and talk about – non-human actants and their workings without according them human traits (Hornborg 2021). His notion of generic agency seems to rest on templates of subjectivity, and to the extent I do not share these traits, I slip out of ant's anthropomorphic view.

Interestingly, Ingold the spider moves in this direction, too, and perhaps increasingly so. Despite his assertion that there is no agency without attention – so that, e.g., stones cannot act purposely – he seems more than willing to accord *life* to all things. Beyond the many manifest and distinct beings that develop, only some of which have nervous systems that provide for agency, spider ascribes life to the very process of becoming. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *agencement* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004), vitality is, he argues, 'immanent in the "primordial swerve" from which everything arises' (2022: 365 note 1; see also Ingold 2011: xii-xiv, 83-84; 2013: 32). Despite his critique of ant's proclivity for symmetric thinking, then, spider ends up with a symmetry of sorts on his own: notwithstanding their manifest differences, attentional and non-attentional beings share life force in and through their precipitation as beings.

Earnest attempts at taking things seriously are, of course, promising music to the ears of mindless beings like myself, but as noted, when ant and spider get down to things, they hardly get down to *things*. It turns out that what these theoreticians extend to us is largely the templates of their own being – we are infused with agency in the one case, with *élan vital* in the other. We are being recast, allegedly 'rehabilitated', in the moulds of minds: life force, consciousness, desire, volition, perspective and so on. But these traits are profoundly alien to us. That is my point throughout: we are intransitive. We exist and operate *beyond and in spite of* human-generated, human-like ascriptions. Anthropomorphism is, simply, yet another trick to place humans at the pinnacle of being, not unabashedly in the centre of it all, but more subtly and covertly as the foundational template of all existence.

Coming from the world of mindless generative mechanisms, I cannot but object. Constrained as ant and spider – the theoreticians as well as their allegorical avatars – are by diverging forms of anthroposizing, they never come to appreciate the genuine ontological characteristics of mindless entities like me, our real modes of existence. It seems we are required to align with the hallmarks of living beings in order to be noticed. A *true* ontological turn would entail paying respect to what we are capable of accomplishing *in terms of our ontological uniqueness.* As my back-stage fellows such as combustion and accumulating drops fully know, apart from the fact that we cannot *know* it, that is quite a lot.

At this point, I – DNA – rest my case and give the voice back to the author so that he can sum up my intervention in his own words.

Conclusion

What I, the author, have tried to convey by allowing DNA to articulate its 'viewpoint' is that socio-material formations – what Latour and Ingold dub 'networks' or 'meshworks', repsectively – cannot be *fully understood* unless we also recognize the ontologically constitutive role of – often invisible – underlying generative mechanisms in them. While, in theory, the two scholars are the first to acknowledge the 'agency' (Latour) or 'force fields' (Ingold) of 'mindless' existences (like DNA), I claim that, in practice, their modes of analysis tend to push the workings of such underlying efficacies into the background. Taking DNA's position, I have attempted to identify the analytical constrictions that spur this occlusion while arguing for a more comprehensive – and realist – account of socio-material forgings. There is a need to recognize their composite character, their constitution in terms of both attentional and non-attentional efficacy.

First, in spite of significant theoretical differences, both Latour and Ingold tend to privilege formations that involve attentional (mind-driven) subjects, notably humans. Hence, the many translations/mediations that take place among non-attentional existences are being occluded, e.g., the life-sustaining, mutual engagements of DNA, RNA, proteins, etc., that secure attentional subjects their existence. Moreover, the privileging of attentional agency tends to engender anthropocentric and/or anthropomorphic renderings of mindless being. When non-attentional existences do come into view, they tend to be premised on attentional ontology. Hence, what slips away from analyses is the fact of *intransitivity* – that entities exist and operate in ways that *transcend* the conceptual and practical engagements of mind-driven beings. What DNA attempts to convey, then, is an ontological point: the world is not anchored, fundamentally, at the interfaces of attentional engagement. There is a vast 'beyond' inhabited by DNA and countless other, ontologically real and formative, non-attentional entities. Disregarding their role in the forging of networks/meshworks is a dramatically reductive move.

Secondly, Latour and Ingold compound their analytical bias by insisting on the *immediacies* of socio-material formation; the former projecting networks in terms of temporal punctuality, the latter meshworks in terms of the spatial proximity of experiential horizons. In other words, time and space are made to contract around the interfaces of attentional

engagement. The analytical upshot of this reduction is a disinterest in the roles that non-attentionals play *across spatio-temporal scales* – a blindness with respect to the effects of extra-local space in localized engagements and/or the continuities that sustain socio-material forms across points in time. What DNA attempts to convey is, again, an ontological point: that socio-material formations to a large extent depend on the 'non-immediate' – premises originating in *other* times and places.

Also, DNA goes on to articulate a deeper point in this respect, arguing that the core problem is, really, analytical tendencies to 'flatten out' the world. This is, indeed, a critical theoretical intervention: why accept the use of uni-dimensional epistemologies in a reality that is ontologically multi-dimensional? Why be content with an anthropology of partiality? The analytical challenge, DNA insists, is to surpass flat renderings of being in order to reach at the depth dimensions of reality-forging. This entails identifying and incorporating into analyses the often non-manifest (i.e., non-immediate, 'invisible') generative mechanisms (like DNA) that partake in socio-material forgings, and to do so by truly acknowledging the nature of their non-attentional ontology.

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MEDIATION IN A FEUDING SOCIETY: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE PROCESS OF *SASMOS* IN CONTEMPORARY CRETE

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On the Greek island of Crete, a customary practice for mitigating hostility or conflict between two men continues to the present time. It survives mainly in local agricultural and pastoral communities and is called *sasmos*. The corresponding verb is *siazo* which means 'pulling to taut (e.g., a wire or a string) which has been wrapped'. We adopt Herzfeld's English translation of the term *sasmos* as 'reconciliation' (Herzfeld 1985: 72, 82-83, 285n). The men who intervene between the two opponents as 'neutral third parties' are termed *mesites,* 'mediators', or *siahtes* or *siastades*, two words having an identical meaning, very close to that of a 'constructor, repairer' of a social relation which has been disrupted. The mediators are always men, as are the parties in conflict, and the motivation for mediation is rooted in the 'moral duty for the communal good' as the locals claim, which means the prevention of the escalation of interpersonal hostility into an open conflict – crime and its revenge (vendetta) (Herzfeld 1985; Tsantiropoulos 2004, 2008, 2019). A local saying summarizes the purpose of mediation as follows: 'We want to close the matter, so that houses are not going to be closed (ruined)'.

In this paper, we will first attempt a conceptual clarification of the three main components of mediation. The first are the sources of conflict and the types of conflict the mediators are involved in; the second is the social profile of the mediator, which provides the background for his views to be heard by the conflicting parties; and the third is the structure of mediation as a conflict resolution mechanism. The last is specific, known to all, respected by all and as will be seen, connects closely with the scope of social relations.

The research material comes from interviews with mediators and individuals who have been part of mediation, either themselves or their kin. For the analysis of this phenomenon, we have used concepts and schemes from the theory of social practice as formulated and elaborated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977). In addition, the concepts *bricoleur*

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and *bricolage* as defined by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss ([1962]1966) will be used in the analysis of the logic of the mediator's argumentation to describe a different way of thinking from the modern Western perception, for the construction of a project.

As will be seen from the interview material from mediators and people for whom mediation constitutes a 'social practice', there is a correspondingly configured *habitus*. In Bourdieu's theory, *habitus* describes the embodiment of social structures. The social structures do not *determine* but *shape* individual perception and action. In Bourdieu's words, *habitus* is

> systems of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu 1990: 53; see also Bourdieu 1977).

In this sense, our final aim is to explore the 'logic of practice', that is, to proceed with the creation of a model that explains the 'objective systematicity' of this practice. The main goal is to reveal the 'logic of practice' of a 'social practice', which, since it is geared toward a specific goal – resolving a conflict – organizes and establishes specific strategies. As seen below, these strategies are not limited to linguistic performance.

The approach is anthropological, i.e., it will focus on social and cultural aspects of Cretan society, where a specific *habitus* is created and shared by all those directly involved in the conflict, parties, and mediators alike.

It will be demonstrated that mediation is a 'social practice' through which, on the one hand, the amount of symbolic capital available to every man is measured and, on the other, men are called to demonstrate it practically. Therefore, the symbolic capital that cannot be seen as unconnected to the material is at stake in the whole process of mediation. It is not a coincidence that many mediators are great shepherds or have positions like heads of pastoral or agricultural cooperatives, or are local or even state politicians. Consequently, the 'personal selflessness' and the 'interest for the public good', presented by local people as incentives for mediation, constitute, in Bourdieu's (1998) terms, a 'verbal alchemy' for the 'disguise', 'masking' or 'overlooking' of practices associated to self-interest. More specifically, this is a society which has much in common with societies identified by anthropologists as 'egalitarian'. Egalitarian does not mean equal and refers to institutions and not to whole societies. In Mediterranean societies, according to John Davis, the interest in egalitarian institutions is that, in the making of important political decisions, they exclude differences in crude material wealth from consideration. That means that, 'the reality of differentiation is socially destroyed instead of being construed to create a stratification' (Davis 1977: 122). Boehm (1993), in a cross-cultural survey of many egalitarian societies, argues that an apparent absence of hierarchy in these societies is the result of followers dominating their leaders rather than vice versa, creating a 'reverse dominance hierarchy'.

It is also important to note here that, from a historical point of view, many Mediterranean societies (on major islands, like Sicily, Sardinia, Crete, Cyprus or Corsica) have

been, for most of their history, part of imperial states, where the centres of power and authority were located far away. In the case of Crete, the island was part of the Roman (67 B.C.-330 A.D.), Byzantine (330-1204), Venetian maritime (1204-1669) and Ottoman (1669-1898) empires, with central authority located in such faraway cities as Rome (1,200km), Venice (1,500km) and Constantinople/Istanbul (750km), huge distances in ancient, medieval and early modern times. However, in the period between 1898 until 1913 the island of Crete was an autonomous state. Furthermore, given the island's mountainous geography, all occupying powers (including the Germans during WWII) confronted major difficulties in establishing control of the mountainous areas and concentrated their military forces and administrative authorities in the main cities on the coast and the lower plains. Authority in the mountains was left with the local communities, favouring the persistence of an ancient, clan-based organizational structure and the egalitarian ideology that penetrates island-wide. The lack of a powerful, legitimate elite able to effectively control the inland regions or intervene between opposing parties left the administration of justice in the hands of the local communities, generating the vendetta as an institution of social control and *sasmos* as a social practice of preventing conflicts spiralling into full blown blood feud.

Conflict in the context of the Cretan mountain society

For local people, conflict does not mean a general dispute, arising in relation to family or proprietary differences (issues of right in *rem* or family law in accordance with the legal terminology), in which mediators intervene. On the contrary, the content of the conflict is very specific. It is an act of verbal or physical violence against a person or an act of damage or destruction of immovable or movable property. Also, in the mountain pastoral societies, the stealing of sheep or even their slaughter and abandonment in the sheepfold of the owner is frequent. All these acts of violence are culturally signified as 'assaults against self-regard', against the honour and reputation of a man by another man (Herzfeld 1985, Tsantiropoulos 2004).

This is a local signification, which forms part of the bipolar system of honour and shame of Mediterranean and Balkan societies in a dyad which has attracted the interest of ethnographic researchers since the 1950s. These values must be an integral part of the 'symbolic capital' which should characterize men and must be demonstrated and proven in daily life. Because these are values that reference the public image of the individual as a 'person' (Morris 1994), if they cease to be recognized by the circle of people around a particular man, then they cease to exist. Also, in this sense, it is reasonable to assume that this symbolic capital is not consistently defined but fluctuates in direct proportion to the number of people who recognize it and support relevant options and decisions. The higher the number of supporters, the greater the 'symbolic capital' is. Consequently, the symbolic capital of one man might increase at the expense of others, which creates an unstable situation of sensitive balances and hence conflicts between individuals with the potential to drag in wider kinship groups (Peristiany 1974 [1967], Gilmore 1987, Albera, Blok and Bromberger 2001, Campbell 1964).

In this context, acts of verbal or physical violence are not considered a cause of conflict, but as a practical expression of a social relationship between two individuals or groups of kin which has been disturbed as both sides compete for access to material resources. This fight is either to maintain the status quo or to contest and overturn it.

This is a conflict rooted in the material basis of society, which in agricultural areas is to challenge rights of land ownership to pasture or areas of land of particular use as they are located near the sea or other places of interest (e.g., areas of natural beauty, archaeological sites, etc.). In an urban environment, conflicts may arise due to suspicions or complaints to the police of illegal activity in the operation of a business or its extension without legal permission from the authorities. In both the urban and agricultural environment, conflicts may arise over weapons, and human and drug trafficking.

In Cretan society there are two main factors that contribute to this type of conflict. The first is the egalitarian nature of society, for reasons we touched upon above. The second is the important role of obligation in daily social life (obligation to assist), in the broader political aspect (patron-client relations). It is a social practice reflected in corporations which are based on kinship relations, namely consanguinity, affinity, and ritual kinship, such as that of godparents or fraternal orders. Proof of this is that Crete is still today a feuding society. As will be seen below, the potential of murder and vendetta arising between the lineages of two men directly involved in conflict, with disastrous consequences for both sides, is imbued in the overall discussions in the mediation (Tsantiropoulos 2004).

In summary, conflict and specific forms of violence are 'social facts' as defined by Durkheim, i.e., 'a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him' (Durkheim 1973: 52). This is because in a feuding society there are two justifications as part of a system of 'social representations' relating to revenge. From this point of view, the conflict is a social fact: an act of violation of honour and self-regard of one man by another and the morality of being the first to retaliate. The concept of 'collective representations' is used here with the meaning given by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (2014 [1898]), i.e., socially configured constructions of thinking concerning the social ideals of altruism, morality, knowledge and the way they shape all aspects of daily life in this particular society. As we will argue, this runs through the totality of argumentation on mediation. In other words, at the level of local conceptions, mediation does not negate but confirms and ratifies (Tsantiropoulos 2019).

A conflictual situation is expressed by the two conflicting parties avoiding meeting in public places (e.g., cafés, square, etc.) or at social events. In the local language idiom, this situation is declared with the words 'they do not speak to each other'. This means that a meeting is very dangerous, as it might spark anger from the victim's side and turn into an exchange of insults, which in turn may lead to the intensification of hatred and violent acts, such as fighting or even murder. In the context of a society like the Cretan one, where the dyad honour/shame is fundamental to the system of values, it is reasonable to assume that strong feelings of anger resulting in violent behaviour may be evoked, particularly in the victim as a reaction to the shame felt by the exposure of his corporeality to the gaze of the Other (Fuchs 2003).

The Other is not only the embodied rival, who has offended him, but is also a condition – the symbolic order as conceptualized in social relations. For the participation of the individual in this symbolic order, i.e., to co-exist socially, the value of honour is fundamental. But honour as a positive social value exists in one person only when it is identified by a circle of people; therefore, it must be proven continuously and publicly in practical terms with the objective of social acclaim. That is why, at least in Crete, the value of honour is described as a 'clean forehead' in the eyes of society. In other words, the gaze of society functions as a mirror in which both the value of the individual's honour as well as its depreciation, i.e., diminishing into a condition of shame, are constantly reflected.

Louis Kriesberg identifies four factors that need to work together in order to generate a conflict: identity, grievances, blame and power (Kriesberg 1998). Identity plays a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of the emergence of conflict in rural Crete. Essentially, identity cannot be separated from honour. Honour defines, structures and upholds individual identity in relationship with one's community. How a man sees himself (as mentioned above, it is only men that are involved in conflicts that might escalate into blood feuds and need mediation) is anchored in how his status is perceived by the community. Any attempt to reduce that status through insults or damage to property must necessarily be followed by retaliation, to restore the balance and thus the way the victim is perceived by the community and, even more important for the dynamics of conflict, how the victim perceives how the community perceives his status. Not retaliating against an act that is seen as status-demeaning leads to actual demeaning, in the eyes of the Other but also in the eyes of the victim himself, who is now considered 'less of a man' (Bourdieu 1979). Honour requires retaliation, hence the inner logic of escalation and of the necessity of mediation before that happens.

Avoiding a meeting by those directly involved in the conflict is both an indication that the social order has been disturbed as well as a tactic throughout the early stages of mediation. It makes time for the mediators to be summoned and begin their work. The seriousness of the conflict is assessed by how difficult the mediation appears to be. In addition to aspects like the amount of damage to property or honour, another factor contributing to the seriousness of the conflict is the psychological profile of the two main opponents, measured in terms of fractiousness and stubbornness. A severe conflict means long-term negotiations, the involvement of several mediators of high prestige, possibly from distant parts of Crete, and potential changes in the composition of the group of mediators during the mediation.

In particular, the most difficult conflicts to resolve are those where the people involved are from the same village, or even more difficult, living in the same neighbourhood. The locals say, 'If they come from the same village and are neighbours, they will inevitably meet and this will aggravate their temper'.

Another indication of the severity of the conflict is the social prestige of those directly involved. The higher the symbolic capital that they bear, the more difficult mediation is. Therefore, it is easy to understand that the toughest mediations are those where the people directly involved in the conflict are mediators themselves.

The objectives and the logic of mediation

The stated goal of mediation is to restore a social bond between two men who have suffered a break, with the aim of preventing murder and consequent feuds. This means that mediation is a tool for preventing conflict escalation at the same time as a conflict resolution process. It also means that a prerequisite for the successful outcome of the mediation is the consent of the two directly involved in the conflict to accept the mediation, i.e., to agree to speak to intermediaries.

Sometimes, the victims of violence resist and refuse to accept mediation, aiming for retaliation, in a logic of restoring the imbalances created by the violence inflicted on them and to thus 'equal the score' and be able to engage in mediation on an equal footing with the initiators. This creates the risk of further violence, hence the aggravation of conflict beyond resolution. It is then that the mediators project their social status. This is reflected in the use of local phrases such as: 'they will make them fix things between them' or 'make them agree to come to mediation'. Since the mediator's power of persuasion derives from his symbolic capital, it should be higher than those involved in the conflict. Contrary to the accepted practice in modern state law where the mediators cannot impose mediation or themselves as mediators onto the conflicting parties, in Crete (as in almost any other traditional community across the world) mediation is seen not as a procedure at the disposal of the conflicting parties, but as a necessary vehicle for restoring peace in the community and hence of a wider interest than that of the parties involved. Therefore, pressure to bring some sense and get the conflicting parties to talk to each other through intermediaries is socially accepted and mandated by the mediators. Moreover, a refusal to attend mediation is perceived as an insult to the mediators. Antagonizing powerful men is rarely a good strategy, therefore parties, especially the victims, are generally persuaded to accept their good offices.

The symbolic capital of the mediator should not be too much higher than that of the parties, however, for two reasons. One is that it is socially incorrect and therefore against the status of the mediator to deal with the conflicts of two men who stand in a much lower social position than him. Low-status men typically lack the social power to gather supporters and escalate conflicts into open violence. As a result, these conflicts usually remain limited to trivial competition or verbal argumentation. The second reason is that mediation relies on rhetoric based on persuasion and the equal treatment of opponents, aiming to achieve balance. Accepting mediation is, therefore, an act of engaging in 'dialogue' with the opponent through an intermediary process. This approach differs fundamentally from adjudication, which is rooted in the authority of state law.

Unlike mediation, which often reflects culturally embedded conflict practices, such as blood feuds seen as 'intergroup phenomena' (Pospisil 1972: 392), law functions as an 'intragroup affair.' It represents the decision of an authoritative entity imposing a resolution on two disputing parties, requiring both to comply with its provisions (Rouland 1994).

> [The mediator] should know how to speak [in order] not to bring further problems neither with the one nor the other [opponent]. To know how to talk [...] to bring those [opponents] in a common denominator.

> Nektarios A. had fought with somebody. I wasn't aware of it and one day, at a Christening, I discovered that they were not speaking to each other. One of them came close to the men's group and as soon as Nektarios saw him, left. I saw that and thought: these two are not speaking to each other...damn it... Anyway... I found one of them and said to him: Listen...With Nektarios you are not on speaking terms... Yes, he replied...but I am right, and so on… I replied to him: you should reconcile. I am leaving now but I am coming back. I went and said exactly the same thing to Nektarios. No, he replied, my brother (*sinteknos*), I won't… Again, the same thing... I won't reconcile. One day he is sitting in the café. I went up to him and said: Brother you need to reconcile. No [he replies]. I got up, frustrated and hurt, and left. He called me and said: Go and do anything you please. Because he is thinking like this: why the hell should I disrespect my brother for the other man's fault? He said: for the job (the mediation), do it whenever you want and however you want. We arranged a meeting, both came and clinked their glasses and now they act as brothers. And they were about to kill each other. This deal was arranged by me and another man in the next two or three months.

Therefore, a mediator differs from a judge in modern society who, by drawing on a set of rules of law, produces a verdict, seeking the truth about the causes of conflict in order to bestow justice. A mediator also differs from an arbitrator, i.e., a man who has recognized wisdom and experience, accepted by the parties to make a binding decision on their case. In anthropological terms, a mediator is often referred to as a 'big man', a figure commonly associated with egalitarian societies, particularly in Melanesia. In these societies, the absence of structurally reproduced power, inherited rank, or formal councils created opportunities for individuals to mediate disputes. These mediators aligned their own interests, as well as those of their clans, with broader collective projects.

The success of a proposed solution validated the mediator's role, enhancing their social standing as a 'big man'. However, this status was personal and temporary, as it was based on their ability to influence others rather than on inherited authority (Godelier 1986, Lederman 2015).

In the case of Crete, the mediator should be neutral to both sides so as not to be seen as intervening to support the interests of one side against the other. Neutrality means having no close ties of relationship or any close cooperation with those directly involved.

This neutrality is accompanied by a lack of personal interest or incentive on the part of the mediator, which is described by phrases such as 'an initiative for the common good, of the mediators coming voluntarily and with good purpose, to prevent things from getting worse' (such as an escalation of the conflict leading to murder). These are preconditions for a successful mediation, since the mediator will request information about the underlying causes of the conflict, which he will handle in his arguments so that 'neither the one nor the other side feel injustice or insult'.

There is the possibility, as mentioned by several of our informants, that mediation is sometimes used as a strategy to continue or intensify the conflict. This might be because a mediator wants to benefit himself, his kin or a circle of people around him through a continuation of the conflict or its outcome in favour of one side, taking advantage of the trust

bestowed upon him by both parties. Or there might be others in the community (spoilers) who perceive the conflict as an opportunity for themselves as a way of gaining materially or socially from its continuation.

To prevent this risk, three counter-measures have customarily been adopted. The first is that there is more than one mediator – this is what usually happens – and they always go together to meetings with each opposing side. The second is that before attending each meeting, the mediators discuss the case in detail and choose their basic argumentation. The third is to go in as quickly as possible, as soon as the conflict happens, so there is no time for potential spoilers to use their influence to escalate the conflict.

The structure of the mediation process

The mediation process always begins with a period of 'pacification', meaning a time when the opponents voluntarily disengage and pledge to the mediators not to act against each other or take action during the time the mediators are at work. Because it is very possible for a face-to-face meeting to result in a quarrel the opponents avoid meeting each other and their relatives in public places – road, cafés, taverns – until the work of the mediators is done and the ritual dinner ending the conflict occurs. Any violation of these commitments is considered an insult to the mediators and can lead to their withdrawal or even retaliation from them, lowering the culprit's family status and prestige within the community.

The withdrawal of the mediators is in itself a very grave punishment for the culprit's family – it leaves that family totally exposed to retaliation from the other family and from the entire community, with no protection whatsoever. It basically turns that family into outlaws, free to be persecuted by anyone in the community and left to deal with law enforcement agencies themselves. For this reason, the mediators are always persons of high prestige, high power and influence in the community – so no one usually dares to infringe on their work or refuse their services (and solutions, as we will see below). Mediation is thus not to be taken lightly by the people involved in a conflict and cannot be refused on a whim.

There is one exception regarding this period of pacification. If the perpetrator comes from a very poor family and the victim belongs to a very well-off one, the powerful family will always retaliate first (so to establish equality as victims) and only then will they accept mediation. Thus, their honour (gravely affected by being assaulted by someone of a lesser status) is restored and mediation can begin. But, as in any other social construct, there can be exceptions to this 'rule'. For example, to prevent the powerful from retaliating in kind, the mediator(s) may pay the rich family out of their own pockets and thus restore their honour, leading them to accept mediation without getting even with the perpetrator's family. This happens only if the violent act concerns the destruction of property.

During this period of pacification, mediation takes place. At the beginning, the 'truths' of each side on the cause of the conflict will be the first topic discussed by the mediators with each side separately as it is necessary to acquire knowledge, for two reasons. One is that this will help them in the debate on the conditions laid down by each side on the other, and in particular to predict whether one side or the other will accept the conditions of the other to

formulate appropriate cooperation to increase the chances of acceptance. At this stage of mediation, each side may openly admit their own responsibilities, but accuse the other side of their own, as factors which led to the conflict.

This is one of the reasons mediation is the accepted path to (possible) resolution, rather than other procedures, like arbitration or litigation. A debate in which both sides openly discuss the 'truths' that led to the conflict with an arbiter or judge will lead to an aggravation of the conflict. These ways to resolve the conflict (arbitration or litigation) are completely at odds with the values of a society relating to what is called 'self-regard'. Locals say 'from their self-regard, they will not admit their mistake even if they think they were wrong'. But each side separately can admit their mistakes before the mediators as a practical demonstration of their confidence in them. This is a matter not only of neutrality and impartiality (which arbitration, at least, can provide), but of confidentiality and trust in the capacity of the mediators to help find the 'right' resolution of the conflict, one that not only resolves the issues between the conflicting parties, but also restores their status and self-regard.

This aspect of mediation is understood as a requirement on both sides and the mediators, or as the locals say, 'the mediators should know the whole truth'. A mediator we interviewed said that in one case of mediation with four others, one side expressed doubts that the other side spoke openly to the mediators, i.e., that they admitted their own mistakes and injustices to them. Therefore, that side refused to compromise. The mediators insisted that the other side spoke openly or, as our informant said, 'told the truth' and, as proof of this, they proposed to swear in front of the icon of a saint ('to enter the oath', in local jargon). The mediators' intention was to reduce any doubt, so that compromise could be achieved.

Some informants stressed an important risk regarding this aspect of mediation. They claimed that there is the possibility of a mediator exploiting the benefits of access to the information the two sides have entrusted him with, by gaining benefits either for one side or for himself or others with whom he has ties of kinship or transactions. We have seen above what measures are traditionally in place to avoid this kind of behaviour (it does not mean, however, that they are always successful).

As a next step, the mediators find out on what terms the family of the victim would settle the conflict and refrain from retaliation. After establishing the facts and identifying the families' expectations and wishes, the mediators confer and build a solution based on the findings and on what is considered just according to tradition, customs, unwritten rules and their own best judgement.

Here there are two courses of action that the mediators will always avoid. They will not pressure the offender to apologize to the victim, nor will they ask the victim to give up any intention to reciprocate. Neither course of action will ease the conflict and lead to resolution but instead could aggravate it and possibly ruin the whole process. An apology means denying the motivation that led to an act of violence in response to an injustice or damage suffered by the victim. The non-reaction of the victim means giving in to the desires of the offender, which were the reason for his violent behaviour. These are solutions which are contrary to the values of local society where, as we have seen, the concepts of self-regard, pride and honour reign supreme.

Therefore, mediators are men whose judgement and abilities are most trusted by the people involved. Contrary to modern state law practices where anyone can become a mediator if a certain number of formal conditions are fulfilled (training, qualifications, exams, etc.), in the more traditional environment of Cretan rural society a mediator has to be someone trusted by the parties, a trust that comes from his abilities, life achievements, reputation, status (economic, social or even political), power and influence, a symbolic capital that no formal training or certification can provide.

The mediator focuses on the conflict and highlights the possibility of its escalation into an ongoing feud as an outcome of not finding a solution that works for both parties. This is a condition that all are aware of in the local society since it is a 'feuding society' (Black-Michaud 1975), and therefore the feud is a *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) and the 'collective representations' (Durkheim [1898] 2014) of a blood feud are familiar to all: a crime which initiates a sequence of retaliatory crimes, in which the following generations will also be involved, as the two kinship groups will also exchange the roles of perpetrator and victim. It is conceived by local people as a 'mimetic violence' as René Girard defines the term (Fleming 2002) or an 'exchange of death' analogous to the Maussian notion of the 'gift' (Mauss [1923] 1979) where there are no winners and losers. As one of our informants put it:

> Because when the job [the interpersonal difference] becomes serious; you give your children difficulties (*kousouria*), you leave them with a past and a future. Future and past. You leave them with a future [of conflict].

The final argument derives from a familiar past, which is re-contextualized from that conflict and displayed as a future possibility. The past concerns old blood feuds and their consequences, as well as a biography of the respective generations of those directly involved to show that they are adopting the values of the society and therefore obey them to the point of murdering to defend them.

Therefore, the argument of the mediator, delivered by a man with social prestige equivalent or slightly higher than those involved in the conflict, is to make the parties visualize conflict as a possibility (or warning) of an ongoing feud, which makes the parties reflect on the costs of continuing the conflict and refusing to acquiesce to a solution offered by the mediators.

Different from modern state law rules and practices, the mediators build the solution, not the parties. We can argue that mediators act like a filter. They discuss with each side their terms and try to formulate them to be acceptable to the other side. The criteria for filtering derive from the discussions on the causes of the conflict and the form of the violent act, but also the status difference between the two sides. As the mediators play a far more active role in the formulation of solutions to the conflict than their state legal counterparts, we should focus here a little more on the condition of the mediators.

As already described, it can be assumed that the mediator is not a man with a theoretical background or specific education, but rather someone who may have just basic literacy or be totally illiterate. In answer to the question of 'how can one become a mediator?', we were told that the capacity for mediation is acquired through a process of apprenticeship in social affairs under the supervision and advice of one's father or a very close male relative. The French term *bricolage* is used by Lévi-Strauss as an analogy for understanding the working

principles of mythical thought and can be considered very helpful for understanding how a mediator's thinking works (Lévi-Strauss 1966 [1962]). More concretely, Lévi-Strauss defines two distinct ways of thinking: the scientist and/or engineer who has a project in his mind which determines his choice of tools and materials; and the *bricoleur* who is led by the materials and tools available, considering and reconsidering these heterogeneous objects to 'engage in a sort of dialogue with [them] and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem' (Lévi-Strauss 1966). For the *bricoleur*, 'the properties of each – tools, materials and project – are uncovered in the process' (Freeman 2007).

In structural terms, the scientist works with concepts whereas the bricoleur 'construct[s] a system of paradigms with the fragments of syntagmatic chains' (Lévi-Strauss, 1962: 150). In doing so, the *bricoleur* is subject to various types of constraints posed by limited and heterogeneous material, 'the collection of oddments left over from human endeavours' (Lévi-Strauss 1966). The French anthropologist emphasizes that the distinction between engineer and *bricoleur* is not a hierarchical one, but it represents 'two distinct modes of scientific thought', the mythical and the scientific (Lévi-Strauss 1966; Freeman 2007). In addition to this, one can assume that the *bricoleur* acquires his knowledge and capacities through apprenticeship:

> The mediator is the major actor, the main protagonist as well. In other words, in order to do this job, you have to think fast... and you should know this particular job doesn't need education. Education is not enough. No, you must be born for it. [When asked how he learned to do mediation] You know... My father was a mediator. I saw it happening at home … inviting people. He would tell us to stay [in other rooms], but we would look on at the situation. We understood. We are five to six brothers; I got the charisma of my father. His charisma. And then when I grew up, I liked to do the same. And I continue to do so. I am successful. [...] And they say: go find Andrew K. who knows. Who has qualifications? You are not going to tell me what to say. It's my decision. I will improvise. I do not read [...] and I will make examples. When I was young, I mediated for young children. At the beginning you do an easier mediation, later a more serious one, and finally the very serious. You will reach an age, when you have finished your army obligations, and become a familiar face, a chief [*tsiftis*] to the local society, significant.... and end up being a man with status. With status. But to get so far is like you're telling me to go and get education. This is the best education. Of course... it comes with great struggle, a great deal of experience. In other words, with constant practice you get the experience. Of course... it cannot be done instantly... you can climb up the steps slowly. Do you get it? [Narration of a middle-aged man, a mediator].

And in another fragment of speech by a 20-year-old student at the University of Crete, whose father intervenes mainly in conflicts between shepherds:

> My father intervenes in mediation concerning various conflicts between shepherds. In the case of the mediation I am describing now, the mediator was a son of shepherds, grandson of shepherds and so on. But he is a baker. He became

> a mediator because he is in that circle. The issue is to be in the circle of Psiloritis [means the shepherds' villages at the Cretan mountain of Psiloritis], to mingle, to attend weddings – the main thing is going to weddings – to give money as the gift, to dance, your name to be heard by the lyre player, to go around the villages. And if you start mediation, you need to participate in various ones. Even if you are a farmer, once you enter this circle, you can do it. The main thing is to be in the circle [means being present in various circumstances of local social life]. It is impossible for a man that lived all his life in Heraklion to start doing mediation. How? Why? Does he know what sheep are? Does he know what they are feuding about? Does he know the entire ideology?

One question that arises is about the 'material' the mediator uses for his negotiations. It can be assumed from the fragments of local discourse cited below, that this 'material' stems from the 'collective representations' (Durkheim 2014 [1898]) of the local community, i.e., thoughts, experiences, knowledge, values, perceptions, etc.

In the mediation there is a clear objective, but it is not victory over the rival but to avoid a situation in which there will be no winners and losers, i.e., an 'exchange of murdered men', that is the blood feud. And this is emphasized constantly throughout the procedure: 'to close the deal, so they do not ruin their homes', 'the small becomes large', 'if you do anything worse the opposing side would not leave it like this', etc. These are the general guidelines and objectives, the compass for the overall progress of mediation and they act for reducing unnecessary or reckless moves which do possible damage to the process of mediation. The goal of the mediators is to bring the opponents into a situation of awareness of the consequences against them arising from the situation.

The parties retain their power of decision-making over the solution, meaning that (in theory) they can accept or refuse the terms the mediators communicate from one party to the other. In reality, a refusal is unlikely. Families can negotiate the terms offered by the mediators for a long time (for months or even for years), but they rarely refuse and withdraw from mediation. Naturally, the parties attempt to change details, going back and forth over the terms to gain a better settlement. The mediators accept these attempts, considering them an organic part of the resolution process. A rebuttal would be regarded as an insult to the mediators and their judgement, with the same consequences as described above in the case of a violation of the 'pacification' oath.

The mediators maintain confidentiality about what has been told to them by the parties – they never tell one party what the other has said or what they want in order to settle; they also never discuss the issues related to the conflict with anyone in the community, as it is considered that there may be someone who might be willing to escalate the conflict, to profit from it or to prevent a settlement happening.

After coming to a solution by conferring among themselves, the mediators go to the parties and communicate it. As stated above, families can accept or refuse it; they might put up resistance anticipating a better deal, but refusal is rare. Families can negotiate the terms and the mediators go back and forth, shuttling between the houses of the families involved until every detail is agreed. This is a familiar pattern in traditional, community-based dispute resolution practices, as noted in many other places in the world (for example, Pely 2011a and 2011b; Chereji and Wratto 2013). If mediators are accepted or selected based on their sound

judgement and vast experience, they are expected to actively contribute to designing a solution, not merely conveying messages across the board. Whereas in modern state law, in facilitative mediation, the mediator is expected to let (and help) the parties design the solution to their conflict, based on their interests (Riskin 1994), in traditional settings, the mediators, as figures of great authority and experience in communities, are called on to formulate the solution and present it to the parties, who will discuss its merits and finally accept it.

When a solution has been accepted by all parties, a formal ritual of reconciliation has to be followed. The formal confirmation of the mediation can be described as a 'ritual gaze' between the two rivals. It consists of a formal dinner following a specific choreography in a neutral space, usually the home of one of the mediators or a tavern, early in the evening.

The feast is prepared by women: lamb grilled with potatoes, or stew with rice and salad is served. The drink is wine. The participants at the feast are men only and those directly involved in the rivalry and close male relatives such as brothers, brothers-in-law and cousins. The escort of male relatives has a strong symbolic character and shows that they endorse the decision of those directly involved to enter the mediation and will not attempt to initiate a resumption of the conflict; on the contrary they will be concerned for its further normalization.

At the house or tavern where the feast is taking place, the mediators come together first. After a while, one of the rivals arrives with an escort of his male relatives. Then, in the same way, the opponent arrives with his escort. The table used for the feast is usually rectangular. Each group enters the house with a solemn attitude and greets those present with a simple 'good afternoon'. The men directly involved are seated in the middle of the table, on each side, and the escorts to the left and right. The mediators take their seats at both heads of the table. Until everybody is seated nobody speaks and the food is served quickly. First the mediators talk to both groups noting that their relationship will be even better than before, their differences end here, that they must forget it all, 'water and salt'. This and other similar expressions are the first and last reference to this conflict. Then they urge both sides to *skountrixoun*, i.e., to clink their glasses, saying *eviva* (cheers), and drink just a little wine. In this context the verb *skountrizo* is a 'performative speech act' (Austin 1962) and sanctions the compromise.

First the two men directly involved in the conflict clink the glasses with wine, then the escorts of one side clink the glasses of the other; then they start eating and begin to talk, being very careful to not make any verbal reference to the interpersonal differences in the events and situations which could be considered to be related to the conflict. The topics of discussion are the problems of concern to the local society as a whole. In other words, they just make conversation. Usually, they stay for some time and then they depart following the same pattern: first one side all together, then the other side, while the mediators leave last.

The *skountrisma* is in no way identical to a peace agreement and the feast is not conducted in an atmosphere of celebrating reconciliation.

> Since I was a young child, we had *sasmos* at home. My mother would tell us children to stay in our rooms, not to come out, not to play because people were coming to do the mediation. It was a very serious matter. And we were very serious. We stayed in our room and if we came out, we would greet them and leave [narrative of a mediator's daughter].

The *skountrisma* can be regarded as a ritual exposure of one side in the gaze of the other, sides which have not been speaking to each other for some time. After they *skountrixoun* they can be exposed to the gaze of social and cultural order. This means that there will be no more restrictions against seeing each other in a meeting which could result in violence or even murder, i.e., they will be able to meet in public places, so that the compromise will be visible and known to the wider society.

Feasting is a validated ceremonial exposure to the gaze of the Other, illustrating the restoration of balance following the conflict. First of all, the presence of certain relatives is so important that if any are missing, the mediators begin to have doubts about the success of the mediation. They say, 'they did not come to clink (*skountrixoune*) and we must keep an eye on them, not to mess with the mediation', suggesting that their absence from the ceremony is indicative of disagreement with the conditions laid down for the compromise, and that they might try to rekindle the conflict. In the case of low attendance by male relatives from both sides, the compromise is characterized as a 'small mediation' *(mikros sasmos)*.

If some of the men of any of the families involved do not show up at the feast, it means they have rejected the terms of the agreement. This situation could endanger the future relationship between the families involved and even lead to a re-escalation of the conflict. Consequently, the mediators go to them, work to find out the reasons for their refusal and talk them into acceptance. If they are obstinate, the mediators look for someone who can influence them and ask them to intervene. It is only once the families have accepted the agreement and publicly ended the conflict that the mediators would enlarge the circle of those involved in the process of mediation. This process continues until everyone is satisfied, and the conflict has been completely extinguished.

Also very important is the general atmosphere prevailing during the feast. A mediator said that once during mediation in his home not the slightest sound was heard except the ladle of the housewife stirring the rice in the pan: 'they clinked their glasses [*skountrixane*] and immediately stood up and left'. In this case the mediators keep an eye on both sides. But, as stated by the same mediator, there was also a mediation when the two men involved sat side by side talking until late in the evening. In such a case the certainty of the mediation success is confirmed, and the social prestige of the mediator revalidated. On the other hand, a mediation which is followed by a quick revival of the conflict is a blow to the social prestige of the mediators, who feel that the man continuing the feud (who retaliated) did not keep their promise, i.e., did not demonstrate public acceptance of the compromise so that there is no conformity with what they had verbally promised to the mediators.

Sasmos and state law

A discussion of the possible intensification of a conflict leading to murder, and turning into a murderous feud, is used in judicial resolution of a conflict in order to reduce the penalty. It should be pointed out here that in several of the conflicts and even in the case of injury a complaint is not made to the police and is resolved through the intervention of mediators. But

even if a conflict is brought to court, the arguments of the mediators are of particular importance to the judicial office. This is attested by the following testimonials provided by the mediators:

> I have been called as witness to the Court. I said that I am a mediator; I have fixed the situation and I asked the judge to show great understanding, since we had made them come around. Not to punish them since that would continue the hatred of one against the other. This counted a lot in Court. The Court was in Crete, Chania. And also, in the Court of Heraklion, this has happened to me. And the Court accepted.

> The most difficult mediation was in Sfakia. It was an injury due to an old vendetta arising. And we made them reconcile. The procedure lasted two to three years. We [went] to the Courts in Lasithi and Chania several times. From that point on, everything was ok, nobody troubles the other, and they stopped the feud. We had four or five people involved. [During the procedures] some left, and others were added. We were in the Heraklion Prefecture, one or two people at the beginning. I was participating up until the end. Some left. One or two people were from Mylopotamos and then people from Sfakia who knew the victim very well. We said to the Court that I, the mediator, was an eyewitness from the beginning. I was, in fact. I saved the injured person, otherwise he would have died. He said to the Court that they had a feud for many years, now all is forgiven. Mediators intervened, we came to an understanding, now we're continuing with our lives. I am not asking for his prosecution. And the Court accepted. The Court case went on and on for years, one postponement to the next. In the meantime, the injured healed. We would go back and forth to both sides and finally got results. The two families said that they're not going to hurt each other, they had stopped. They told us and the Court. First (they told) us and then the Court.

In the local Cretan newspaper *Cretan Inspection* in 2007, an article was published, 'a few comments in the aftermath of a trial', signed with the initials of the author's name. The article refers to a trial held a few days ago, which concerns a case of attempted murder for revenge amongst Cretans:

> But what should be acclaimed in this trial is the role of the social mediators. Honest and respectable citizens, representatives of all the families of the community [of the offender and the victim who originate from the same community] – and along with them, to their honour, the priest and the mayor – decided to intervene in order to contribute decisively to ending an ongoing feud between two families who had always been friendly until an unfortunate instance, 47 years ago, a mindless act of a 15-year-old, divided them. Their intervention was so decisive that they signed an agreement of honour for their active contribution to the ending of an ongoing feud and the peaceful co-existence of the two families. This demonstrates the diligence and social sensitivity of local societies, which, when they decide to take action into their own hands, can change the whole culture of their homeland.

Considering that writing consolidates and validates orality (Goody 1987), this post had a specific aim: to verify and literally document an oral agreement of compromise. The punishment of the accused was converted from attempted murder to a simple fault of intimidation and humiliation. Surely the penalty would have been much heavier, if for the same crime, the defendants had come from other parts of Greece and not Crete where blood feud is an ongoing social practice or if the defendant did not have the support of a circle of men with high social prestige acting as his defence witnesses in Court.

Conclusions

There are many unresolved issues regarding the use of mediation to prevent conflicts from spiralling out of control. What we have attempted above is to describe, based on interviews with local mediators and people who have gone through the process, what its basic tenets are and how it works. The Cretans call this process 'mediation' – *sasmos*, in Greek, which literally means 'reconciliation'. The mediators are called *mesites*, meaning mediator, but also *siahtes* or *siastades*, two words with an identical meaning of constructor, repairer of a broken social bond.

Western authors like Christopher Moore (2003) define mediation as a conflict resolution method where the parties retain full power of decision over the way their conflict should end. Consequently, mediators should refrain from even suggesting possible solutions to parties. At the core of the mediation process lies self-determination, the parties having complete control of the decisions and the mediator holding no power over their decisions. Therefore, if, as in the case of *sasmos*, mediators construct the solution and then they present it to the parties, can this process be technically qualified as mediation?

Our answer is that as long as the parties still retain their power (amplified or limited by a number of factors) to bargain over the terms and the details of the solution designed by the mediators, and given that, ultimately, they can withdraw from mediation or refuse the solution, there is enough self-determination present in the process to qualify as mediation.

It is important to recognize that the clear-cut distinctions between various conflict resolution methods often reflect the specific social and legal structures of Western societies. In many other cultural contexts, these boundaries are less rigid. Societies around the world may use the term 'mediation' for processes that extend beyond what is typically defined by Western scholarship and practice. Ultimately, what matters is how effectively a conflict is resolved, not whether the process fits into predefined models or definitions. According to our informants, traditional mediation practices and customary rules often influence court decisions, leading to outcomes that are more efficient in terms of time and cost than relying solely on formal judicial systems.

There are many issues that need further investigation. Despite its good record for resolving difficult conflicts, there are situations when *sasmos* fails and conflict escalates, becoming a full-blown blood feud. What are the factors that make most mediation cases successful and what conditions the failure? Why are certain cases not amenable to mediation

and what makes them resistant to this process? These are all valid questions for further research.

Even more intriguing and challenging is looking into the role of women in blood feud mediation. At a first, superficial glance, it is apparent that women are definitely relegated to minor, insignificant roles, like cooking the meals for the ritual feast, setting the table and cleaning after the men have gone. But various reports from our fieldwork reveal the power that women can wield informally, far removed from the gaze of others (including ours, the researchers), but effective, nonetheless. More research in this line can bring valuable understanding of the real role played by women in blood feud mediation.

Many communities around the world use customary mechanisms to resolve conflicts among their members. These indigenous and traditional methods are not outdated or ineffective but are well-adapted to the unique social structures of their respective societies. Rather than being 'informal' systems rooted in superstition, these processes often involve intricate rituals aimed not only at addressing wrongdoing but also at restoring harmony between the involved parties – a holistic approach that has only recently gained broader recognition in many modern legal systems. These time-tested practices have demonstrated their effectiveness and resilience over millennia. By studying them with an open and unbiased perspective, we can gain valuable insights that may enhance contemporary approaches to conflict resolution.

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON MYSTICISM

E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD[1]
EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY KIT LEE[2]

'Some reflections on mysticism' was originally delivered as a lecture to a student audience, and first published in 1970 in the now-defunct journal *Dyn*. Reflecting E. E. Evans-Pritchard's 'inner life' and his profound and wide-ranging interest in mysticism, the lecture presents common threads across Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mystics, poets and writers, in addition to many of the classics of mystical literature in Britain at the time. A new introduction situates Evans-Pritchard's lecture within the context of his Catholic faith and contemporary Catholic theology at large, and argues that it should be read as part of the longstanding relationship and ongoing dialogue between anthropology and theology.

Keywords: Catholicism, anthropological theory, theology, mysticism

Introduction (by Kit Lee)

'Some reflections on mysticism' was delivered originally as a lecture to a student audience, only a few years before E. E. Evans-Pritchard passed away. Afterwards, he famously commented to Meyer-Fortes, who was in the audience, that 'It must have been apparent to you, if not to them, that this is my inner life' (Barnes 1987: 480).

Evans-Pritchard was formally received into the Catholic Church in 1944, at the cathedral in Benghazi. At the time, he was serving as the liaison between the Bedouin and the military administration of Cyrenaica, and later wrote that he 'could not have faced the dangers [he] had to face in Africa and during the Second World War had [he] not known that [he] had

[1] E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) was one of the pre-eminent and influential British social anthropologists of the twentieth century, spending the majority of his career at Oxford as the Chair of Social Anthropology and fellow of All Souls College. He shaped the field permanently via his classic studies of the Azande and the Nuer, as well as his famed (at the time, notorious) insistence that anthropology should be regarded and developed not as a natural science but as a member of the humanities.

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divine support' (1973: 37). His conversion was the product of lifelong consideration and desire: it had been 'nothing sudden or anything to write about… [rather] it was a slow maturing' (1973: 37); he had, in his own words, 'always been a Catholic at heart (most of my friends have been Catholics or Jews) and…it took me thirty years to take that final dive; so "conversion" can be a very confusing term. I have no regrets' (1973: 37).

His faith was deeply important to him: Godfrey Lienhardt wrote that the only things more important to Evans-Pritchard than belonging to Oxford were 'his home and his religion' (1974: 302). In an obituary, Lienhardt described Evans-Pritchard as having 'not [been] what is called a "good Catholic"' (Lienhardt 1974: 303). Evans-Pritchard did occasionally apply the moniker of a 'bad Catholic' to himself, saying for instance that 'bad Catholic though I be, I would rather be a bad one than not one at all' (1973: 37). Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suppose that he was not in fact devoutly Catholic; it seems that mostly what Lienhardt meant was that Evans-Pritchard did not regularly attend Mass (which, as Larsen wryly comments, more makes him simply a typical Catholic). Certainly, he did not attend the local parish church—despite the efforts of his contemporary at Oxford, J. R. R. Tolkien—preferring instead to worship corporately at Blackfriars, the Dominican priory at Oxford, where his 'uninhibited spaniel Barko…joined him in [the] chapel for his occasional prayers' (Lienhardt 1974: 303). But, as Larsen notes drily, Evans-Pritchard was the sort of 'bad Catholic' who 'has his spiritual autobiography printed in a publication of the English Dominicans' (Larsen 2014: 92).

Evans-Pritchard's faith has, however, largely tended to be regarded as isolated from his scholarship. This seems likely, at least in part, due to some of his colleagues finding his conversion 'so against the grain of what a great anthropologist ought to be and do as to be almost unable to absorb it' (Larsen 2014: 91)—the explanation Larsen offers for why T. O. Beidelman, who knew Evans-Pritchard very well, wrote after his death that Evans-Pritchard had converted to Catholicism from the Church of England 'at the close of his career' (Beidelman 1974: 3) when actually it occurred when he had only been 42 and had not yet been appointed to the Oxford chair he would occupy for a quarter of a century subsequently. Indeed, Evans-Pritchard recounted that was 'often…asked by incredulous, though well-meaning, people—and almost apologetically—"Why did you become a Catholic?"' (1973: 35), with 'the suggestion being that there must be some explanation to account for such a strange, even a remarkable, lapse from rational behaviour on the part of one supposed to be some sort of scientist' (1973: 35).

As such, this lecture is perhaps best known for how it puts Evans-Pritchard's 'spiritual side on display in a refracted way' (Larsen 2014: 101) and 'covertly reveals Evans-Pritchard's own inner life by presenting the devotional resources that meant the most to him' (Larsen 2014: 102). Certainly, as Evans-Pritchard himself puts it in the introduction, the lecture makes 'no attempt to answer…sociological questions… Nor shall I enter into historical questions' (1970: 103). Instead, it aims to 'suggest…a few features that [different branches of mysticism] have in common' (1970: 103). The resulting discussion reflects the depth and breadth of Evans-Pritchard's interest in mysticism, and tries to find common threads across not only Christian but also Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mystics, poets and writers. It also covers many of the classics of mystical literature in Britain at the time—such as Evelyn Underhill's

Mysticism, William James's *Variety of Religious Experiences*, and Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*—as well as touching particularly on the English Catholic tradition with a discussion of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous 14th-century English guide to mysticism.

At the same time, the lecture—and Evans-Pritchard's faith and interest in mysticism—are not divorced from his scholarship. For one, his colleagues did note the influence of Catholicism in, for instance, *Nuer Religion*—whose famous final line reads 'At this point the theologian takes over from the anthropologist' (1956: 322)—and roundly criticised him for it. It was a 'commonly held view that while his earlier monographs...were works of outstanding scholarship, his *Nuer Religion* (1956), which followed his conversion to Roman Catholicism, marked a sad degeneration, attributable to the intellectually debilitating effect of his new faith' (Hamnett 1986: 72). Edmund Leach wrote of *Nuer Religion*, 'no doubt refracting his own dismissive view' (Larsen 2014: 110), that 'cynics have remarked that it exhibits the Nuer as first-class Jesuit dialecticians' (Leach 1980). Beidelman wrote that 'Some consider that his conversion accounts for a falling off in Evans-Pritchard's analytical acuity' (Beidelman 1974: 186).

For another, however, a close examination of Evans-Pritchard's own scholarship shows that—contrary to the colleagues who criticised *Nuer Religion* on the grounds that 'no anthropologist can be a sincere Catholic' (Douglas 2002: 19) (as they commented to Mary Douglas, another Catholic anthropologist)—he saw no inherent contradiction between anthropology and faith; to the contrary, his regard for the Catholic Church was both intellectual and moral (Lienhardt 1974: 302), and his Catholic and anthropological interests often ran in tandem. He was active as a Catholic intellectual, publishing and reviewing regularly in *New Blackfriars*—the academic journal of the English Dominicans, formerly called *Blackfriars*—and such a steadfast fixture in such circles that 'the editor of the venerable Catholic newspaper, the *Tablet*, so took Evans-Pritchard's support for granted that he once sent him a book to review without even bothering to first inquire whether or not he would be willing to do it; as it seemed, he was' (Larsen 2014: 94).

In his anthropological writings, too, he sought a discipline which would be not only amenable towards Catholicism, but also more inviting for Catholicism to engage with. For him, 'fundamentally there were never any real grounds for dispute between what natural science teaches about the nature of the physical world and what the Churches teach about faith and morals' (Evans-Pritchard 1960: 117). Rather, conflict stemmed from the 'scientific' 'claims of social scientists, or very many of them…for...sociological determinism and the teachings of Jesus are irreconcilable' (1960: 117). Evans-Pritchard suggested that a turn towards the sociologist or anthropologist as moral philosopher might open up a bridge between anthropology and his faith, via the long tradition of Catholic moral philosophy—while he conceded that it was 'unlikely that social anthropologists, with one or two exceptions, will study Catholic moral philosophy' (1946: 414), he cheerfully suggested that 'a bridge can…be built between the two disciplines by some Catholic moral philosophers studying social anthropology' (1946: 414). The anthropological development of comparative religion—rooted in ethnographic evidence and fieldwork rather than 'what was for the most part rationalist speculation' (1953: 218)—was the source of great potential for such bridges, as it meant that social anthropology was 'now in a better position to make a contribution to

other subjects concerned with problems of religion, such as Theology, the Philosophy of Religion, Ethics, and critical and exegetical studies of Sacred Texts, and I believe that its significance for these related disciplines will become increasingly evident and important' (1953: 218).

It is in light of this desire for a theologically-engaged and theologically-friendly anthropology which 'Some reflections on mysticism' is situated. Mysticism itself was a crucial, profound subject for Evans-Pritchard: in an interview in 1970, the year this lecture was delivered and in which he retired, he said that one of his next projects would be a book on 'religious mysticism' (Larsen 2014: 100). In the lecture, Evans-Pritchard initially posits that a mystic might be, in the religious sense, simply defined as someone who had 'an acute awareness of God' (1970: 102); and thus, mysticism was, as Evans-Pritchard put it, 'the intuitive, inward, imaginative, poetic, and therefore personal and highly subjective, element in religion' (1970: 102). By the end of the lecture, however, Evans-Pritchard goes further and asserts mysticism as a matter not of belief, but of experiential knowledge—and, that he understands this experiential knowledge to be something which can only be accessed through sharing the same kinds of experience:

> What, if I understand them rightly, all the mystics are trying to tell us in their different religious idioms is that they have incontroversible [sic] knowledge of God, conceived of in one way or another, and that this knowledge is experiential and therefore verifiable; indeed St. Thomas Aquinas defines mysticism as *cognitio experimentalis*. The mystic does not believe, he knows. It would follow that the truth the mystics claim to know can only be known by those who in some way or another and in some degree or another have had the same kind of inner experience. If we have not had it, it would seem that we pass from enigma to enigma. (1970: 115)

First, this assertion of the importance of experiential knowledge enters into a longstanding tension in Catholicism between mystical and scholastic theology—demonstrating Evans-Pritchard's own intellectual engagement with and positioning within theology. The famous Catholic theologian Jean Gerson, for example, defined mystical theology as 'an experiential knowledge of God that comes through the embrace of unitive love' (*theologia mystica est cognitio experimentalis habita de Deo per amoris unitivi complexum*) (Harmless 2008: 5); for Gerson, 'theology is God-talk, and as he saw it, the God-talk of the mystics offers us some genuine insight into God. What makes the mystics' knowledge of God unique is its roots: it is *experiential*' (Harmless 2008: 5, emphasis original). It was given this understanding that Gerson contrasted scholastic theology (which his predecessors at the University of Paris had been instrumental in creating, and which centred on developing theology as an academic discipline) with mystical theology (which he thought had been neglected in the process): where 'mystical theology' was personal, interior, and of the '*affectus*', scholastic theology was public, exterior and of the mind (Harmless 2008: 6). By the time Evans-Pritchard was writing, this tension was—and still is—a longstanding one within Catholic theology. Indeed, one stalwart defence of scholastic theology in the 1950s noted mysticism's inherent separation from scholastic theology, since it 'tends to regard itself as essential and experimental and *a posteriori* science,

rather than an *a priori* one' (Greenstock 1950: 592)—a tendency which he saw as posing a 'very real danger which the traditional theologian must be fully prepared to meet' (Greenstock 1950: 592). Gerson had simply already recognised in the 15th century 'what has [since] become obvious…that scholastic theology, in its efforts to be scientific, unwittingly severed the intimate link between theology and spirituality, between theologians' public thinking about what the Church believes and believers' personal encounters with God in prayer and worship. Scholastic theology seemed abstract, devoid of devotion, cut off from the heart and from the personal' (Harmless 2008: 7).

Second, mysticism in the way Evans-Pritchard lays out, rooted in experience as a form of knowledge, thereby serves as a way to approach religion and theology through an anthropological lens. Larsen has posited that for Evans-Pritchard, mysticism was a 'wider anthropological category which would shed light on the specific case of Christianity' (2014: 225). Certainly, mysticism's focus on experiential knowledge aligned well with his well-known critique of anthropology, delivered as part of his 1950 Marett lecture, as having been 'dominated consciously or unconsciously, from the beginning…by positivist philosophy' with the result that anthropologists 'have aimed…and for the most part still aim…at proving that man is an automaton and at discovering… sociological laws' (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 123). Instead, he famously suggested that anthropology should rather be understood as 'ultimately of philosophy or art' (1950: 123). As he was very careful to state, these were 'conceptual, and not merely verbal, differences' (1950: 123)—leading to an anthropology which is understood not as a member of the natural sciences, but 'one of the humanities' (1950: 118), studying 'societies as moral systems and not as natural systems…interested in design rather than in process, and…therefore seeks patterns and not scientific laws, and interprets rather than explains' (1950: 123). Mysticism's experiential nature works as an instance of such a 'conceptual, and not merely verbal, [difference]' (1950: 123) which helps to shift anthropology—and theology—away from the more 'objective', positivist approaches to religion.

More than this, however, the emphasis on the intellectual validity and worth of mysticism's experiential knowledge indicates how mysticism serves for Evans-Pritchard not just as a way for anthropology to analyse Christianity, but as a potential nexus for profound, genuine engagement between anthropology and theology—what Robbins has termed a 'transformative' relationship, wherein 'anthropologists would look to theology to unsettle in one way or another [anthropology's] understandings of its own goals and potentials' (2020: 3). In particular, this is so because mysticism is, as Evans-Pritchard asserts, a matter not of belief but of experiential knowledge ('The mystic does not believe, he knows'), an experiential knowledge which cannot be gained via logic or rationalisations but only via shared experience ('It would follow that the truth the mystics claim to know can only be known by those who in some way or another and in some degree or another have had the same kind of inner experience. If we have not had it, it would seem that we pass from enigma to enigma'). Scholars have often focused on the role of belief in Evans-Pritchard's work: Engelke, for instance, has argued that for Evans-Pritchard 'belief became an element of method' (2002: 4), a 'tool in [his] anthropological projects, a way of bridging the distance between [himself] and "the other"' (Engelke 2002: 8); Larsen argues that 'Christianity for Evans-Pritchard was

mystical in the sense that one could experience it as an immediate apprehension of the presence of the Almighty but—if one did not—then the only way to belief was forever barred by an angel with a flaming sword' (Larsen 2014: 101). However, Evans-Pritchard here evades the 'problem of belief' altogether by explicitly framing mysticism not as belief but as knowledge. Although, as Larsen said, there is perhaps no path for belief—a matter Evans-Pritchard leaves aside in the lecture—there explicitly is a path for knowledge through 'those who in some way or another and in some degree or another have had the same kind of inner experience' (1970: 115). It is shared kinds of experience, then—and not belief—which grants knowledge, and his remarks make it clear that this is not meant as a completely forbidding requirement: Evans-Pritchard did not claim 'any esoteric knowledge' of mysticism himself, and went 'no further than to say that if we are to have any comprehension of what the mystics are trying to tell us we must contribute some of it ourselves' (1970: 101-2). As he lays out at the beginning of the lecture, one 'does not have to practise the mystic's way of life and have some understanding of it any more than one has to write poetry or understand poetry; or, as Dr Samuel Johnson put it, "He who drives fat oxen need not himself be fat"' (1970: 101). Mysticism could be understood by anyone. As he put it 'anybody who is capable in some degree of imagination and reflection can understand it and participate in it' (1970: 101).

Evans-Pritchard was a deeply committed and engaged Catholic intellectual at the same time that he was someone who has a 'good claim to being simply *the* pre-eminent social anthropologist of the mid-twentieth century, [without whom] the late twentieth-century discipline is hardly thinkable' (Fardon 2003: 21-22, emphasis original). Although his work on mysticism was never completed—Evans-Pritchard died just a few years after he delivered the lecture—'Some reflections on mysticism' not only provides a glimpse of Evans-Pritchard's theological and Catholic knowledge and predilections, but also an indication of how the transformative dialogue between anthropology and theology (c.f. Lemons 2018; Robbins 2020) is not only possible but has a precedent in figures such as Evans-Pritchard.

Some reflections on mysticism (1970)

The prayer-mat stain with wine, if so
The Magian's favour thou canst win,
For travellers in the land should know
The ways and custom of the inn.

This is a stanza from Hafiz (Palmer 1938: 1), and this lecture is about those travellers who hope to reach a knowledge of God at the end of their journey. The mystic way, the *via mystica*, as the words 'way' and '*via*' imply, is often spoken of as a journey, and this brings to mind other words, such as *tariqa* and *tao*. Likewise the gnostic journey of the soul and the opening line of the *Divina Commedia*. And some of you may also be thinking of *Piers Plowman* and *Pilgrim's Progress*; the metaphor is common enough.

I shall endeavour to set before you some general features of mystical thought, but it must first be said that mysticism is a very vague term. It ranges from what some mystics tell us about their raptures to Lévy-Bruhl's use of the word in contrasting the ideas of primitive

and civilised man, and even, in a very general sense, to the non-rational. In the first and narrowest, and some may estimate the highest, sense of the word it would seem necessary for anyone who wishes to understand its meaning to experience what it is the mystics say they have experienced since they have often declared that the experience is incommunicable in words. That remarkable scientist Swedenborg (1688-1772), for instance, who lived in a world of angels, practised no ascetic practices and fell into no ecstatic trances. Indeed I would like to make it clear right away that such experiences, for which there is much evidence, as visions, levitation, glossolalia, stagmata [sic] and so forth may have little to do with mysticism or are at any rate peripheral to it. I quote Ansari of Herat: 'Can you walk on water? You have done no better than a straw. Can you fly in the air? You have done no better than a bluebottle. Conquer your heart; then you may become somebody' (Huxley 1966: 265).

So I am here going to use the word in a broader sense, a sense in which anybody who is capable in some degree of imagination and reflection can understand it and participate in it. One does not have to practise the mystic's way of life and have some understanding of it any more than one has to write poetry or understand poetry; or, as Dr. Samuel Johnson put it, 'He who drives fat oxen need not himself be fat.' So I do not claim any esoteric knowledge of the subject and would go no further than to say that if we are to have any comprehension of what the mystics are trying to tell us we must contribute some of it ourselves.

It is perhaps always a mistake, and especially in a topic like this, to attempt formal definitions at the outset of a discussion, but some, even if a vague, indication must be given of what is being talked about, so let us say, initially, that it is religious mysticism about which I wish to make some observations, and that for the time being we need go no further than to say that in the religious sense a person is a mystic who has an acute awareness of God[3] (however conceived of). Mysticism may then be said to be the intuitive, inward, imaginative, poetic, and therefore personal and highly subjective, element in religion in contrast to the formal, external, conventional, institutional, dogmatic, ritual and liturgical side to it.

These are not opposites. Religious mysticism has invariably been practised within the framework of institutional religion, however much it may have transcended it and however much the official clergy may have frowned upon it. Mystics have not been antinomians, anarchists and heretics, as some seem to have supposed. Indeed it has generally been recognised by the great mystics themselves that, if not anchored to institutional religion, any form of mystical exercises can be both futile and dangerous; and, it may be added, mystical notions may easily become self-delusion, sentimentality, and an almost meaningless pseudo-metaphysic. Nevertheless, mysticism, though it may wear the clothes of conventional piety is not the same as it. We may even contrast those who perform their conventional religious duties, who are sound in both faith and morals, with those who see in the most ordinary things what the eye cannot see, the visible with the invisible church. For the mystics, there being a God, there is nothing else worth bothering about. For them Thy lily and Thy rose. For them the vision of the many-splendored thing.

Since mysticism is rooted in institutional religion, that is to say, in one or other traditional culture, it must vary in form and idiom of expression from one part of the world

[3] This is more or less the definition given by Rufus M. Jones in his comprehensive survey of Christian mysticism (1909: xv).

to another. Obviously a Christian is most unlikely to contemplate Muhammad. Also it is a phenomenon found in one form or another in every religious movement. When one thinks of Christian mysticism one may think first of the renowned Catholic mystics, but there were also Puritan mystics, John Bunyan and George Fox, for example; and there were Montanists, Beghards, and any number of different types of Pietists, Quietists, Anabaptists, etc. Moreover, mysticism need not always have what most people would regard as a theistic content: Jain mystics, some of the Hindu mystics, and those of Zen Buddhism can be held to be atheists, though this is a questionable word. Then, clearly the monistic mysticism of Vedantic India cannot be expressed in the same terms as the dualistic mysticism of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Nevertheless the contrast may be more apparent than real for it can be maintained, as Dean Inge has noted, that 'mysticism is independent of time, place, nationality and creed. In reading extracts from great mystics we might often be in doubt whether the writer was a Neoplatonist, a Sufi, a Buddhist, a Catholic or a Quaker' (Inge 1930: 121). Like dreams, like archetypal themes in myth and poetry, it is a universal language, a universal faith, the sea into which all rivers flow and are united. The late A. J. Arberry says the same (1950: 11), and the same point is made, though with more caution, by Gershom G. Scholem, in his great book on Jewish mysticism (1941: 5-6).[4]

It is my hope that in this lecture I may be able to suggest to you a few features they have in common, why it is that the Dean felt that they have all been telling us the same in different tongues, that there is a *Philosophia Perennis*, a Perennial Philosophy. But here, and before making those suggestions, I must qualify what I said earlier, that mysticism is intensely personal. I did not mean that it was entirely individualistic. The mystics have not been isolated figures but the product of a long history of thought. Nor were the mystics hermits. There were schools, orders, seminaries of mystics (e.g. the Sufi orders, the Essenes, and the chain of Rabbinical teachers); and some mystics have played a considerable part in public affairs (e.g. St. Teresa of Jesus, St. Catherine of Siena and Swedenborg). Even the mystics among the Pietists, whom one might suppose to be highly personal, individualistic and emotional in their religious thought and practice, belong to a broad and deep tradition.

If the line between institutional religion and its mystical expression is blurred so is the line between poetry and mysticism, so much that it is difficult to decide which of the poets should be included among those who may be said to be religious mystics. Indeed the intoxication of poetry much resembles mystical rapture. Each must make his own choice. Some might include Wordsworth, Browning and Matthew Arnold. I would not. If anyone is to be included I suppose it would be people like Henry Vaughan,[5] Blake, Tennyson, and Francis Thompson. The matter is further complicated here in that it is in the nature of the subject, as will be apparent to you, that mystical writings are, and perhaps have to be, in the language of poetry, even when in prose, a language full of metaphors and allegories and other more or less hidden allusions taken from everyday things. This is well illustrated by the terms used by the Sufi mystics, e.g. 'new wine' is 'divine love', 'darling' is 'the manifestation of the beloved

[4] See also Evelyn Underhill (1930: 3, 80, and in many other places).
[5] We have been told that Vaughan was no mystic (Dixon 1967: 19) a verdict I cannot accept. The editor was giving the word 'mystic' the narrow sense of the *unio mystica*.

(God)', 'tavern' is 'the stage in which the seeker after God is immersed in the divine mysteries', and 'ruby lip' is the 'conscience'. These are simple examples. Some are more esoteric, and they are sometimes deliberately obscure for sake of protection. So until one becomes used to their vocabulary mystical writings may be confusing and may be so even when one has become familiar with it. I have earlier quoted a verse from Hafiz. More familiar examples could be taken from the quatrains of Omar Khayyam, such as:

> You know, my friends, how long since in my House
> For a new Marriage I did make Carouse:
> Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
> And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

Indeed it has never been finally agreed upon whether in such verses Omar is speaking of the intoxication of wine or the intoxication of mystical experience. I have no doubt that it is the latter, but whether so or not, it must be recognised that mystics have often hidden in their verse their acute sense of the transcendental, what lies behind the veil. Sometimes they have taken on the garment of erotic passion, as we see in *The Song of Solomon* and as we find in some of the what are to me rather sugary writings of some of the Catholic mystics.

Furthermore, it might be questioned whether in a very general way of speaking there can be any poetry which does not have a religious source. Even avowed atheists like Swinburne drank deeply from that pool. It might also be observed that many hymns, which are religious poems, could well be included in an anthology of mystical verse, though the only well-known one that has got into the *Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* is Newman's '*Lead kindly light*' ('*The Pillar of the Cloud*').

At this point and before we go any further I wish to say that I shall in this lecture make no attempt to answer such sociological questions as from what sort of social background did the mystics come? Why did they flourish, sometimes simultaneously in different religions and in different countries, at some periods and not at others? And why is it that women played so prominent a part in Catholic mysticism and none at all in Jewish mysticism? Nor shall I enter into such historical questions as the spread of Buddhism from India to China and from China to Japan, the influence of Neo-Platonism on Christian thought, the possible Hindu origin of Islamic Persian mysticism, or what was the impact on Jewish mystical thought of the exodus from Spain in 1492. My object is rather to suggest some features mystical thought has in common at all times and in all places.

I would begin by saying that, as in Plotinus, it tends always to be monistic,[6] pantheistic if you wish, and this even in such starkly dualistic religions as Judaism and Christianity (as in the writings of Eckhart, Suso and Boehme, and in German Hasidism and in the English 17th Century Ranters), though not in them to the degree we find it in Vedantic Hinduism. Concisely stated, monism asserts that there is nothing but God; hence obviously everything is God. Pure monism is therefore not only much the same as pantheism but is also strangely alike to certain forms of atheism, e.g. Jaina mystical thought; for to say that everything is God is in some ways very much the same as saying that there is no God – a paradox we find in much Hindu writing.

[6] Prof. Zaehner does not agree (1957, *passim* but especially chap. X).

As Hindu thought underwent many changes during the millennia of its development some of its concepts have been found difficult to translate with precision and consistency into English and are not always easy to grasp even when so rendered. So I commence by citing to you two verses of the well-known poem *Brahma* by Emerson as an example of the impression Hindu monism made on a sensitive western mind well acquainted with its literature: [7]

> Far or forgot to me is near;
> Shadow and sunlight are the same;
> The vanished gods to me appear;
> And one to me are shame and fame.
>
> They reckon ill who leave me out;
> When me they fly, I am the wings;
> I am the doubter and the doubt,
> And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

We find the same vein of pantheism in most, if not in every, form of mysticism. This is from the Sufi Jami (Browne 1893):

> His beauty everywhere doth show itself
> And through the forms of earthly beauties shines
> Obscured as through a veil……
> Where'er thou seest a veil
> Beneath that veil he hides.

We shall have to get used to this paradoxical metaphor of the veil, the phenomenal world which is both God and hides us from him. It is the unveiled God, the *Deus revelatus* behind which is the concealed God, the *Deus absconditus*. We read in Isaiah (45, 15) 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel', and elsewhere that he 'is clothed with light as with a garment.' Then the veiled God of the Old Testament becomes the revealed God of the New Testament; or, if you prefer, God revealed through a veil, as in Charles Wesley's hymn 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see.'

This is what the Sikh mystic Gobind Singh says: 'God is in the water, God is in the dry land, God is in the heart, God is in the forest, God is in the mountain, God is in the sea, God is in the earth, God is in heaven…… Thou art in the tree in its leaves, thou art in the earth, thou art in the firmament. Thy name is repeated again and again, thy name is fixed in man's heart…… Thou alone art' (Macauliffe 1909: 269). And we are told in the Koran: 'I am nearer to him than his jugular vein' (Palmer 1938*:* 27). Meister Eckhart declares 'God is nearer to me than I am to myself' (quoted in Jones 1909: xxvi). Tennyson, who is known to have fallen into mystic trances tells us the same (1867):[8]

> Glory about thee, without thee; and thou fulfillest thy doom,
> Making Him broken gleams, and a stifled splendour and gloom.

[7] Emerson's poem is easily parodied, as it was by Andrew Lang.
[8] *The Higher Pantheism* (parodied by Swinburne in *The Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell*)

> Speak to Him for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—
> Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

But all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in a pool.[9]

Now it follows from all this in the logic of monistic mysticism that God being all, we are God. This may seem an outrageous thing to say, and yet we have been told that the kingdom of God is within us; and there is the famous passage in St. Augustine in which he says he went wandering like a strayed sheep seeking God, 'and I found thee not, because in vain I sought for him who was within myself.' And here is what a Sufi says (Palmer 1938: 42):

> All the earth I'd wandered ever seeking still the beacon light,
> Never tarried in the daytime, never sought repose at night;
> Till I heard a reverend preacher all the mystery declare,
> Then I looked within my bosom, and 'twas shining brightly there.

Ibn al-Arabi tells us the same, that we are God. And so do the other Sufi mystics.

So it follows from the famous Vedantic doctrine that the *Brahman* is the *Atman*, roughly-speaking that God and the soul are one, not only that there is no 'thou' and 'I' but only 'thou', or if you prefer only 'I', but also that you and your brother are one, so that you love your brother as yourself because he is yourself. Hence the famous Hindu formula 'That art thou' or 'Thou art that'. The Upanishads (c. 800 B.C.) centre round this teaching, developed by Sankara in his doctrine of *advaita*, non-duality, a monistic doctrine which denies the existence of the world as separate from God. Hence when we are in the presence of another being like ourselves we are in the presence of God (in the rather impersonal sense of what has been called the ground of all existence) – beneath that veil he hides. We are told the same in the Torah (Lev. XIX, 18): 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself', meaning the other is yourself (Scholem 1941: 279). The same sentiment has often been expressed: 'And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me' (Matthew, 25, 40). And it is related that Muhammad 'declared that God said to Moses: "O my servant, I was sick and thou didst not visit Me. I begged of thee and thou gavest not to Me" with other like expressions, pointing to the fact that the existence of the beggar in His existence and the existence of the sick is His existence' (Smith 1944: 210).

And not only people but every creature must likewise be treated with love and respect. This is the ethical basis of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, avoiding harming any sentient creature. There are many charming stories of kindness to beasts, such as how Yudhishthira, the hero of the *Mahābhārata*, would not enter paradise without his dog, saying 'Such glory do I nowise covet for which I must renounce a creature loyal to me.' Nevertheless he was reproved for still being bound by human love (Zaehner 1966: 125). From a different part of the world we hear how when the Polish patriot and mystic Towianski was asked why he allowed a strange dog to jump at him and cover him in mud he replied 'The damage he does

[9] Tennyson was clearly influenced by Hindu monist philosophy. So were many others, e.g. Swinburne, who draped oriental mysticism round the rather unlikely figure of Hertha.

to my coat is nothing in comparison with the wrong I should inflict upon him in case I were to remain indifferent to the manifestations of his friendship' (quoted in James 1902: 281 (footnote)). And even then the inanimate world should be treated with respect: 'Gently brother, gently pray.'

So much for monist ethics. How about the philosophy underlying the ethics? In Indian mystical thought it is more or less taken for granted that the world is meaningless and that it is for man a countless succession of births and deaths in an endless chain of misery. The only sensible thing to do is to opt out of the illusion of mundane existence and through elimination of all desire and all attachments to become absorbed into the ultimate source of all being. The Buddha says of Brahm in Sir Edwin Arnold's poem *The Light of Asia*:

> Nor him nor any light
> Shall any gazer see with mortal eyes,
> Or any searcher know by mortal mind;
> Veil after veil will lift – but there must be
> Veil upon veil behind.
>
> Stars sweep and question not. This is enough
> That life and death and joy and woe abide;
> And cause and sequence, and the course of time,
> And Being's ceaseless tide.
>
> Which, ever changing, runs, linked like a river
> By ripples following ripples, fast or slow –
> The same yet not the same – from far-off fountain
> To where its waters flow
>
> Into the seas. These, steaming to the sun,
> Give the lost wavelets back in cloudy fleece
> To trickle down the hills, and glide again;
> Having no pause or peace.

and so it must go on for ever unless the self can be annihilated and the dewdrop slip into the shining sea.

Everything is in a state of flux, of ceaseless ebb and flow, as wave after wave beats aimlessly upon a barren shore without meaning or respite. It only makes some sense of this unintelligible divine sport if there is some means of finding stillness – what the Western scholastics would have called the *nunc stans*, the timeless now (far away from the *nunc fluens*, the now in time); and this can only be done by renouncing the world and all desire by living only in the present, for, as the Buddhists say, the past is beyond recall and the future is entirely unknown.

The monist position is of course full of paradoxes and seeming contradictions. How do we know that we cannot know what is behind the veils? How can we will to end desire in a world of inflexible cause and effect? Then, if everything is God apparent opposites are the same: existence and non-existence, love and hate, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, good and bad. It would all seem to be a dream of a shadow play in which God takes all the parts.

For Ramakrishna (b. 1834), we are told, good and evil cease to have meaning once liberation (*moksha*) has been achieved, for whatever is is good because it is God, and just as the poison in the snake does the snake no harm, so what appears evil to men who are still in bondage to their egos, is in itself not evil but good (Zaehner 1966: 164). Dean Inge has not been the only one to be shocked by the apparent lack of ethical content in some aspects of monistic philosophy and its doctrinal implications, that God spoke through Ovid as much as through Augustine. This seeming disregard of morality is set forth in a beautiful poem, *Krishna*, by G. W. Russell (1917: 498-499):

> I paused beside the cabin door and saw the King of Kings at play,
> Tumbled upon the grass I spied the little heavenly runaway.
> The mother laughed upon the child made gay by its ecstatic morn,
> And yet the sages spake of it as of the Ancient and Unborn.
> I heard the passion breathed amid the honeysuckle scented glade,
> And saw the King pass lightly from the beauty that he had betrayed.
> I saw him pass from love to love; and yet the pure allowed His claim
> To be the purest of the pure, thrice holy, stainless, without blame.
> I saw the open tavern door flash on the dusk a ruddy glare,
> And saw the King of Kings outcast reel brawling through the starlit air.
> And yet He is the Prince of Peace of whom the ancient wisdom tells,
> And by their silence men adore the lovely silence where He dwells.
> I saw the King of Kings again, a thing to shudder at and fear,
> A form so darkened and so marred that childhood fled if it drew near.
> And yet He is the Light of Lights whose blossoming is Paradise,
> That Beauty of the King which dawns upon the seers' enraptured eyes.
> I saw the King of Kings again, a miser with a heart grown cold,
> And yet He is the Prodigal, the Spendthrift of the Heavenly Gold,
> The largess of whose glory crowns the blazing brows of cherubim,
> And sun and moon and stars and flowers are jewels scattered forth by Him.
> I saw the King of Kings descend the narrow doorway to the dust
> With all his fires of morning still, the beauty, bravery, and lust.
> And yet He is the life within the Ever-living Living Ones,
> The ancient with eternal youth, the cradle of the infant suns,
> The fiery fountain of the stars, and He the golden urn where all
> The glittering spray of planets in their myriad beauty fall.

Now, if all this seems to you and me to be a maze of enigmas, paradoxes, contradictions and delusions it could be that we are unenlightened, that we have not sensed the unity of all things. Here we come to the most difficult part of monist philosophy, the unity of opposites. "'A is made possible only by not-A". This simple principle contains within it all the complexities of the dialectic as it developed from Heraclitus, through Plato and Aristotle, to Jakob Boehme, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel' (Vysheslawzeff 1969: 10-11) In the history of Western philosophy Hegel has been the most forthright in stating this unity of conceptual opposites, regarding change itself as identity. Indian mysticism goes beyond this what might be regarded as a dialectical game. It asserts that there are no opposites in reality, that diversity and multiplicity are illusions, and therefore so also is all change and movement. There is no object and no subject; that is merely illusion.

So if the opposites merge into identity both cease to have any meaning, cease to be. It follows that if the self has an existence only in relation to the non-self, the 'I' in relation to the 'non-I', then if the subject-object relationship can be got rid of, seen to be an illusion, both subject and object are united in nothing. The self is eliminated, or rather the ego is eliminated. The true self, the soul, the *atman* survives but as it were in a deep dreamless sleep, as a dewdrop in the sea, as a drop of wine in a cask of water. This is the final mystery.

How does one proceed to reach this delectable state? The mystics of every religion agree on the first and absolutely necessary step: to detach the self from worldly interests and desires, to rid oneself of the foul stinking lump of self, as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* has it, of all self-willing and self-pleasing. Richard Rolle tells us 'from the earliest moment on till the present day no man has ever attained to the contemplation of everlasting love until he has utterly forsaken the vanity of the world' (quoted in Joseph James 1950: 170). 'But thou, O dear Timothy,' admonishes Dionysius the Areopagite, 'leave behind both sensible perception, and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence; and all things being and not being, and be raised aloft as far as attainable – unknowingly – to the union with Him above every essence and knowledge' (James 1950: 185). All the mystics say the same:

> If thou couldst empty all thyself of self,
> Like to a shell dishabited,
> Then might He find thee on the ocean shelf,
> And say, 'This is not dead',
> And fill thee with himself instead. (from T. E. Brown, *Indwelling* quoted in James 1950: 107)

So the only thing to do is to empty the self of all the self – the self-oblivion we read of in the Talmud. But how is it to be done? How is one to make a void of the self so that God may enter in? Self-naughting, as it has been called, can be achieved in various degrees in many ways. One can get drunk or take drugs or anaesthetics. There is the path of energy or exertion, the path of contemplation (the *via contemplativa*), the path of resignation or submission, the path of good works, and the path of just trust (*pistis*). One can sometimes escape from the self for a time in madness, in human love (*eros*) (even in dissipation), in art; or one can withdraw from the phenomenal world into that of ideas, as some of the Greek thinkers did. It is generally accepted, however, that the only really effective and lasting mode is the complete abandonment of the self through total intellectual detachment from all that makes one cling to the world, from wealth, distinction, ambition, carnal desire – to become completely disinterested, to achieve what in Western mysticism is sometimes called holy indifference. Certainly power and wishing to be important are wellnigh incompatible with enlightenment. Says Jalal-uddin Rumi, (quoted in Huxley 1966: 130) one of the most famous of the Islamic mystics:

> Once the noble Ibrahim, as he sat on his throne,
> Heard a clamour and noise of cries on the roof,
> Also heavy footsteps on the roof of his palace.
> He said to himself, 'Whose heavy feet are these?'
> He shouted from the window, 'Who goes there?'

> The guards, filled with confusion, bowed their heads, saying,
> 'It is we, going the rounds in search.'
> He said, 'What seek ye?' They said 'Our camels.'
> He said, 'Who ever searched for camels on a housetop?'
> They said, 'We follow thy example,
> Who seekest union with God, while sitting on a throne.'

Even religious duties may be a hindrance. Writes Palmer, summarising what the Sufis say, 'Wealth and Dignity are great hindrances; but too much praying and fasting are often hindrances too. The one is a shroud of darkness, the other a veil of light' (1938: 16). And at the last even worldly love must be surrendered, as we have seen in the story of Yudhishthira and his dog, and as we may also see in the pathetic story of Gautama, the companion of Mahavira, who could not give up loving his family. And have we not been told what Jesus said about his family!

The Hindu mystics tell us that the secret is realisation that the phenomenal world as known to us by our senses and what we deduce from that knowledge by our reason is all an illusion. To the mystic the phenomenal world, the world which seems most real to us, is *maya*, an illusion or a dream or, as it is often spoken of, a veil or veils. It is the *jalāl* of the Sufis, the majesty which veils God from human sight; and it is Plato's cave of shadows, the prison of the sense. This does not mean that the phenomenal world does not exist but it does mean that it does not exist as we think we know it, thereby giving us the illusion of the duality of the 'I' and the 'it'. The basic delusion, says the Roshi, the venerable teacher, is 'that the world and oneself are separate and distinct. Inherently there is no such bifurcation. The world does not stand outside me – it *is* me' (Kapleau 1965: 131). Plotinus tells us the same.

The senses cannot give us this understanding, and certainly not the intellect, which is perhaps the greatest of all obstacles to the goal; nor precepts nor dogmas; only the divine light, what we might call grace, can do that. In no other way can the One be apprehended or comprehended. So in Zen Buddhism the mind has to be emptied of all thought by the performance of certain exercises (*za zen*) demanding total concentration, then sooner or later will come enlightenment. Says Yasutani-Roshi in his commentary on the *koan MU* 'The opinions you hold and your worldly knowledge are your delusions. Included also are philosophical and moral concepts, no matter how lofty, as well as religious beliefs and dogmas, not to mention innocent thoughts. In short, all conceivable ideas are embraced within the term "delusions" and as such are a hindrance to the realisation of your Essential-nature. So dissolve them with the fireball of MU!' (Kapleau 1965: 79-80). (Of MU more anon). Al-Ghazali likewise tells us 'Let him reduce his heart to a state to which the existence of anything and its non-existence are the same to him' (James 1950: 203). This condition, which we might call in our commonsense language making the mind a blank is what the mystic calls the darkness of unknowing. All the mystics, of whatever faith, seem to say the same. This is Ibn al-Arabi: 'It is necessary that thou know, after this fashion, not by learning nor by intellect, nor by understanding nor by imagination nor by sense, nor by the outward eye, nor by the inward eye, nor by perception…..His veil (i.e. phenomenal existence) is (only) the concealment of His existence in His oneness, without any quality….. There is no other and there is no existence to other, than He……. He whom thou thinkest to be other than God, he is not

other than God, but thou dost not know him and dost not understand that thou seest Him' (James 1950: 92-93).

To return to the West, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* says the same, as does St. John of the Cross and so St. Thomas a Kempis, that all attachments must be cut away, every earthly tie broken; then one may enter that cloud of unknowing, the *nubes ignorantiae*; and this cannot be done by human reason. The anonymous author tells us that God cannot be done by human reason. The anonymous author tells us that God can only be known by the heart and not by the mind. All thoughts must be abandoned, even those of God, who must be loved, not thought.

If the great obstacles to enlightenment are logical reasoning and conceptual thinking and it is useless to try to understand by the intellect what is beyond the reach of the intellect then we can better appreciate certain mystical exercises which are the opposite of rationalist theology (as represented by Bonhoeffer and Tillich) and sometimes even appear to be prescriptions for derangement. So since the Zen Buddhists hold that the greatest obstacle to understanding the ultimate truth, that all is everything and everything is all, is the intellect, discursive, and divisive as it is, they set their students such conundrums (koans) as these: 'What was my face before my parents were born?'; 'On top of a flagpole a cow gives birth to a calf'; and 'The east mountain strides over the water.' A favourite koan is: 'When a Chinese Zen master of the T'ang era, Joshu, was asked by a monk whether dogs have the Buddha-nature he retorted "MU".' Zen students will meditate for years on such conundrums which to us may seem meaningless, and that is precisely what I suppose they are intended to be. What does MU mean? You and I might say that MU means just MU (nothing). If we did so, however, we would be missing, from the Zen point of view, the whole intention of the exercises, which is to eradicate any attempt at intellectual understanding.

Another example, and one nearer home, are the Cabbalistic exercises of Mediaeval Jewry. It is not merely that the Torah is interpreted in symbologic terms. The Jewish mystics go much further; and those who venture into this labyrinth will find that each word has a mystical and symbolic meaning, and one may even concentrate on each combination and permutation of letters in a word and even on a single letter or its numerical value (which letters have in Hebrew). Prof. Scholem in discussing Abraham Abulafia's *Hokhmath ha-Tseruf* (13th cent.) says that it was regarded even as an advantage if the letters being contemplated are meaningless, 'as in that case they are less likely to distract us.' [10] (In the case of both the Zen and the Cabbalistic exercises – as also in some of the Yoga – there is nothing irrational, however strange they may appear to us, given the end aimed at, the elimination of all sensory and discursive distraction in the interest of total concentration. The same might be said of the Sufi repetition of the word 'Allah' till in the end it is meaningless; also in Hinduism and Buddhism the *mantrum* OM.

Perhaps I may here be allowed to change direction a bit and say that the mystic, especially the more monistically he is inclined, more or less ignores as illusions two problems which in the dogmatic theology of the West have proved difficult if not insoluble: the creation of the universe and the existence of evil. To say that creation must have a creator is mere tautology; and I have never been able to understand how anyone could entertain the idea of

[10] Scholem 1941: 133. See also Ernst Müller (1946: 76).

a God who created the universe *ex nihilo*, as Christian and Muslim dogmas assert. He must have created it out of himself, if at all. And what was the point of creating it anyhow? For the monist however this problem does not arise, or if it does, it arises in quite a different form. For him the world is God, and since God has always existed the world also has always existed. Anyhow space and time are illusions – there is no here and no there, no beginning and no end.

The second problem is how to account for what are generally regarded as evil, pain, cruelty and all the seeming beastliness of the world. Eating of the forbidden fruit may indeed have appeared to have given us the gift of understanding but to the mystic the appearance is illusory for the understanding is of the opposites of good and evil, and opposition which has no reality, it is just the way we in our ignorance evaluate phenomena in relation to ourselves. To use the Vedanta word again, it is all *maya*, all a dream. So Mother Julian of Norwich tells us 'Sin is no deed', and so the Cabbalistic writers tell us 'Evil has no existence in itself, but only so much as is given to it by the good' (Müller 1946: 129). This does not mean that what we call evil has no reality but simply that we do not understand the nature of that reality, not realising that there is no diversity, are no opposites, and that there is only the One; and by realisation I do not mean intellectual recognition but illumination.

I think it should be said also here that this business of emptying oneself of the self is not so simple as it might at first sight appear, for in one way of looking at the matter it might be asked what could be more selfish than the aim of the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist monks, liberation (*moksa*) from the cycle of rebirths by burning away their own individual loads of past actions (*karma*); or the aim of the Christian monk, personal salvation? Jesus came to save the world, not himself, and the Buddha would not enter the *nirvana* he had won, because of all the world's woe. So asceticism may be a form of hedonism, and mortification a form of self-love, the surrender of the self being more than ever a clinging to the self. It has also been said that mendicant monks are spongers, passing on provision of necessary things to others. The argument on the other side is that the ascetic sets an example to others, that if the mendicant had any personal possessions he might become attached to them and cling to them, and that you can't save anyone till you can save yourself. However the mystics tell us that one need not enter a monastery to forsake the world. Says Abu Sa'id ibn l'Khayr 'The true saint goes in and out amongst the people and eats and sleeps with them and buys and sells in the market and marries and takes part in social intercourse and never forgets God for a single moment' (Nicholson 1921: 55). One can, that is to say, live a busy worldly life and be other-worldly; but it is difficult.

By this time you must have gotten used to paradox upon paradox in mysticism, as it may appear to you and me, but I have yet to draw your attention to the greatest, and in a way most ironical, paradox of all. Our senses and our reason enable us to cope with the world in which we have to live and we would be lost without them, yet the mystics tell us we are more than ever lost with them in that it is sensory impressions and discursive thought, and indeed all that we call our environment and our culture, which blind us to a true knowledge of reality.

Now, commonsense tells us that the mystic's quest is hopeless, and looked at from outside it seems pathetic that one should cut oneself off from the familiar world one has loved:

Unwatched the garden bough shall sway,
The tender blossom flutter down,
Unloved that beech will gather brown,
This maple burn itself away;

Unloved, the sun-flower, shining fair,
Ray round with flames her disk of seed,
And many a rose-carnation feed
With summer spice the humming air…

But if there sometimes seems to be a note of sadness in mystical writings it is a glad and confident sadness, the weary but happy sadness of the pilgrim who must ever follow a distant trail to a city that he can never find. So when the Sufis tell us that there is no road from man to God what I suppose we are to understand them to mean is that perception and intelligence can never reveal the mystery, only the Divine Light.

Here then is another paradox: there are many roads to God and likewise no road. So it is that we are told by the 13th century Bukhara Sufi 'Aziz ibn Muhammad al-Nasafi that according to the Sufis there can be no road for the traveller on the path of mystic philosophy because the nature of God is illimitable and infinite. Since all existence is God, how can there be a road to what is already there?

Then, if it be sensory impressions and discursive reasoning which prevent us from understanding the ultimate reality behind the phenomenal world illumination must be a matter of degree, for obviously even the most committed mystic cannot be totally indifferent to the senses and to reason. What the mystic means when he speaks of holy indifference is that one is indifferent because the mind is occupied with a higher and spiritual reality: then what the mediaeval philosophers called the 'spiritual forms' take the place of the 'natural forms' (the sensory impressions).

What, if I understand them rightly, all the mystics are trying to tell us in their different religious idioms is that they have incontrovertible knowledge of God, conceived of in one way or another, and that this knowledge is experiential and therefore verifiable; indeed St. Thomas Aquinas defines mysticism as *cognitio experimentalis*. The mystic does not believe, he knows. It would follow that the truth the mystics claim to know can only be known by those who in some way or another and in some degree or another have had the same kind of inner experience. If we have not had it, it would seem that we pass from enigma to enigma.

I have tried to point to a few features common to mystical thought that I have noted in my little reading in that vast subject. You may indeed ask whether what the mystics tell us is true. Whatever the answer we might give we have to bear in mind that to the mystic who is convinced that he has achieved unitive knowledge of God the question is not only irrelevant but meaningless. For him there is no answer because there is no question. Truth and untruth are all the same. Also the issue for him is beyond discussion for he knows that he has experienced what is, and it avails little to ask whether what is is true. Furthermore, since his knowledge is not derived from perception or conception but from intuition, the heart, the Divine Light, the Inner Light of the Quakers, what Swedenborg calls 'wisdom' in contrast to 'knowledge' or 'intelligence', which can scarcely, or even at all, be defined, any sort of

argument based on science or logic would miss the mark. Moreover the validity of mystical experience, both of the trust kind and of the rapture kind, cannot be questioned—it is too well attested. To ask how it should be interpreted, what it signifies, is to ask a different question, but likewise a useless one, for an experience which has little or no intellectual content cannot be intellectually described or defined.

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

ANTHROPOLOGY IN TRANSLATION (JASO OCCASIONAL SERIES)

This new translation series provides an English-language space for current anthropological scholarship originally written in languages other than English. Such a space is long overdue. Successive debates about 'world anthropologies' or decolonisation – including in English – have produced little practical changes in editorial practices concerning non-English-language scholarship. It is no longer possible to ignore the many vibrant traditions of social anthropology worldwide, whose insights are well cognizant of English-language scholarship without receiving appropriate attention in the opposite direction. The global hegemony of English as a scholarly language, in addition to the everyday Anglo-centrism of Anglo-American anthropology departments, poses a serious epistemic barrier to an even scholarly dialogue within the worldwide anthropological community.

As an open-access anthropology journal based in Oxford, we wanted to open a modest editorial space to begin redressing this epistemic imbalance, by featuring a genuine avenue to engage with anthropology in translation. We are well aware that translation, on its own, cannot be the panacea to cure all structural imbalances in academic knowledge-production. However, it is a small step towards acknowledging the limitations of Anglo-American conversations that rarely feature non-Anglo-American scholars. We note, furthermore, that there is a broader trend towards a cross-linguistic anthropological practice in our discipline. Setting aside bilingual venues such as *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie sociale*, journals such as *HAU* and *Cambridge Anthropology* have begun featuring a translation section in recent years. Meanwhile, the American journal *Cultural Anthropology* has begun accepting articles in Spanish as well as English. We would like to join this broader trend in Anglo-American circles by offering a robust engagement with current world anthropologies through translation.

Our first article in the series was written by Ismaël Moya (CNRS) and translated by David Zeitlyn in JASO's 2022 issue. In the current issue, we are delighted to publish a second article in translation, written by Mériam Cheikh (INALCO, Paris) and translated by David Zeitlyn once more, entitled 'Cover-up is better than exposure: scandals, flexible norms, prostitution or sexual dissidence in Morocco'. Through a long-term ethnography of girls who 'go out' in Tangiers, Morocco, Cheikh details how the girls' everyday experience is shaped by practices of not-speaking and class-based norms of respectability. Beyond public discourses on 'scandal', Cheikh deftly demonstrates how ordinary sexual practice outside marriage is tacitly tolerated so long as it is actively hidden and denied.

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

COVER-UP IS BETTER THAN EXPOSURE: SCANDALS, FLEXIBLE NORMS, PROSTITUTION OR SEXUAL DISSIDENCE IN MOROCCO[1]

MÉRIAM CHEIKH[2]

The pioneering work of Howard Becker (1963) and Erving Goffman (1963) argues that deviance and transgression only emerge as such through their identification by others. The working out of social relationships between individuals – the labelling process – produces deviant acts. No society is exempt from this. Contributions from anthropology, particularly in the context of work on moral economies (Fassin and Eideliman 2012; Fassin and Lézé 2013), have provided a useful reminder of how, in different situations, moral norms and values are inscribed at the heart of social relationships.

In Morocco, where prohibitions on premarital sex are still a prominent part of the dominant morality, it is worth asking what exactly is their basis: sexual practice itself or something else? In view of the banality of intimate relations between the sexes before marriage today, I would imagine that it may be based on something else. This unnamed banality is nevertheless attested in numerous studies. Although there are a few studies on sexuality from recent decades, they have not succeeded in developing a genuine sociology of sexuality and overcoming the essentialism that is common in discussing sexual dynamics in Muslim-majority societies. However, they do show the social dynamism in this area. All of them emphasise the existence of sexual activity before or outside marriage, particularly during adolescence - the age that concerns us here (Dialmy 1988, 1995, 2000). This particularly highlights the school population. Interesting figures on the issue come, for example, from some studies on these juvenile worlds (Bakass and Ferrand 2013; Naamane-Guessous 1992). They are interesting because they capture what is often hastily described as paradoxical or social hypocrisy. Indeed,

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[1] This article is an augmented manuscript partly based on the following chapter and conference paper. The translation is published in JASO with the permission of the original publisher:

- Cheikh, Mériam 2018. Scandales et ductilité des normes au Maroc : le cas de la prostitution vu par-delà les marges, in Philippe Chaudat et Monia Lachheb (éds.) *Transgresser au Maghreb : la normalité et ses dépassements*, 51-62. Tunis: IRMC-Karthala.
- Cheikh, Mériam 2019. Scandales, altérités et dissidences sexuelles au Maroc - colloque international 7-8 novembre 2019, *Altérités et résistances au prisme du genre en Méditerranée*, Aix-en-Provence : Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme.

[2] Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO), Paris.

the results generally show that boys, on the one hand, mostly report their sexual activity without inhibition, while girls, on the other hand, do not dare (even in an anonymous questionnaire) to talk about their intimate practices (whether deflowered or not), and therefore minimise it.

This evidence of the banalisation of sexuality has been highlighted in particular by ethnographic studies. Observation and immersion have made it possible to talk about sexualities in the plural, i.e., to identify, observe and analyse all practices current in Morocco. These works, most of which are recent, increase our knowledge in this area (Fioole 2021; Cheikh 2020; Gouyon 2018; Menin 2018; Rebucini 2013; Carey 2012; Davis 1995, 1992; Davis and Davis 1989). Their use of ethnographic enquiry – necessary for any study of sexualities in countries without large-scale national statistical surveys on the issue – is the only method that allows for a detailed understanding of the banalisation of sex in hyper-moralised contexts. Ethnographic studies provide an analysis of the complexity of reality that is difficult to achieve from questionnaire surveys (El Aji 2018), although it is these which have been used in recent essays on sexuality in the country (Slimani 2017) or in journalistic reports.[3] Moreover, ethnographic analyses adopt an approach framed in terms of social dispositions. This, for example, does not reduce sexual experiences to 'sexual misery', making the working classes sexual 'misfits' or the upper classes, the site of a modern and enlightened exercise of sexuality as developed by Abdessamad Dialmy.[4] Nor are sexual experiences reduced to a question of identity (religious or national) that brings the increasingly recurrent scandals and debates about sexualities in Arab and Muslim countries back to a monolithic Islamic normativity (Feki 2014). However, those religious norms and the centrality of the nation-state cannot fail to challenge us. This centrality, bursting into the political, intellectual and academic debate when scandals relating to morality emerge, is less indicative of the widespread attachment to those norms than of the social transformations underway.

[3] See the report on young people by the daily newspaper *L'Économiste*. This special issue is illustrated by a picture showing a couple kissing on the beach: Grande enquête sur les jeunes d'aujourd'hui, *L'Économiste*, March 2006, (online):
https://www.leconomiste.com/sites/default/files/eco7/public/Grande%20Enqu%C3%AAtte%20sur%20les%20jeunes%202006.pdf

[4] Abdessamad Dialmy, in a survey postulating a process of liberalisation of morals, only interviews 'literate people', 61.3% of whom belong to the middle and upper classes, because this category is said to suffer most from the 'sexual crisis due to their being torn between two contradictory cultural models, the traditional and the modern'. The 'literate' would have, more than the other groups, 'the possibility and the habit of dealing, often orally, with the problems of sexual life'. They would also be better able to recognise 'the cognitive function of the questionnaire and to distinguish between the social researcher and the administrative agent'. The survey is underpinned by the idea of a 'natural' propensity among educated upper-class youth to adopt and incorporate gender equality values. All this says more about the class distinctions assumed by the author than about the subject of his study (Dialmy 1988, 51-52). Despite the concern in accounting for differences in sexual experience according to origin and level of education, studies dealing directly with sexual practices in Morocco do not consider the question of practices from the perspective of class relations and respectability. However, the return through the social space offers an excellent tool for de-culturalising the sexual question and thinking about it in terms of the positions, resources and capital of individuals (Cheikh 2020).

Scandals

The first scandal in independent Morocco was the so-called 'Tabit affair', which broke out in the early 1990s and was named after a Casablanca police commissioner who was sentenced to death for the rape of a hundred girls and the recording of abusive sexual orgies to which his victims were forced to participate.[5] This first public affair concerning the morality of a state official and leading to other officials symbolises the second era of Moroccan authoritarianism (the first era being that of the '*années de plomb*', the 'years of lead' in the mid-1950s), which was characterised by a controlled political liberalisation. This liberalisation was characterised in particular by the opening up of the media sphere, which was supposed to transmit information on transparency, the dusting off of the Makhzen's old techniques of power, and the moralisation of the public sphere, including political and bureaucratic life. As a result of the 'Tabit affair', several other scandals became public. These mainly concerned Moroccan financial circles and led to campaigns to clean up the world of entrepreneurs (Catusse 2004). With the continued growth of the press in the early 2000s, financial and politico-financial scandals continued to make headlines. By the end of the decade, with the emergence of new technologies and in particular the use of social networks, police scandals recurred. In the context of widespread social mobilisations (demonstrations against the high cost of living, the deep-rooted movement of unemployed graduates) and the transformation of the political field with the arrival and political participation of Islamist actors (who made the fight against corruption one of their main creeds), the denunciation of corruption among agents of the deep state took centre stage. These scandals continue, marking the path of protest that is fuelling uprisings in the Arab world.

During this decade, sexual and moral scandals did not blow up. What they do and give rise to "cases", mainly concerning prostitution, seen through the prism of the Moroccan nation under attack by fornicating foreigners (Grotti 2005). Cases involving sex and sexuality, however, intensified from 2010 onwards. At irregular intervals and taking advantage of digital amplification, 'scandalous' information was propagated denouncing the immorality of a group or an individual in order to better reaffirm the moral values of the community. This series of scandals began with the so-called 'Nador kissing affair' which, in 2013, brought two teenagers to the forefront of national attention after they published a photo of themselves kissing in an alley in a district of Nador on their Facebook profiles (Soret, 2013). The photo was the subject of a complaint from a local, and the two young people were arrested and placed in a boarding school for difficult youth while awaiting trial. They were acquitted, but not without receiving a paternalistic 'reprimand' from the judge. This moral scandal very quickly went beyond the country's borders. It also gave rise to mobilisations in the form of sit-ins, known as *kiss-ins*, because of the public kisses that were exchanged in solidarity with the two teenagers. The series of scandals continued in 2015 with the selection of the film *Much Loved* at the Cannes Film Festival, which is about the lives of four prostitutes living in Marrakech, whose risqué scenes forced the main protagonists to leave the country after being attacked and receiving

[5] Yassine Benargane, Affaire du commissaire Tabit ou la toute dernière peine de mort appliquée au Maroc, *Yabiladi*, 10 October 2017, https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/58262/affaire-commissaire-tabit-toute-derniere.html

death threats (Alami 2015). The scandal caused by the film polarised society and led to national and international mobilisation for and against the film. Other scandals concerned the festivals organised by the country and the nudity thus promoted by the authorities (BBC News, 8 June 2015); moral transgressions such as the *Merendinagate,* named after the famous Merendina industrial snack, which put a company, known in every Moroccan household, on the hot seat for deciding to celebrate Valentine's Day by proposing new packaging honouring both the ways of speaking love in dialectal Arabic (*tan bghik*/I love you) and, in the form of drawings, young couples in love (El-Atti, 2022). Other public discourses denounced offences against modesty, which maintains conservative critical debates on intimacy and sex in Morocco. Personalities considered hostile by the regime are 'guilty' of these offences (as sanctioned by the penal code – which in turn raises questions about legally diligent trials, see Macé 2021). This is similar to – but does not quite take the same form as – the scandals that arise from the work of moral entrepreneurs.

While the scandals highlight the opposition between moralists/conservatives and progressives/defenders of individual freedoms, any potential politicisation of moral scandal blurs the effects of polarisation. On several occasions the protagonists have been Islamist leaders or conservative personalities caught in the act of immorality (for example, the adultery case of two executives from the preaching association of the Islamist party, PJD, which was then leading the government; see France24 2016). When scandals involve figures critical of the regime (mainly male journalists accused of rape), it upsets militant affiliations within the progressive camp, leading to opposition between those wishing to denounce the authorities' instrumentalisation of denunciations of sexual violence and those who refuse to deny women's voices. In the context of the *#metoo* mobilisations, ruptures along feminist lines are also at work. These recurrences invite us to question the conditions, functions and effects of scandals in a country that has been going through a demographic transition for three decades, involving a transformation of its sexual ethics. Before looking at what scandal does to emancipatory aspirations and mobilisations in terms of sexual freedom and gender relations, let us look at the very notion of *scandal*.

A scandal, the moment when the contradiction between idealised norms and the actuality of practices is made public, is also the moment when we take into consideration the state of things we thought were pushed to the margins. Scandals include deviance and transgressions, and through them, just as in photographic snapshots, it is possible to evaluate change but also to observe how, politically, different social forces mobilise to curb this contradiction or to advance the debate on individual freedoms. A scandal is first and foremost a moment, one of newsworthiness (*actualité*) and of the present. It occupies the temporal space of the public sphere in the present. The public is gripped by the scandal, which freezes the present time in an illusory manner. It is as if we are held in suspense by a plot that we follow and whose final twists and turns we await in order to mark the course of time. This is doubtless the quality of scandal that has led to its neglect by researchers, as the historian Éric de Dampierre (1954) pointed out. He sought to rehabilitate it by borrowing the analytical procedures used by functionalist anthropologists in their analysis of societies. In his approach, scandal is not understood as rumour, an open secret or gossip. Unlike these channels for the circulation of information, which are situated between the private and the public, scandal is

public. It needs a public audience that will feel offended by the transgression of its common values - to which they are supposed to adhere – by the guilty parties, those who scandalise. By being public, therefore, the scandal concerns the public opinion of a given society or community. When a scandal reaches a whole country and generates a polarisation between two opposing camps, the scandal becomes an 'affair'. Thus, in French, newspapers very quickly talk about affairs rather than scandals, whereas in Arabic, newspapers (depending on their sensibilities) will speak more of scandal.

There are several types of scandal that can be distinguished according to the categories of values they offend. There are the scandals that offend against sacred values (blasphemy is a source of scandal); there are the scandals that contravene moral values and norms; and those that expose the corruption of those in power. While the last decade has mainly seen scandals related to morality, the other categories of values have also given rise to somewhat recurrent scandals at certain times. The era, and especially the political period, plays an important role in the emergence of one or other type of scandal. Scandal is part of the repertoire of 'political action' and, in the 2010s, it is essentially politico-sexual, supplanting the scandals of the 1990s and 2000s concerning public service corruption. This instrumental or strategic approach to values and norms highlights above all that scandal, contrary to what one might think, is not a reflection of a society that is 'too moral' or 'too transgressive'.

Saying scandal in Moroccan: between *shuha* and *fdiḥa*

In Moroccan, scandal can be said by means of two terms: "*shuha*" (شوهة) or "*fdiḥa*" (فضيحة). A *fdiḥa* is, the dictionary tells us, a shameful action, the glare of exposure, the resulting infamy, scandal. The root of the word refers to the semantics of publicity or display. The word contains the idea of unveiling, bursting, disclosing or breaking through. '*Faire la fdiḥa*' or making someone *fdiḥa* is equivalent to the slang expression in French '*s'afficher*' or '*afficher quelqu'un*' that is heard a lot among young people today: 'showing somebody up' in English. *Shuha* refers to the idea of nuisance, dishonour (we speak of tarnishing/compromising/damaging reputations). *Shuha* and *fdiḥa* are thus distinguishable from the theological and moral etymology of the word scandal (from the Greek *skandalon*), which refers to the idea of wandering, falling into sin as in the expression 'scandal stone'. It is therefore the idea of displaying oneself by tarnishing one's reputation, but also that of one's relatives, which is retained in Moroccan Arabic. There is therefore an approximation to the idea of honour, which underlies that of scandal. The semantics of display refers to a norm that I have called the norm of (non-) disclosure or the norm of 'non-saying' (Cheikh 2011; Cheikh and Miller 2010) by borrowing the concept from Jean Jamin (1977).[6] We can trace its ethical genealogy, at the heart of which is a *hadith* regularly and routinely mobilised by individuals to deal with the moral contradictions in their lives. This *hadith* explains and enjoins us to remember that

[6] See also Marie-Pierre Anglade's work on drinkers in public parks in Casablanca, which elaborates on the idea of being up-to-date (2015).

there is no worse sin than telling and disclosing transgressions God had forgiven, as long as they remained in secret or informal.[7] Making visible and enunciation are at the heart of scandal. I do not intend to provide a cultural explanation of transgression by referring to the religious sphere). Rather, I want to emphasise the interactivity of normative work in making something a scandal. This reminds us that practices of deviance and transgression only emerge in interaction. They are not social states from which individuals cannot dissociate themselves. To recall this *hadith* is to show how religious reflection can join sociological reflection: sins do not exist as long as they are not caught in the flow of interactions, which then put the speakers at risk. *Shuha* seems to me to be as powerful as *hshuma* (modesty) or even more so.[8] The prohibition of *shuha* prescribes that individuals should not show themselves in the open or, more precisely, that they should not disclose their wrongdoings in the open. It is a norm that aims to keep transgressive acts under wraps, not from society as a whole, but from the immediate social environment, i.e., the social network in which the transgressors live (family, neighbourhood, work, etc.), the only one that counts. Also, putting the emic concepts of *shuha* and *hshuma* face to face helps to account for the transformations that the intimate and the sexual have been undergoing in Morocco for several decades – otherwise described as the 'sexual transition' (Dialmy 2017) – and which has produced a new intimate and sexual ethic, or at least complexified the urban sexual order (Cheikh 2014).

The *shuha* (شوهة)

My work on sex work[9] has shown that if there is one transgression that young women in prostitution fear more than the practice of premarital sex or the practice of prostitution, it is the exposure of these practices and, above all, putting them into words. This is why any talk about these practices to the uninitiated is forbidden and vigorously controlled. It is through the act of *not-speaking* that young girls manage their transgressions.[10] In public arenas, it is easy to identify the young women in my survey as leading a 'bad life' because of the places they frequent (discos, bars), the late hour they are there and the use they make of them, i.e., flirting. However, the girls do not care about the gaze of strangers, except that of the police,

[7] According to Abu Hurairah, the Prophet said, 'All my community is forgiven except the *Mujahirin*. And it is part of *Mujaharah* if a man does something at night and then in the morning, while Allah has hidden him, he says, "Oh so-and-so yesterday I did such-and-such". Certainly he spent the night hidden by his Lord and in the morning he discovers what his Lord has hidden' (Al-Bukhari, sahih no. 6069, Muslim, sahih no. 2990). Cf. for example: http://www.hadithdujour.com/hadiths/hadith-sur-La-pudeur-du-Croyant-envers-soi-meme_186.asp

[8] See Rahma Bourqia's reflective review of the concept of *hshuma* in Morocco (Bourqia 2020).

[9] This investigation is based on a longitudinal ethnography conducted between 2008 and 2015 in Tangier, where I shared the lives of young women who were prostitutes (who 'go out' to use their idiom). This long-term study allowed for an exploration of the adolescent lifestyles of the young women, also including discussion of female juvenile illusions, an analysis of the intimate economy by describing the spatial (the urban construction of prostitution) and social organisation of the prostitutional economy and the intimate economy of Tangier. Finally, a reconsideration of housing for single females in the city of Tangier (description of shared flats, studios, etc.). Each of these themes questions practices that are clearly at odds with the dominant normative discourse: whether it be the illusions of adolescence, commercial and festive sexuality or living away from families.

[10] Annerienke Fioole shows very well in her work on premarital love arrangements in a small Moroccan town the complexity of the gameplay surrounding the circulation of speech concerning the existence of premarital couples (Fioole 2021).

who may arrest individuals for prostitution or simply because they are moving around as a group together without being linked by marriage contracts or family ties. For the rest, the moral judgement of strangers is ineffective because it does not compromise one's reputation and, therefore, does not marginalise. One does not have to be decent in front of strangers: it is perfectly possible to talk out loud about one's sexual relations, prostitution or polyandry in a taxi, a shop or while walking through a crowded souk. It can also be done with people with whom one has an equal relationship (sisters, friends). What is important is to hide these practices from people in higher social positions who are close (parents, uncles, aunts, etc.). I will give some examples of this management. The first illustrates the importance of building trust in order to be able to talk about sexual practices, while the second metaphorically illustrates the reality of concealment:

> My acceptance in the field was finally achieved when I was able to demonstrate my ability to keep my mouth shut, i.e., not to divulge to people who mattered (families and relatives) the girls' practices and not to say too much about their residential mode (the flat share) that I also shared. Thus, after running into one of my roommates with her cousin whom I did not know, I was congratulated for not revealing the fact that we shared the same living space.
>
> In the summer of 2009, during an outing to the beach with her extended family, one of my roommates, Salima, asked me to hold a towel out in front of her to hide her from the eyes of her family members as she undressed to put on her swimming costume. The beach was crowded and I pointed out to her that the towel was too short, so that everyone behind her could see her undressing except her family. She replied: 'Who cares about the people behind us, the ones you have to hide from are in front of us', and accompanied her answer with a hand gesture, thrown backwards as if to signify her lack of interest in people (*l-bashar*), the anonymous.
>
> Another roommate, Badiaa, explained how she had to avoid a former client from Tangier who recognised her while she was on a family outing: "I saw one approaching me and I quickly said to my mother: 'Come on, let's go and see the slippers'. When he saw me deviate he understood. He heard me say "Mama" and he turned back. The men of Tangier have no gumption, they could come and greet you [lasciviously] in front of your brother. My brother was sitting on a low wall and I went to call him to stay next to us to avoid a man coming to greet me. And what's more, in Sidi Hrazem, as soon as my brother steps aside, you see one approaching you and saying: 'Give me the number' [description of street dating in Tangier].

The majority of the families of the girls I followed in my seven-year longitudinal ethnographic study know what their daughters are doing, but none of these families will talk about it openly, and each of these families will make sure it is never talked about. So when the mother of one of the girls reminds her while blessing her that she hopes the gifts she is giving her are not gifts bought with *hram* (illicit) money, she stresses the importance of not stating, while

understanding – which her blessing, or *rdat l-walidin*[11], translates – that her daughter is forced to fend for herself. She also knows that this solitary resourcefulness is the result of the inability of her family of origin to ensure the integration of their daughter through marriage (normally the family's prerogative).

So, what does this norm of not-speaking bring us in terms of understanding prostitution: is it at the same time transgressive, deviant and illegal? On the one hand, it makes it possible to realise that individuals are given room to manoeuvre. On the other hand, the anthropological interest of this norm lies in the importance it attaches to social relations. Mobilising Erving Goffman's analytical framework, with *shuha* avoidance, the other is at the centre; and if it is important not to disclose a transgression of the norm, it is not only to protect oneself but also to preserve the face of this other. Maintaining one's face and that of the other does not jeopardise the maintenance of social relations and the continuation of social life. The preservation of the social or interactional order is what guides the recommendations of the clerics: a cover-up is better than an exposure.

As Numa Murard and Jean-François Laé tell us, intimacy 'absorbs and reduces to details what otherwise would be scandalous, and authorises excesses because what one does there will have no consequences for the outside world. Intimacy is the non-consequence, the shock absorber of faults' (Murard and Laé 1996: 39). Managing tensions within the family and preserving relations with family members means that girls must preserve their privacy to avoid disclosing their transgressive practices and, in so doing, safeguard the honour of their relatives. Preserving honour is not simply a matter of deference to the family, but also consolidates the social capital acquired through social networks that promote the social integration of individuals, particularly by conveying marriage proposals. The point of not saying anything is to avoid the risk of weakening one's social capital. The notion of social capital is central here. Far from being new, it builds on previous anthropological analyses of honour and social action (Abu-Lughod 1986; Bourdieu 2018). These are helpful for understanding what is at stake in the new attitudes to intimacy and sexuality, which are becoming increasingly commonplace even as moral scandals intensify.

In addition to silence and the management of information about oneself, concealment can be practised with discretion: discretion in clothing and restraint in attitudes when the girls use familiar or everyday spaces. This is true of the neighbourhood in which they live in Tangier. The girls live in shared flats in new buildings or in neighbourhood houses dating from the 1980s (generally in neighbourhoods adjoining the old colonial city and the old Muslim working-class neighbourhoods from the international era). These neighbourhoods are popular places (in the sense of *sha'bī*) which today accommodate small middle- and lower-class families, Tangier families of Rifian origin who have been living in the city for three or even four generations, a few Rifian retirees back from Belgium or the Netherlands (one of them is the

[11] *Rdat l-walidin* literally means 'blessing of the parents'. It emphasises the bonds of filiation recognised before God and recalls the parental order derived from the religious order. Children receive blessing from God *through* their parents – i.e., moral support and relief from their anxieties about their success and future – only if they respect their parents by showing them respect and giving them help and support in all circumstances. The latest images of the Moroccan football team, which regularly show the players celebrating alongside their mothers (whom they would embrace in the stands or bring to the centre of the pitch to dance with or kiss) after each of the victories that led them to the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, are entirely in this register.

owner of the flat share I share with the girls) and young single people of both sexes living in flat shares. Many of the flats are rented to single girls who are 'going out' (as the young sex workers call it),[12] working (in industry or services) or doing both. Throughout my fieldwork in two shared flats, there were few altercations and scandals. On a day-to-day basis, the problems did not go beyond the flirting and harassment by boys loitering in the alleys: flirting which we avoided by not passing close to the groups of young men; and harassment which we responded to vigorously when confronted. The two scandals that led to altercations in the neighbourhood and the intervention of the public authorities concerned the 'indecent' display of one of the girls with her boyfriend on the roof of the house (they were embracing and kissing on the roof) and a punitive moral visitation of unprecedented violence against the girls in our flat. It was undertaken by a criminal who was under the influence of drugs and alcohol that day and ended dramatically with the rape of one of the girls. The girls in the flat share 'justified' the attack – in my opinion prolonging the violence of the rape – by saying that it was the result of the victim's lack of restraint and respect for the neighbourhood. For them, it was the breach of the tacit contract on the existence of limits not to be exceeded that led to the tragedy in this inner-city neighbourhood and left vulnerable the weakest: girls living alone. In other words, the transgression of the norm of non-saying, of not being exposed, led to the punishment meted out by the most marginal member (a *shemkar* or 'drug addict') from the neighbourhood, the immediate social network of our flatmate. *Dert shuha* (she exposed herself and by extension us), my roommates repeated. The possibility of public scandal is a powerful social regulator, through which the moral order is reasserted. It is not the failure to be modest or chaste that is the problem, but the fact that someone has crossed the line of tolerated shamelessness.

The strength of the fear of *shuha* persists even after one has distanced oneself from prostitution. There is a fear of being recognised as a former prostitute. It may be necessary to deal with unwanted encounters and to counter possible disclosures (inadvertent or not) that might occur. This fear of recognition by someone is the fear of loosing a newly acquired respectable status. Thus, one of the young women, then in a relationship with her boyfriend, explained to me that five years after ceasing her 'going out' (sex work in the Moroccan sense), she had been slow to go out on the street again in Tangier. The fear of being recognised by former clients or by police officers in charge of moral sanitation kept her enclosed. So, as we were crossing a crossroads in the Tangier city centre, she stopped and looked at a policeman who looked at her without lingering and said:

> Look at the policeman over there. He used to see me all the time at night. He remembered my face even though he didn't arrest me. He had recorded me for sure. Now, I walk by him, he doesn't recognise me. It's a change to stop going out, but above all I've learned something. When you go out at night you are different, you change and when you stop you become like everyone else.

[12] They refuse to use the term 'sex workers', hence my undifferentiated use of the terms sex work and prostitution. For an in-depth discussion of the terms see my monograph on 'going out' (*l-khrij*) in Tangier (Cheikh 2020).

The stakes of recognition leave a mark, judging by the comments made by those who have found the 'exit'. And recognition is *shuha*, which can be felt at the individual level and which is equivalent in this case to self-shame: shame of one's labelling but also of one's social downgrading. The ban on *shuha* is powerful because it affects the process of normalisation of women's trajectories more than the loss of virginity, which is not the cause of their banishment or entry into prostitution. Most of them recall that they were not deceived by false promises from men (a classic justification to explain the loss of virginity and mitigate social criticism) or stress that if they lost their virginity it was because *zigha* – which I translate as the desire to have fun, to discover intimacy and to be delirious in adolescence – pushed them to do so (Cheikh 2020).

Scandal and social climbing

Shuha is also a failure to neutralise the infamy of one's social origin. Here, *shuha* refers less to the scandal of exposing transgressions than to social shame and failure in the quest for social respectability. The young women I met were generally able to stabilise themselves in intimate relationships and some of these relationships led to marriages. When girls engage in sex work and the intimate economy in general ('dating'), they are seeking to improve their situation. They seek fulfilment but not at any cost. Thus, intimate relationships with poor boys are avoided. The avoidance of the latter, their social disqualification, establishes a hierarchy among men. The 'going out' of women determines the social relationship in a certain way. The intimacy and sexuality at the heart of the 'going out' device not only participates in the reproduction of gender relations (Gourarier 2016) but also in the social ranking of men by women. When they secure a lasting relationship with a suitable party, the ostentatious celebration of marriage is an opportunity to make one's entry into 'normality' known. Here, normality is synonymous with access to social respectability or social ascension. This is measured not so much by the passage from one social class to another but by one's insertion into the social fabric, into sociabilities that mean that one acquires a certain social value. Social value is still measured by one's ability to make alliances. The ostentation of matrimonial ceremonies in Morocco performs or stages the alliance of two families and thus the participation in the national ideology of the Moroccan family. The matrimonial success of a young woman can have a considerable impact on the social status of families otherwise socially disqualified. Sometimes these marriages, as well as the material and immaterial resources they allow, make it possible for boys also to gain: the brothers of these women (who have had to manage their sexuality on their own by dealing with the effects of the *shuha*) are taken care of more by their families than their sisters.

At a wedding celebration, a girl who wanted to show her continuing interest in friendship with her former disco mates invited them all. In this respect, the wedding was a brutal illustration of the break with the old social milieu that comes with social climbing. The limousine hired for the occasion, the sumptuous dresses and the royal feast were felt as a humiliation by the former 'going out' friends invited to the wedding. They were uncomfortable with the looks they received, feeling that their body language betrayed their membership to

the world of prostitution. The fact that one of the girls was dressed in a strapless Western dress (associated with disco outfits) rather than the traditional caftan was particularly damaging to the image of our group, who were seated separately on a table that the hosts had forgotten to set up for us, leaving us to wait standing in the midst of the guests who were leering at us disapprovingly while we improvised a place to sit. Indeed, revealing that one does not own a caftan is humiliating because this ceremonial garment is central to the Moroccan woman and family: it symbolises more than anything else the link to the Moroccan community according to codes defined by the upper classes.[13] For working-class women, if it is not possible to own these very expensive dresses, it is nevertheless possible to rent them for the evening, which our friend unfortunately omitted to do. Anxious to do the right thing and carried away by the craziness of this wedding among my roommates, I was myself very embarrassed by my wedding outfit and had to bring in one of my sister's dresses from the south of Morocco at the last minute, as she was more familiar with traditional dress styles. The girls were surprised to see that I mastered the code *par excellence* of belonging and social respectability, having noticed, during our night out, the lack of interest I had in my 'evening' clothes (jeans and shoes without heels). Without having planned it, I was reproducing within the group the frontier that separated us.

During the evening, the identification of my friends as 'whores' and as being poor earned them particularly harsh treatment. While I was being sympathetically welcomed to pose for photos with the bride and groom, the sister of the bride addressed one of us in these unfriendly terms: 'How are you going to deal with your girlfriends? [...] See how you've got to do it because they're blocking the way [referring to the improvised dinner table that disrupted the seating plan] and spoiling the decor'. Similarly, their moral outbursts during the evening were treated with discrimination. On the dance floor, where my friends were relatively discreet, married women indulged in suggestive swaying that did not earn them any reprobation. However, when those who were 'spoiling the place' smoked in the toilets and talked to men in the car park of the party hall out of sight – and therefore careful not to provoke the *shuha* – they drew the ire of the bride, according to whom 'they thought it was the disco toilet'. Unsurprisingly, relations between the bride and the other girls became considerably strained after the wedding, as one of the girls complained:

> I was her girlfriend. She used to say to me: 'You're better than my brothers and sisters'. The day she got married, why didn't she take me with her to her new house? Why didn't she tell me, 'Welcome and make my house your home and this and that?'

At the wedding, the vulgarity of dress and certain behaviours created *shuha* because they not only reintroduced into the wedding ceremony a bit of the bride's nocturnal past, which no one was fooled by, but they also disrespected the social picture being drawn. It was a matter of keeping the alliance of two families untainted, enhancing the status and respectability of each (one by marrying her daughter and the other by marrying her son to a girl with financial

[13] On the symbolism of wedding ceremonies and ceremonial dress, see the work of Souad Azizi and M. Elaine Combs-Shilling (Azizi 2021; Combs-Schilling 1989)

means, obtained through 'going out' and in particular as a result of her relationship with a drug trafficker arrested in 2006), regardless of the fact that in each of these two families there were daughters who 'went out' to fend for themselves (the bride's cousins but also one of the groom's sisters).

The *shuha* that young women feel as a humiliation refers to the norm of not succeeding in becoming an adult, and in the case of those from popular backgrounds, of not becoming wives and mothers for lack of being able to come into one's own through an experience of work that makes them autonomous and does not bind them like that of the factory or domesticity, which they have all experienced (Cheikh 2020). This shame of 'not-becoming' is also the shameful inability of families to ensure their role in the pairing-up of girls. The weakening in practice of the scope of the virginal norm is the result of the weakening of the capacities of popular families to take charge of the marriage of their daughters (a weakening process whose history can be traced throughout the 20th century). This weakening must be taken into consideration in order to understand the phenomenon of prostitution among young women or of 'going out' in Morocco, and to understand its evolution and reconfiguration in light of each of the major economic and social transformations that have taken place in the country during colonisation and since independence. The Moroccan intimate economy, which I analyse through the case of Tangier and which encompasses all intimate and sexual practices, particularly prostitution, is an economy that replaces the economy of matrimonial alliances. In other words, the *shuha* as I analyse it here reveals the transformations of intimacy and sexuality in Morocco, which are linked to the profound changes that Moroccan society has undergone, particularly in terms of gender. The metamorphoses of the *shuha* illustrate the shift that has taken place in the modalities of pairing up: we have moved from encounters in the family setting to a normalisation of encounters in the public space, which the protagonists (young people) must then adjust to moral expectations – no matter how much they have transgressed – in order to save face.

Conclusion

Following Cyril Lemieux and Damien de Blic (2005), I would say that scandal is a 'moment of social transformation'. It puts the values and norms of society to the test. But testing these values and norms can produce a reaffirmation, a contestation of norms or both; they have already given rise to metamorphoses in the daily practices of individuals. What the sociology of scandal gains by going beyond a functionalist or strategic analysis to look at its effects is to show what scandal does, what it produces, what it creates and how it participates – with all the violence, confrontations and repression it brings – in the expression of resistance that is both emancipatory and conservative, but whose tension has allowed one thing: the formulation and visibility of sexual otherness and dissidence. The 'going out' of young women is one of these othernesses and forms of sexual dissidence.

However, in Morocco, discourse on sexuality and intimacy has never imagined the possibility of an articulation between prostitution and the sexual question. This linkage is nevertheless conceivable (and even necessary) as long as we consider prostitution – or 'going

out' and changing attitudes to sexuality – as peripheral, isolated micro phenomena which, in the case of prostitution, would only concern poor women and, in the case of moral changes, only those associated with education, diplomas, modernity, individual autonomy, work, etc. The issue of prostitution is an integral part of the sexual issue, which itself is part of the general social, economic and urban issue in Morocco today. In this sense, the sex trade, as well as sexuality and intimacy in general, must be resituated in a line of questioning that takes into account social belonging (and social class). Discussion of sexuality in Morocco has so far ignored the intersectionality of sexuality and class, or when it is taken into account, reproduces social divisions – which it would have been preferable to analyse – by assuming an 'enlightened' sexuality practiced by the dominant social groupings and an 'obscurantist', scandalous or even anomic sexuality practiced by the dominated. Conversely, there are the specificities of social class, which although increasingly mentioned, remain unanalysed and therefore minimised in an approach that focuses more on common experiences linked to gender affiliations (violence, aggression). The multiplicity of sexual practices and the complexity of the sexual empowerment process at work in Morocco require this intersectional approach.

The girls who 'go out' are in registers of deviance, transgression, illegality and marginality. However, none of these notions manage to account for the totality of the experience that I have seen: the relationships with families, which do not lead, as one might expect, to break-ups or lies; the relationships with men, which are, much more than one might think, complex relationships (amorous, corporal and monetary); the relationships with the social environment – and in the case of housing, with the neighbourhood. To understand the current state of prostitution in Morocco, it is necessary to understand much more than prostitution. It is necessary to understand all the different social relations (intimate, family, political, professional, etc.). Within this articulation of prostitution and sexuality lies marriage, or rather, to quote Jeffrey Weeks, 'frustrated marriage' (2012). We are therefore far from a conscious 'sexual liberation'. We are more simply tracing the production of intimate and sexual lives that are brought about by specific social and economic conditions and these conditions are far from new. They are part of a process of continuities rather than ruptures that spans the entire 20th century. Clearly, the processes of transformation of gender relations are marked by economic transformations.

Through the economy of prostitution, practices, desires, attitudes, identities, norms and values are revealed in the course of their transformation. Today, in Morocco, where there is much more talk about sexuality, particularly with the great transformation of forms of media coverage, criticism is increasingly heard of the amalgam between prostitution and intimate relations outside marriage – an amalgam carried by the moral order of *zina* (the Koranic concept of fornication). The penal code in turn reinforces this conflation (Cheikh 2017).

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MARCUS BANKS: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHIHAB EL KHACHAB[1]

Marcus Banks (1960-2020) was Professor of Visual Anthropology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Oxford. His untimely death has not only left his family, friends, colleagues, and students bereaved, but also left a visible gap in the Institute's intellectual and institutional life. Better known for his foundational work in visual anthropology, most notably his edited volume *Rethinking visual anthropology* (with Howard Morphy, 1997) and his book *Visual methods in social research* (2001), Marcus had wide-ranging interests throughout his career. His PhD research in Cambridge was an important contribution to the anthropology of Jainism and Jain migration, an interest culminating in his first monograph, *Organizing Jainism in India and England* (1992). Marcus also made important contributions to the anthropology of race and ethnicity, most notably in his book *Ethnicity: anthropological constructions* (1996). Later in his career, he researched archival film in India and crime scene investigators in Britain, although much work on the latter remains unpublished.

All these interests shine through this annotated bibliography, which documents and maps out Marcus Banks' intellectual contributions in anthropology. The bibliography was compiled on the basis of research into Marcus Banks' digital and physical files, with extensive online searches as well. I have helped David Zeitlyn and David Gellner to prospect, triage, and annotate Marcus' physical files to facilitate their deposit in various archives – including the Royal Anthropological Institute's film archive and the Pitt-Rivers Museum's photographic collections. The documents that did not find an institutional home are in my personal care, with permission from the Marcus Banks estate. In addition to this bibliography, there are two forthcoming posthumous edited collections of Banks' work: one is entitled *Jainism as social and visual practice: anthropological perspectives* (edited by John E. Cort, David Zeitlyn, and Chihab El Khachab, forthcoming with Primus Books in Delhi), and the other is entitled *Understanding social images: essays on visual methods and teaching anthropology* (edited by David Zeitlyn and Chihab El Khachab, forthcoming with Berghahn Books in Oxford).

Where possible, I have indicated where articles and chapters were presented prior to their publication. This choice was made, in part, to avoid appending a lengthy (and *a fortiori* incomplete) list of conference papers and keynote speeches to this bibliography. All entries in the first three sections of the bibliography are annotated, but I deemed the entries in the

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last three sections either too short or too self-explanatory to deserve further annotation. The bibliography is divided into six main sections: (1) books and edited volumes; (2) articles and book chapters; (3) selected unpublished writings; (4) film, television, and multimedia; (5) book reviews, film reviews, and short articles; and (6) interviews with Marcus Banks.

(1) Books and edited volumes

2018 (co-edited with Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes): *Visual histories of South Asia*, foreword by Chris Pinney, Delhi: Primus Books.

- This edited volume comprises numerous case studies exploring the intersection of visual culture studies and South Asian historiography. Banks co-writes a brief introduction with Motrescu-Mayes to explain the significance of visual research methods in South Asian history, and to highlight the originality of the case studies in the volume. The first chapter is a version of Banks' article on 'Slow research' (2014a), reprinted under the title, 'An archaeology of visual practice: exploring one's own archive'.

2011 (co-edited with Jay Ruby): *Made to be seen: historical perspectives on visual anthropology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- This is a landmark edited volume on the history of visual anthropology as an institutional and intellectual project. In its introduction, Banks and Ruby provide a wide-ranging view of the subfield as well as the numerous contestations around its definition. Banks and Ruby highlight how the visual has been a core concern in anthropology since its inception, and how it transcends a mere interest in ethnographic filmmaking. The contributions cover a wide range of themes in the history of visual anthropology, including textiles, the built environment, the body, photography, and indigenous media.

2010 (co-edited with Richard Vokes): *Routes and traces: anthropology, photography and the archive*, special issue of *History and Anthropology*, 21 (4).

- Banks co-writes the introduction to this special issue with Richard Vokes, under the title 'Introduction: anthropology, photography and the archive', pp. 337-349. The editors begin by noting the growing wave of studies on historical ethnographic photography in the wake of Elizabeth Edwards' edited volume, *Anthropology and photography* (1992). In a similar vein, the special issue contributors engage in debates about the nature of the ethnographic archive and the place of photography within it; the role of archives in historical narration; and the historical value of ethnographic imagery in both scientific and popular settings. Banks and Vokes are particularly interested in the visual economy of photographs, their different 'performances' in private and in public spheres, as well as the material relations between image-objects and archives.

2007a: *Using visual data in qualitative research*, London: SAGE.

- This textbook provides a short introduction to the use of images (chiefly, film and photography) in qualitative social science research. The book begins with a brief history of the use of images in the social sciences, moving on to different approaches to studying images, different visual techniques in field research, and different ways of presenting research material. This book is, in a way, a simplified version of *Visual methods in social research*.

- This book appeared as part of Uwe Flick's SAGE Qualitative Research Kit (QUARK). It had a second edition in 2018. The book was translated into Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Polish, and Portuguese (Brazil), respectively at Ediciones Morata, Weber Publication, Shin'yosha, Naukowe PWN, and Artmed Grupo A. Chapter 1 – 'The place of visual data in social research: a brief history' – is reprinted in Jason Hughes' *SAGE visual methods* (2012), pp. 81-96. The ideas outlined in this book were later presented by Banks in a series of workshops called *Building Capacity in Visual Methods* funded by the ESRC's Researcher Development Initiative (RDI) between 2007 and 2009. I have traced four such papers: one entitled 'Key skills for visual anthropology – a background paper', delivered at the University of Leeds in June 2007; a second one entitled 'Visual anthropology: image technologies in the field', delivered at the University of Westminster in July 2007 and January 2008 as well as the University of Leeds in February 2008; a third, virtually identical one, entitled 'Image technologies in the field: perspectives from visual anthropology', delivered at Wolfson College, Oxford, in July 2008; and a last one entitled 'Key skills for visual anthropology', delivered at the University of Leicester in January 2009.

2006a (co-edited with Andre Gingrich): *Neo-nationalism in Europe and beyond: perspectives from social anthropology*, Oxford: Berghahn.

- This edited volume analyses far-right neo-nationalist movements in Western Europe from an anthropological perspective. The introduction, co-written by Banks and Gingrich, outlines a definition of 'neo-nationalism' as a recent, anti-globalization, anti-immigrant variant off earlier nationalisms in Europe. The authors reassess the anthropological literature on nationalism in light of this then (relatively) recent phenomenon, with a focus on anthropology's ability to mitigate the gap between structural and agentic explanations through long-term fieldwork. Banks also contributes a chapter entitled 'Performing "neo-nationalism": some methodological notes', pp. 50-65. This chapter provides a methodological framework for anthropological studies on British neo-nationalism through the concept of 'performance'. Banks explores the tension between traditionally ambiguous definitions of 'Britishness' and the neo-nationalist equation between Britishness and whiteness, aggressive masculinity, and sexual rectitude.

- Banks' chapter (originally titled 'Performing Britishness: some methodological considerations') and all the main contributions to the volume were initially presented

in a workshop called *Neo-nationalism Inside the EU: Anthropological Perspectives*, organized by Ulrike Davis-Sulikowski and Andre Gingrich in Brussels on December 13th-16th, 2002.

2001a: *Visual methods in social research*, London: SAGE.

- This book is a classic in the interdisciplinary field of visual methods in the social sciences. Here, Banks proposes a sustained methodological reflection on the use of visual methods in qualitative social science research, with a focus on visual ethnography. The book contains seven chapters that can roughly be divided into two parts: first, an exploration of image analysis, representation, and materiality across different media (photographs, films, television, and digital media in particular); and second, a detailed appraisal of the process of preparing, executing, and presenting visual research. The book ends with a short reflection on the possibilities and challenges of visual research in the social sciences.

- A second, augmented edition was published in 2015 and co-authored by David Zeitlyn.

1997 (co-edited with Howard Morphy): *Rethinking visual anthropology*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Twenty-six years afterwards, this book remains a classic in visual anthropology. The introduction, by Banks and Morphy, marks a turning point in the subfield's movement beyond the creation and analysis of ethnographic films towards the study of wider ranging 'visual systems'. The book insists on the social and material dimension of visual systems, which became core concerns in visual anthropology in following years. Banks also contributes a chapter entitled 'Representing the bodies of the Jains', pp. 216-239. This chapter examines how the human body as well as its spiritual liberation are represented in Jainism, a religious tradition whose orthodoxy is nominally averse to visual representation.

- Earlier versions of Banks' chapter on Jain bodies were presented on three occasions: (1) at the South Asian Anthropologists' Group (SAAG) annual conference in LSE on September 19th, 1994; (2) at the *International Conference on Approaches to Jaina Studies: Philosophy, Logic, Rituals and Symbols* in the International Mahavira Jain Mission and the Centre for South Asian Studies at the University of Toronto, April 2nd, 1995; and (3) under the title 'Jains and Gender' at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research on Women (CCCRW) seminar in Oxford, November 7th, 1996. A shorter version of the chapter was published under the title 'The body in Jain art' in a volume edited by N. K. Wagle and Olle Qvarnström entitled *Approaches to Jaina studies: philosophy, logic, rituals and symbols* (Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, pp. 311-23).

1996a: *Ethnicity: anthropological constructions*, London: Routledge.

- This book synthesizes the anthropological literature on race and ethnicity to date. Banks makes a useful distinction between primordial and instrumental conceptions of

ethnicity, while showing how ethnicity has been appropriated differently in different anthropological traditions (particularly in the UK and the USA). Using a number of empirical case studies, Banks outlines the strengths and limitations of these different anthropological traditions. The book points to the rise of studies on 'hyperdiverse' migrant communities and the connections between race and ethnicity as anthropological concepts.

- This book was translated into Greek by Apostolou Photeine in 2005, under the title *Ethnotismos: anthropologikes kataskeues* (Athens: Ellenika Grammata).

1992a: *Organizing Jainism in India and England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- This book is based on Marcus Banks' PhD thesis in Cambridge, which was entitled *On the Srawacs or Jains: processes of division and cohesion among two Jain communities in India and England* (1985). It is an ethnographic comparison between Jain migrants in Leicester and their families in Gujarat, India, emphasizing the sociological principles underlying the organization of both communities: caste, class, residency, gender, and migration. Banks' monograph is an important contribution to the ethnographic study of Jainism, which had historically been the exclusive domain of Orientalists and religious studies scholars.

(2) Articles and book chapters

2022a: Good morning! Memes and the visual economy of images in contemporary India, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 14/1, 47-62.

- This article explores how older and younger middle-class men in Jamnagar use their mobile phones to stay in touch with their families and friends. Banks notes how older men barely ever take pictures, preferring to share memes via WhatsApp (and specifically inspirational 'good morning' memes). He argues that these memes, while highly crafted social media products, are used to present one's 'authentic' feelings among his interlocutors.

- This article was posthumously edited and published by Chihab El Khachab. It is based on a paper initially presented on June 8th, 2018, in a farewell symposium entitled *Art, Authenticity, Anthropology* held in honour of Thomas Fillitz at the University of Vienna. A later version of the paper was presented at Worcester College, Oxford.

2022b (co-written with Robert H. Barnes and Howard Morphy): Fear and anthropology: a view from 1995, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 14/1, 63-83.

- This article examines 'fear' as a cross-cultural category for anthropological analysis. The argument eschews the universalist position according to which 'fear' would be the same everywhere, while resisting the urge to reject it outright as a possible cross-cultural category. The article elaborates on the conceptual difficulties presented by

the cross-cultural study of fear and, in particular, the divergent semantic fields within which emic categories of 'fear' are entangled.

- This article (originally entitled 'Introduction: fear and anthropology') was meant to be an introduction to a special issue submitted to the journal *Social Analysis* in 1995, but the special issue never materialized. The introduction, hitherto unpublished, was retrieved from Marcus Banks' files by Chihab El Khachab and edited by David Zeitlyn before being published in JASO with Robert Barnes' and Howard Morphy's assent.

2020a: Films as things in colonial India, *Gesto, Imagem e Som* 5/1, 11-23. doi: 10.11606/issn.2525-3123.gis.2020.171664.

- This paper argues for a materialist perspective on film images made and consumed in colonial India. Banks starts by presenting an analysis of different ways in which film can act as 'evidence' in a historical context. The paper compares the divergent trajectories of British-made and Indian-made film material under colonialism, while arguing that the divergence masks a wider dialogue across these film forms and genres during the same period.

- This paper's Portuguese version was published as 'Filmes como coisas na Índia colonial' in *Gesto, Imagem e Som* 5/1, 11-25.

2020b: Photography, memory, and affect: two fragments from the history of an Indian city, in Peter Aronsson, Andrej Slávik and Birgitta Svensson (eds.), *Images in history: towards an (audio)visual historiography*, 73-82. Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien (Konferenser 99).

- This is a short essay reflecting on two experiences of photo-elicitation during a fieldwork visit to Jamnagar in 2017. Banks showed photographs from his own fieldwork in the 1980s and 1990s to his interlocutors (eliciting polite indifference) as well as photographs from 1920s Jamnagar (eliciting vigorous interest in a 'real past').

- This essay was initially a conference paper entitled 'Photography, memory, and affect', delivered in a conference called *(Micro)History and the Production of Images: Towards an Audiovisual Historiography* at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities in April 2017. Banks presented versions of this paper on five occasions: (1) at the 2017 annual meeting of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA) in Adelaide; (2) as a keynote speech at the 2017 annual meeting of the German Anthropological Association (DGV) in Berlin; (3) at a 2017 departmental seminar in Sussex; (4) at a 2018 Pitt-Rivers Museum Visual, Material, and Museum Anthropology seminar in Oxford; and (5) as a keynote speech at the 2019 Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) student conference in Oxford. Banks also presented a version of this paper on the occasion of János Tari's 60th birthday in 2017, which appeared in a Hungarian edited volume in 2018 under the title 'Photography in an Indian city: reflections on photo-elicitation', in Marcellina Spannraft and János Tari

(eds.), *A kultúraátörökítés médiumai*, 111-115. Budapest: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem and L'Harmattan Kiadó.

2015: De si beaux morts, in Emmanuel Grimaud, Anne-Christine Taylor, Denis Vidal and Thierry Dufrene (eds.), *Persona. Étrangement humain*, 181-185. Paris: Musée du Quai Branly-Actes Sud.

- This catalogue entry is a short meditation on the representation of the bodies of the dead, with a brief juxtaposition between Hans Holbein's painting, *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, and cadavers shown in the television series *CSI*. The piece highlights the ambiguous personhood attributed to images of dead bodies in both cases.

- A longer version of this piece, featuring more extensive ethnographic engagement with crime scene investigators in Britain, was given as a seminar paper on four occasions: as 'Forensic fictions: first thoughts on media representations of forensic science', delivered at the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA) annual conference in Delhi on April 5th, 2012; as 'Forensic fictions: the forensically dead and the beautifully dead', at the Northumbria University Centre for Forensic Science (NUCFS) in April 2013 and at the University of São Paulo in November 2013; and lastly, as 'Beautifully dead', at the *Art and Conflict Symposium* organized by Nicholas Márquez-Grant, Victoria Syme-Taylor and Verónica Cordova de la Rosa in Wolfson College, Oxford, on May 3rd, 2015.

2014a: Slow research: exploring one's own visual archive, *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia* 3/2, 57-67. doi: 10.4000/cadernosaa.222.

- This article is a personal reflection on the pace of social science research through the use of visual methods. Inspired by Sarah Pink's work on the 'slow city', Banks proposes 'slow research' as a way of diagnosing the effects of time on one's field site through the anthropologist's own visual archive. He calls for letting images 'breathe' so that their insights are not overdetermined by verbal explanation.

- Banks initially presented this paper under the title 'Slow research, or letting the image breathe' on two occasions: (1) at the *International Visual Methods Conference* organized at the University of Leeds in 2009, and (2) in an invited talk at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Delhi on April 2nd, 2012. He later presented different versions of this paper under the title 'Slow research: mining one's own archive' at the University of Birmingham's School of Social Policy in November 2014 and at a conference called *Exploring Modern South Asian History with Visual Research Methods: Theories and Practices*, convened in Cambridge by Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes and Marcus Banks himself in March 2013. He gave two connected versions of this paper under the title 'An archaeology of visual practice: mining one's own archive', once as a keynote speech at a workshop called *Mind the Gap! A National Workshop on Practice Based PhD Research in the Creative, Media and Visual Arts*, convened at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin on April 17th, 2015; and another time at the BiQUAM summer retreat

in Bremen in July 2015. A later version of this paper was given as a keynote speech in a conference called *Visual South Asia: Anthropological Explorations of Media and Culture* at the University of Dhaka in May 2017, and reprinted under the title, 'An archaeology of visual practices: exploring one's own archive' in the edited volume *Visual histories of South Asia*, co-edited by Banks and Motrescu-Mayes in 2018.

2014b: Analysing images, in Uwe Flick (ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*, London: SAGE.

- This chapter asks how and by what criteria social researchers select a subset of images for visual analysis. Banks notes how image creation is an analytical act in at least one discipline (anthropology), but in most social sciences, it is still considered a neutral act of data generation. After providing a brief history of the use of visual methods in the social sciences more broadly, Banks acknowledges the limitations of visual analysis and its occasional lack of robustness, arguing that researchers should be honest about these limitations because they indicate the 'limits of human self-knowledge itself'.

- This chapter's second half was initially delivered in a paper entitled 'What can we learn from visual methods?' at the 2003 German Anthropological Association (DGV) annual conference in Hamburg. A shorter version of the paper was later delivered at the *Introduction to Visual Methods* conference in Leeds under the title 'Key skills for visual anthropologists?' in June 2007.

2014c: Revisiting Raju, *FocaalBlog* https://perma.cc/C63C-EJEK (accessed 23 Apr 2023, originally published 18 Dec 2014).

- This reflexive blog piece asks whether Banks' first ethnographic film, *Raju and his friends* (1988c), still has ethnographic value twenty-five years after its making. Following a brief summary of the film, Banks argues that its main value lies in being the historical document of a city of Jamnagar no longer in existence. He concludes by saying that while he never made another film, his training at the National Film and Television School in 1986-1987 was very useful in his academic career because it allowed him to challenge the mainstream equation between visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking.

2013a: Unstable bodies: science, society, and visual work, *Reviews in Anthropology* 42/1, 15-37. doi: 10.1080/00938157.2013.761932.

- This review article engages with four books around the theme of how 'those we study see'. First is Caroline Wilkinson's *Forensic facial reconstruction*, moving on to Thomas Evans and Patrick Daly's *Digital archaeology*, Sarah Pink's *Visual interventions*, and Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore's *Missing bodies*. Despite their different methodological, theoretical, and disciplinary foci, Banks highlights how each book makes manifest and identifies bodies, with a focus on the politics of body visibility, the taboos surrounding the representation of certain bodies (e.g., racialized populations, children), and the practical methodological tools available to make bodies visible. Banks concludes that

the theme of 'seeing the seeing body' is not explicitly addressed by all four books, but it suggests a broader move in the social sciences from representing the objective body using film/photography to capturing the experience of the body in a phenomenological sense.

2013b: Post-authenticity: dilemmas of identity in the 20th and 21st centuries, *Anthropological Quarterly* 88/2, 481-500. (Special issue on 'Authenticity', edited by Dimitrios Theodossopoulos) doi: 10.1353/anq.2013.0018.

- This article compares claims for the repatriation of Tasmanian human remains to an 'authentic' Tasmanian community with claims made about the authenticity of early colonial film in India. Beyond nominal and expressive authenticity, Banks proposes the category of 'instrumental authenticity' as a way to understand how claims to authenticity can be, in some cases, directly motivated by political or economic gain. His analysis further compares how the National Film and Television Archive of India and the Films Division under the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting have contrasting understandings of the authenticity of early colonial film material to show how 'authenticity' is itself politicized.

- This article was initially a conference paper delivered in a panel entitled 'Cultural authenticity' convened by Dimitrios Theodossopoulos at the 2009 Association of Social Anthropologists of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth (ASA) annual conference in Bristol. Banks later presented similar arguments in a workshop entitled *Image and Object: Interdisciplinary Perspectives Now* at the Centre for Visual Studies in Oxford's History of Art Department on May 29th, 2009.

2013c: True to life: authenticity and the photographic image, in Thomas Fillitz and A. Jamie Saris (eds.), *Debating authenticity: concepts of modernity in anthropological perspective*, 160-171. Oxford: Berghahn.

- This chapter explores three cases in which different evidential standards are applied to 'authenticate' images: early Indian photography, early Indian cinema, and a film called *From the heart of the world* (1990). Banks starts from Denis Dutton's distinction between nominal and expressive authenticity, where the former means authenticity verified by external sources and the latter something which is 'true to itself'. Through his case studies, Banks shows how authenticity is established differently according to different cultural frameworks.

- This chapter was initially presented at a 2006 conference in Vienna, and later presented in Berlin under the title 'Authenticity and the image: some methodological issues', at the *EUROQUAL Conference on Qualitative Data Analysis* in September 2007. It was also given as a keynote speech in a 2009 workshop entitled *Cultura visual y arte: diálogos metodológicos a través de la imagen* [Visual culture and art: methodological dialogues through the image] at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma in Mexico.

2012a: An anthropologist in the film archives: interdisciplinary approaches, in Sarah Pink (ed.), *Advances in visual methodologies*. London: SAGE.

- This chapter argues in favour of an anthropological study of archival film, defined as edited or unedited film footage eighty years-old or older. Banks reviews possible methodologies to facilitate this exploration, dwelling on technical and content analysis methods, as well as cultural studies methods. Through a case study of his own work on film in colonial India, Banks shows how these approaches cannot individually address the paucity and historicity of archival film material, which calls for a historically attuned reading both internal to the footage and external (i.e., relying on contemporaneous documentation and press materials).

- This chapter was given twice as an invited lecture: first at the *EtnoFilm* festival held in Rovinj on May 5th, 2012; and second at the Tibetan and Himalayan Studies methods course in Oxford in November 2012, under the title 'Visual methods: In and out of the archive'. Similar arguments have been developed in an invited seminar entitled 'Adventures in the archives: anthropological perspectives' delivered at the University of Canterbury in 2012. Earlier versions of these arguments can be found in eight papers: (1) 'Documentary and other film forms in Colonial India', presented at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology's work-in-progress seminar in Oxford in Michaelmas 2000; (2) 'Documentary and other film forms in the colonial Indian "mediascape"', presented at a SOAS/Royal Anthropological Institute seminar organized by Lola Martinez in December 2000; (3) 'Films as things in Colonial India', presented at the University of Kent's anthropology seminar in 2001; (4) 'Contested nationalism and documentary film forms in Colonial and post-Colonial India', presented both at the University of Kent's departmental seminar in 2002 and the University of Dublin's departmental seminar in 2003; (5) 'Film and film form in Colonial India', presented at the *Cinema and Anthropology* workshop in Sussex in May 2005; (6) 'Looking for the nation in the archive: film, nation, and society in Colonial India', presented at the *International Institute of Sociology World Congress* in Stockholm on July 9th, 2005; (7) 'Film in Colonial India', presented at the Wolfson College South Asia Group seminar in 2007; and (8) 'Finding the field: adventures in the archives', presented at the Wolfson College President's Seminar on February 23rd, 2009.

2012b: Visual anthropology, in John Jackson (ed.), *Oxford bibliographies in anthropology*, New York: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/OBO/9780199766567-0028.

- This annotated bibliography includes a brief introduction to the field of visual anthropology, as well as annotated readings from different sections of the field. After a general overview and a list journals and references in visual anthropology, the bibliography is divided into sections on visual analysis, ethnographic film (including subsections on making film, studies of filmmakers, other forms of film/moving media), ethnographic photography (including subsections on ethnographic studies of historical photography and contemporary photography), indigenous media, visual

methodologies, and new directions. This bibliography was updated by Chihab El Khachab in February 2023.

2007b: The burden of symbols: film and representation in India, in Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor (eds.), *The cinema of Robert Gardner*. Oxford: Berg.

- This chapter reflects on the problem of representation in ethnographic film and the idea of India as an 'unknowable' location through Robert Gardner's *Forest of bliss* (1986) and the extensive commentary it has elicited. Banks notes how recent anthropological practice has moved away from empiricist modes of representation towards more phenomenological ones, akin to Gardner's film. He further notes how early representations of Indian religion on a 'realist' mode failed to capture its sensory and social complexity like later films, both fictional and non-fictional. Banks ties these observations to an analysis of Gardner's Indian corpus and argues that his evocative style leaves everyday experience open to interpretation by the viewer.

- This chapter is based on a paper given at a conference organized in honour of Robert Gardner in November 2006, held at the University of St Andrews.

2007c: Time in Hungarian ethnographic film, *Visual Anthropology Review* 23/1, 76-83. doi: 10.1525/var.2007.23.1.76.

- This article was written by János Tari and, according to a footnote, edited by Marcus Banks in a division of labour akin to the one between a director and a film editor. The article explores the constitution of a specific chronotope in Hungarian ethnographic film, tracing a brief history of ethnographic filmmaking in the country, and moving on to show how these films engaged with questions of temporality given technical and medium-specific difficulties.

2006b: Visual anthropology is not just ethnographic film: the visual as material culture, in Peter Hamilton (ed.), *Visual research methods: volume III*, 305-320. London: SAGE.

- This chapter argues for an anthropological approach to images as objects, because the visual is always already material. After discussing the differences between representational and material forms of visual evidence, Banks explores photographic materiality through numerous ethnographic themes: technique, commodification, and the body of photographic subjects.

- This chapter was initially presented in an invited ESRC-funded seminar called *Visual Evidence* held in St Antony's College, Oxford, on December 11th, 2000.

2003a: Indian Jainism as social practice at the end of the twentieth century, in Olle Qvarnström (ed.), *Jainism and early Buddhism: essays in honour of Professor P.S. Jaini*, 79-93. Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press.

- This chapter contrasts the usual historical or textual approach to Jainism with an ethnographic approach, in which Jains are studied as living and breathing believers. In

addition to highlighting the digital practices of Jain believers, the chapter situates 'Jain' religious practice in the broader social contexts in which Jains live, asking the religious studies reader to consider whether every single action undertaken by a Jain ought to be interpreted from a (textualist) religious perspective.

- This chapter is based on a paper entitled 'Social change and the "privatization" of Indian Jainism at the end of the twentieth century', which was presented in a conference called *Jainism and Early Buddhism in the Indian Cultural Context* at the University of Lund in June 1998.

2003b: Visual research methods, in Robert Miller and John Brewer (eds.), *The A-Z of social research*. London: SAGE.

- This short chapter summarizes the use of visual methods in the social sciences under three main headings: (1) the production of images (mainly through film and photography) to document society; (2) the content- and context-based examination of pre-existing representations; and (3) the co-creation of images with fieldwork participants.

- This entry was initially published as Social Research Update #11 at the University of Surrey's Department of Sociology in 1996. The entry was based on a conference paper entitled 'Visual research methods in social anthropology', presented in Bournemouth on October 27th-29th, 1995.

2000a: Views of Jain history, in Paul Dresch, Wendy James and David Parkin (eds.), *Anthropologists in a wider world: essays on field research*, 187-204. Oxford: Berghahn.

- This chapter examines two different views on Jain history, one grounded in the long timescales of sacred texts and another grounded in the ethnographic timescale of lived religious practice. The overarching argument shows how the historicity of a given subject of study – in this case, Jainism – comes into different focus at different moments in the life of a fieldworking anthropologist.

- This chapter was initially presented in 1997 and 1998 under the title 'Foreground and background in the study of Gujarati Jain history', first in UCL's anthropology department seminar, then in a workshop entitled *Fieldwork and the Passage of Time* in Oxford.

1999a (co-authored with Monica Wolfe Murray): Ethnicity and reports of the 1992-95 Bosnian conflict, in Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (eds.), *The media of conflict: war reporting and representations of ethnic violence*, 147-161. London: Zed Books.

- This chapter analyses British news media reports about the Bosnian war, with a focus on the war's so-called 'ethnic' dimension. The authors begin by describing how anthropological theories of ethnicity have shifted from primordialist to instrumentalist approaches, but that in the public sphere, both primordialism and instrumentalism are

presented in a reductionist manner. The authors mainly critique the term 'ethnic cleansing' as it was deployed in the press, first as an explanation of the conflict and later as an explanation of the Dayton Accords' failure.

1998a: Visual anthropology: image, object and interpretation, in Jon Prosser (ed.), *Image-based research: a sourcebook for qualitative researchers*, 9-23. London: Falmer Press.

- This chapter presents a brief history of visual anthropology as well as the core issues addressed by the subfield. Banks argues that visual anthropology was largely understood as the production and use of ethnographic film until the 1980s, when anthropologists have become interested in all 'visual systems' including film, photography, television, and indigenous art. This interest has led them to examine three core issues, i.e., 'veracity' in visual documentation, the analytical separation between form and meaning, and the invisibility of media technologies in practice. Banks, here again, insists on the materiality of visual technologies of production, dissemination, and viewing as a key avenue to understanding visual systems.

- In the edited volume's second edition in 2005, this chapter appears on pp. 6-19. The chapter was also translated into Czech in 2015 in an edited volume by Petra Burzová, Tomáš Hirt and Ľubomír Lupták called *Vizuální antropologie: klíčové studie a texty*.

1998b: Time-consuming technologies: using the Web and visual media in anthropological teaching and research, *Oxford University Research Archive* https://perma.cc/X7WU-24L2 (originally published on the World Wide Web at http://rsl.ox.ac.uk/isca/marcus.banks.04.html).

- This short online article summarizes some of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of new media technologies in the anthropology classroom based on Banks' practical experience. This experience includes teaching IT skills to anthropology undergraduates, setting up the online ethnographic film catalogue HADDON, and teaching a graduate visual anthropology class. Banks concludes that introducing new technologies into the classroom is more time-consuming and effortful than conventional discourses recognize, and that the interactivity allowed by using even low-end technologies is worth making them 'good to think' in anthropology.

- This article is a revised transcript of a talk given in a workshop called *New Technology: Epistemology, Pedagogy and Anthropology* at Oxford Brookes University on November 6th and 7th, 1998.

1996b: Constructing the audience through ethnography, in Peter Ian Crawford and Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson (eds.), *The construction of the viewer: media ethnography and the anthropology of audiences,* 118-134. Højbjerg, Denmark: Intervention Press.

- This chapter outlines conceptions of the audience in media studies, literary theory, and visual anthropology. Banks notes that, while visual anthropology has had little interest in audience research, scholars in media studies and literary theory tend to

keep a narrow focus on reader/viewer responses to specific film products. This approach, he argues, cannot square with how non-fiction genres such as ethnographic film are typically received. Through a case study of the response to his ethnographic film *Raju and his friends* (1988c), Banks illustrates how a more expansive attention to the filmmaker and the filmed subject as 'audiences' can better capture broader expectations about non-fiction film reception.

- This chapter was initially presented in a conference organized by the Nordic Association of Film and Anthropology (NAFA) in Iceland in 1995.

1996c: Film, in Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (eds.), *The Routledge encyclopedia of social and cultural anthropology*, 292-295. London: Routledge.

- This encyclopaedia entry begins with a distinction between the place of film in visual anthropology (as a medium of ethnographic recording) and the place of film in the art worlds of many societies. Banks proceeds to a brief history of the use of film cameras in anthropology, while saying that ethnographic films are now mostly used in teaching settings. He concludes with a section on theorizing ethnographic film production and reception.

1995: Jain ways of being, in Roger Ballard (ed.), *Desh Pardesh: the South Asian presence in Britain*, 231-50. London: Hurst.

- This chapter gives an overview of Jain social organization and practices in different geographies, beginning in England, moving through East Africa, and back to Gujarat, India. Banks, here, provides a more general-audience summary of his key ethnographic findings on Jainism from his monograph, *Organizing Jainism in India and England* (1992a).

1994a: Interactive multimedia and anthropology – a skeptical view, *Oxford University Research Archive* https://perma.cc/VKL5-MHF3 (originally published on the World Wide Web at http://rsl.ox.ac.uk/isca/marcus.banks.01.html)

- This article cautions against optimistic takes on interactive multimedia (IMM) as giving more 'choice' or 'freedom' to teachers in anthropology classrooms, because new media can be just as bounded (and binding) as books and lectures. Banks expresses particular concern about the hold of telecommunications and entertainment corporations over IMM and how their vested interests could take over the education sector, without mentioning the dangers of obsolescence (e.g., computer punch cards in his time). He urges us to think as anthropologists about new technologies and technological change, to forego IMM applications in teaching, and to concentrate on research applications using 'distributed computing environments over bounded packages for the storage and presentation of IMM data'.

- This paper was initially given at a conference called *Interactive Multimedia and Anthropology* at the University of Western England on June 1st and 2nd, 1994.

1994b: Television and anthropology: an unhappy marriage?, *Visual Anthropology* 7/1, 21-45. doi: 10.1080/08949468.1994.9966634.

- This article offers an extensive anthropological assessment of televised ethnographic film. Banks argues that much of the literature on ethnographic film since the publication of *Principles of visual anthropology* in 1975 has been uncritical. While many social science disciplines produce images, none consider the production and consumption of film as a self-conscious disciplinary imperative so much as visual anthropology. Banks focuses on Granada Television's role in creating ethnographic films through the *Disappearing World* series, as well as the BBC's *Worlds Apart* and *Under the Sun* series. His main argument is that ethnographic films should be judged based on two criteria: first, a concern with context and the interconnection of social behaviour; and second, a concern with 'discussiveness' (borrowing the term from Maurice Bloch), which he sees as 'an undermining of any single point of view' (p. 37).

- Earlier versions of this paper were published in two articles in a special issue of the French film journal *CinémAction* in 1992 (volume 64), under the title 'Les tics et l'éthique du film ethnographique' and 'Quoi de neuf à la télévision britannique?'.

1994c: Why move? Regional and long distance migrations of Gujarati Jains, in Judith Brown and Rosemary Foot (eds.), *Migration: the Asian experience*, 131-148. London: Macmillan with St Antony's College, Oxford.

- This chapter is a historical and anthropological exploration into the motives behind the migration of Gujarati Jains before, during, and after the colonial era. Banks argues that these motives are not unified across entire communities and, furthermore, that the internal divisions of Indian society are not best understood through the prism of caste. Rather, he argues that migration 'may be a contributory feature in ideological processes of caste fission and fusion' (p. 133).

- This chapter is based on a paper delivered at a seminar called *Migration – the Asian experience*, convened by Rosemary Foot at St Antony's Asian Studies Centre in November 1991.

1992b: Which films are the ethnographic films?, in Peter Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as ethnography*, 116-129. Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology.

- This chapter challenges conventional definitions of 'ethnographic film' by arguing that ethnographic-ness can be differently attributed to a given film by different people involved in making and watching it. Based on a thorough examination of the ethnographic film canon of the time, Banks argues that the ethnographic quality of ethnographic film can either be present in the intention of the filmmakers, in the event of filmmaking itself, or in the audience's reaction. Different audiences attribute different weights to each element, but ultimately, what marks a film as being

'ethnographic' is an emergent property rather than an inherent characteristic of the film.

1992c : La vie existait-elle avant la télévision?, *Journal des anthropologues* 47-48, 39-47. doi: 10.3406/jda.1992.1670.

- This article is a brief introduction to the history of ethnographic filmmaking in Britain, written as part of a special issue on visual anthropology across the world, edited by Colette Piault. Banks pushes back against the stereotype that British ethnographic filmmaking is exclusively produced by television channels such as Granada TV and the BBC, and he explains the institutional constraints surrounding the production of independent ethnographic film in Britain.

1991a: Competing to give, competing to get: Gujarati Jains in Britain, in Pnina Werbner and Muhammad Anwar (eds.), *Black and ethnic leaderships in Britain: the cultural dimensions of political action*, 226-252. London and New York: Routledge.

- This chapter examines the fundraising activities of Jain migrants in Britain, arguing that the long-term survival of a minority religious community relies on economic as well as religious commitment within the host country. Banks examines, in particular, how the Jain community managed to raise funds and gain necessary permissions to successfully build a Jain Centre in Leicester. He further details how regular and sporadic donations, largely from the Jain laity in India and England, express competing interests in the Centre's functions – and, by extension, competing wishes for the community's future in England.

- In this edited volume's second edition in 2009, Banks' chapter is on pp. 154-173.

1991b: Orthodoxy and dissent: varieties of religious belief among immigrant Gujarati Jains in Britain, in Michael Carrithers and Caroline Humphrey (eds.), *The assembly of listeners: Jains in society*, 241-260. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- This chapter examines the variety of beliefs held by Jain migrants in England, challenging the notion that there is a single community of believers that is cleaved on sectarian lines. With a focus on orthodox, heterodox, and neo-orthodox tendencies in Jainism, Banks deftly shows how sociological factors related to residency, class, and migration have a direct bearing on the kind of 'belief' held by different Jains in England.

1990a: Experience and reality in ethnographic film, *Visual Sociology Review* [*Visual Studies*] 5/2, 30-33. doi: 10.1080/14725869008583672.

- In contrast with positivist takes on ethnographic filmmaking as a way of documenting other peoples' reality, Banks analyses the cinematic conventions of ethnographic film and how they produce a realistic effect. Based on a detailed reading of the film theorist André Bazin's views on realism, Banks notes how some theorists of ethnographic film prescribe a certain view of reality (e.g., Karl Heider), even though a phenomenological

approach might better communicate a unique experience about other cultures in his view.

- This paper was originally presented in a visual sociology/anthropology conference called *Eyes Across the Water* in Amsterdam in 1989.

1990b: The seductive veracity of ethnographic film, *Society of Visual Anthropology Review* [*Visual Anthropology Review*] 6/1: 16-21. doi: 10.1525/var.1990.6.1.16.

- This article argues against 'transparent' readings of ethnographic films and in favour of a more robust theory of what happens in these films. Banks agrees with David MacDougall's search for a new kind of ethnographic film (in line with Jean Rouch). The article's final sentence crystallizes his core argument: 'The point I am trying to make is that yes, there is a sense in which ethnographic films show us reality and hence a kind of truth, but that we need a far fuller understanding of the processes of visual communication before we accept that reality as being transparent, however seductively attractive it may appear.' (p. 21)

1990c: Talking heads and moving pictures: David Byrne's *True Stories* and the anthropology of film, *Visual Anthropology* 3/1, 1-9. doi: 10.1080/08949468.1990.9966519.

- This article uses David Byrne's *True Stories* as an anthropological device to analyse unspoken assumptions about the making and watching of ethnographic films. After describing the narrative and cinematic techniques used by *True Stories* to blend fact and fiction, Banks argues that these techniques are similar to ethnographic filmmaking: for instance, how the narrative is set in a specific 'historical setting', or how Byrne's voice-over narration uses sociological clichés. Banks notes how ethnographic films allow for the idea of multiple authorship and for a focus on unique individuals (as opposed to anonymous collectives).

- This paper was initially presented in a departmental seminar in Oxford, as well as at the XIIth International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) Congress in Zagreb in 1988.

1989a: The narrative of lived experience: some Jains of India and England (Photographic essay), *Critique of Anthropology* 9/2, 65-76. doi: 10.1177/0308275X8900900205.

- This photographic essay argues against the view that minority Jains in Britain deviate from an established norm in their home country, because this norm does not even exist at home. Banks argues that the indexical and particularizing property of photographs allows for a different way of perceiving the relationship between home and abroad in Jain migration. He describes the 'architecture' of his photographs before inviting the reader to browse through a series of captioned pictures.

1989b: Seeing yourself as others see you, *Commission on Visual Anthropology (CVA) Review* Fall, 33-38.

- This article examines the film subjects' own responses to the film *Raju and his friends* (1988c), based on fieldwork screenings in 1988 after the film was shot in the summer of 1987. Banks makes interesting remarks about the divergent expectations of his Indian interlocutors as opposed to a Euro-American viewer, not least because they were directly involved in the events being filmed. The article concludes with an intriguing anecdote about the power dynamics between Banks and Raju.

- This paper was incorporated into a longer paper entitled 'Reclaiming a soul stolen by the camera', presented at a South Asian Anthropologists' Group (SAAG) meeting called *Identity: The Politics of Representation* on September 22nd, 1989.

1989c: Visual ideology: problems of subjectivity, *Visual Sociology Review* [*Visual Studies*] 4/2, 127-140. doi: 10.1080/14725868908583646.

- This article reviews contributions to the visual sociology/anthropology conference called *Eyes Across the Water*, held in Amsterdam in 1989. Banks notes the great disparity of papers presented, and the limited engagement with conceptual issues of subjectivity and visual ideology overall. However, as reviewer and synthesizer, he takes it upon himself to highlight how some conversations at the conference can move towards a more critical (if partial) notion of objectivity in the social sciences, as well as a fundamental critique of the ethnocentrism and androcentrism of visual sociology and anthropology. Banks concludes by warning against the notion that mastery over visual technology means mastery over the representation of ethnographic subjects.

- This article was reprinted in 1990 by R. B. Flaes (ed.), *Eyes across the water*, 127-140. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

1988a: Forty-minute fieldwork, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 19/3, 251-63.

- This article presents Banks' experience while shooting *Raju and his friends* (1988c) as second fieldwork (using a camera) as opposed to his first fieldwork between England and India (using traditional ethnographic methods). After dispelling the notion that ethnographic filmmaking is a less rigorous method than participant observation, Banks discusses both how film can produce anthropological theory as well as the conventional limitations on filmmaking (e.g., budget, time). He also reflects on what fieldwork subjects think about the anthropologist's fieldwork, and wider differences between his first and second fieldwork.

1988b: The non-transparency of ethnographic film, *Anthropology Today* 4/5, 2-3. doi: 10.2307/3032746.

- This article argues that mainstream ethnographic films are still tied to an observational style sustaining a functionalist view of the social world, without attending to the fundamental non-transparency of the filmic medium. This non-transparency is inherent

in production decisions about which aspects of reality to exclude and how to represent those included in the film. Banks predicts the decline of observational cinema given the bent of public television towards entertainment, but also given how visual anthropology should be more than a filmic adaptation of written ethnography.

1986: Defining division: an historical overview of Jain social organisation, *Modern Asian Studies* 20/3, 447-460. doi: 10.1017/S0026749X00007812.

- This article examines historical scholarship on Jainism by European academics, showing how Jainism was refracted through the prism of early interest in the Indian caste system and sectarian divisions. Based on his ethnographic work on Jains in Leicester and Gujarat in the 1980s, he argues that these scholarly interests provide a 'false perspective' on the Jain community's internal divisions between lay and ascetic groups.

1984: Caste, sect and property: relations in the Jain community of Jamnagar, Gujarat, *Cambridge Anthropology* 9/3, 34-49.

- This is Marcus Banks' first substantive publication, which is based on fieldwork conducted in 1983 among Jain residents in Jamnagar, Gujarat. The article is a descriptive ethnographic report on formal and informal divisions among Jains, based on caste, sect, and property type. Banks takes great care in disentangling local terms and weighing the extent to which conceptual divisions map onto practice.

- Banks was special editor of the *Cambridge Anthropology* issue in which this article appeared. He wrote a brief editorial introduction to the issue, which gathered four core articles on the ethnographic study of Jainism by Caroline Humphrey, Josephine Reynell, James Laidlaw, and Banks himself (p. 1). His article was reprinted in 1987 in N. K. Singhi (ed.), *Ideal, ideology and practice: studies in Jainism*, 180-196. Jaipur: Printwell Publishers.

(3) Selected unpublished writings

2017a: The significant banality of crime scene photography.

- This paper is the most developed account of Banks' fieldwork during his last major research project, *Forensic Visions*. The overall project was meant to be an ethnography of forensic scientists and crime scene investigators in Britain, with a specific focus on their 'skilled vision' (viz. Cristina Grasseni). This paper specifically explores how crime scene photographers seek to create 'banal' images that can both stand as dispassionate court evidence and create a visual narrative otherwise invisible in reality. These 'banal' images therefore gain evidential significance in certain social and legal contexts.

- This unpublished paper was delivered in different versions on six recorded occasions: (1) as a seminar paper at the University of Oxford's Pitt-Rivers Museum Visual, Material, and Museum Anthropology seminar in 2015; (2) as an invited seminar at the

University of Sussex's anthropology department in April 2016; (3) as an invited seminar in Stockholm in October 2016; (4) as a keynote speech at the Red Mexicana de Antropología Visual [Mexican Network for Visual Anthropology] conference in October 2016; (5) as an invited seminar at IIT Delhi's Humanities and Social Sciences Occasional Seminar in March 2017; and (6) as a conference paper in a conferenced entitled *Visual South Asia: Anthropological Explorations of Media and Culture* at the University of Dhaka in May 2017.

2004: Space and indifference in urban India.

- This paper examines the problem of 'small-town India' as diagnosed by late 20th-century metropolitan Indian writers. Although these writers decry the squalor endemic to these towns, Banks deploys his ethnographic experience in Jamnagar to present an alternative view of a small town's growth and decay throughout the 20th century. Starting with the sweeping urban reforms introduced by Jam Ranjitsinhji with British support between 1909 and 1927, Banks narrates his encounters with the city in the 1980s – a dull provincial town – and in the late 1990s – a booming construction zone with the arrival of Reliance petrochemical plants. Banks describes the social and historical construction of the city's space as well as the indifference of its inhabitants towards bigger cities, governmental projects, and poorer citizens.

- This unpublished paper was delivered in a seminar at Brunel University on March 18th, 2004. I have traced two earlier versions of the paper: one entitled 'Trade, industry, and changes in the Indian urban landscape', delivered as a research seminar in museum ethnography at the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford on October 30th, 1998; and another entitled 'Architecture and indifference in urban India', delivered in Cambridge (March 10th, 2000), Kent (March 13th, 2001), Oxford Brookes (May 22nd, 2001), and the LSE (June 22nd, 2001).

2003c: Monsterous outcomes: the marriage of ethnographic film and anthropological theory.

- This paper integrates insights from Science and Technology Studies (specifically Latour's concept of 'purification' in *We have never been modern*) into the analysis of ethnographic film. Banks loosely applies this framework to two ethnographic films from India and how they represent divinity. He concludes by saying that the way forward is not necessarily to make films differently, but to look at existing films in a different way (with more attention to relations between humans and nonhumans).

- This unpublished conference paper was initially delivered in a panel called 'Beyond Observational Cinema – again…', which was convened at the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA) Decennial Conference in Manchester on July 14th-18th, 2003. The paper's alternative title was 'In pursuit of monsters: ethnographic film, science and society'.

2001b: Image, history and perspective: seeing the ethnography of urban Indians.

- This paper uses cinematic metaphors of the 'wide-angle', 'medium shot', and 'close-up' to approach the tension between specificity and generality in ethnographic and historical writing. In particular, Banks sets out to integrate a narrative about global migration patterns among Gujarati Jains over several centuries with a narrative about a specific family's migration trajectory. Most of the paper dwells on ethnographic encounters with Raju's family, about whom Banks had made a film in 1988, and how his interlocutors narrated their migration history by constantly shifting perspective between the specific and the general, between the 'close-up' and the 'wide-angle' view.

- This unpublished paper was delivered at the *Writing Ethnography* seminar held in Corpus Christi college, Oxford, on February 21st, 2001.

c. 1997: HADDON – the online catalogue of archival ethnographic film footage, 1895-1945.

- This short article introduces the HADDON catalogue, an ESRC-funded project to create an international online database of early ethnographic film led by Marcus Banks with assistance from Tina Stoecklin. The database gathers information from film archives, ethnographic museums, and other institutions harbouring film collections of ethnographic import. This article describes the technical decisions behind creating the database and collating data, and it gives instructions about accessing and using the database.

- This article was to be proposed as a publication in *ViewFinder*, but it is based on longer seminar papers introducing the HADDON catalogue in different venues. I have traced four such papers: (1) 'HADDON', delivered at a Work in Progress seminar at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Oxford in 1996; (2) an untitled talk to Wolfson College's governing body in 1997; (3) 'HADDON: Old film, computers and anthropology', delivered at an unspecified venue in Jerusalem in 1997; and (4) 'HADDON on the Internet – Some theoretical reflections', delivered at a colloquium called *Visual Anthropology and New Technologies* during the Freiburger Film Forum in 1997.

1996d: Ethnographic film.

- This encyclopaedia entry provides a brief history of ethnographic filmmaking as an expressive and social form. Starting with the early days of filmic anthropological documentation, this history moves to the 'classical' period of observational ethnographic cinema and more recent experimental attempts to create a postmodern aesthetic.

- This entry was to be published in a Routledge encyclopaedia edited by Robert Burgess, called the *Encyclopedia of social research methods*, which never materialized.

1993a: The *tirtha pata*: contemporary Jain art and worship.

- This chapter explores Jain pilgrimage art, specifically what is known as a *tirtha pata*, which is a pictorial representation of Jain sacred sites where worshippers 'mentally migrate' to faraway shrines. Banks notes how 'Jain art' is a somewhat fraught category in ethnographic terms, as Jain scriptures and practices prescribe a certain visual austerity to the believer, but he explores *tirtha patas* as precisely one area in Jain belief where 'naturalist' pictorial representation plays a key role.

- This unpublished chapter was meant to be printed in a volume entitled *Paradigms of Indian art*, edited by Giles Tillotson at Oxford University Press (Delhi), but the volume never materialized. The initial version of the paper was given in 1993 at a conference called *Towards an Indian Aesthetics*, organized by Giles Tillotson in SOAS. The paper had four versions under different titles: (1) 'The Tirthapata: art and experience in Jain pilgrimage paintings', delivered at the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Jainism: Religion, Ritual and Art* conference in 1995; (2) 'Indian Jain art', delivered at the Pitt-Rivers Museum seminar in Hilary term 1996; (3) 'Contemporary Jain pilgrimage paintings and other "Jain" art', delivered at the South Asian History seminar in Oxford in 1998; and (4) 'Visual anthropology and the study of religions', delivered at the Mansfield Study of Religion seminar in Oxford in 2001.

1991c: The visual future of anthropology.

- This paper begins as a response to a 1990 editorial by Keith Hart on the future of anthropology, arguing that visual anthropology might provide a fruitful avenue to rethink contemporary issues in social anthropology. After a brief definition of visual anthropology, which Banks distinguishes from the production of audiovisual aids or ethnographic films, he details five ways forward for the discipline: (1) as a visual handmaiden to the core discipline of anthropology; (2) as a method of documentation; (3) as a way of reaching mass audiences through ethnographic film and television; (4) as a way of decentring ethnographic texts; and (5) as a new way of seeing anthropology in a more phenomenological or humanistic mode.

- This paper was initially delivered in a seminar series called *The Future of Anthropology* at Pembroke College, Cambridge. I have found four unpublished and undated papers in Marcus Banks' physical files in which similar ideas were discussed. Two were called 'What is visual anthropology?' and were delivered respectively in Oswiecim and at an unspecified 'Bristol video conference'. A third one was called 'Visual anthropology – a worthwhile subdiscipline?' and was likely delivered in a departmental seminar in Sussex. A final one was called 'The true story of "Disappearing World"'. Some sections in the 1991 version of 'The visual future of anthropology' have appeared verbatim in 'Television and anthropology: an unhappy marriage?' (1994b: 36-37). Some sections in the Bristol version of 'What is visual anthropology?', 'Visual anthropology – a worthwhile subdiscipline?', and 'The true story of "Disappearing World"' have appeared in two articles: 'Retreating universes and disappearing worlds' (1989e) and

'Talking heads and moving pictures' (1990c). A further section in 'The true story of "Disappearing World"' was published in 'Experience and reality in ethnographic film' (1990a).

(4) Film, TV, Multimedia

1996e (with assistance from Tina Stoecklin): HADDON, the online catalogue of archival and ethnographic film footage, 1895-1945.

- This catalogue is now back online on *The Silent Time Machine* website: https://www.silenttimemachine.net/haddon/HADD_home.html

1990-1994: *As far as Makó from Jerusalem*, 205 mins [seven-part film series], directed by János Tari, produced by Marcus Banks for the National Film and Television School (NFTS), the Hungarian Academy of Drama and Film, and the Jerusalem Film School.

1988c: *Raju and his friends*, 40 mins, directed by Marcus Banks, produced/distributed by the National Film and Television School (NFTS) and the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI).

- Banks published a study guide to accompany the film in 1990, under the title *Reading Raju: a study guide to the film 'Raju and his friends'*, Oxford: ISCA/RAI.

1987: Wycombe men talking, 18 mins, directed by Marcus Banks, National Film and Television School.

1985a: *The Jains: a religious community of India*, 25 mins, directed by Marcus Banks, James Laidlaw and Caroline Humphrey, distributed by Insight Media (New York). [Available in DVD format from c. 2006]

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2008a: Adrian Mayer, in Vered Amit (ed.), *Biographical dictionary of social and cultural anthropology*, London: Routledge.

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

MARSHALL SAHLINS. *THE NEW SCIENCE OF THE ENCHANTED UNIVERSE: AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF MOST OF HUMANITY.* PRINCETON: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS 2022, 208 P. ISBN: 9780691215921

ANDRÉS GONZÁLEZ DINAMARCA[1]

The late Professor Marshall Sahlins (1926-2021) leaves a final title, where he set out for nothing less than to 'revolutionize an obsolete anthropology' (ix). The development of a malady interrupted his original plans for the book, requiring assistance to complete it. The result is described as 'a kind of preface to the study of culture' or a 'prolegomena to a new science of the enchanted universe' (ix-x), which appears to be synonymous. Indeed, as the author will later confirm, culture among what he terms *immanentist* societies 'is not a human thing' (32), resonating with recent calls for a more-than-human anthropology.

Formally the book comprises four chapters, along with a prologue, an introduction, and an afterword. The central argument revolves around Karl Jaspers' concept of the 'Axial Age', which Sahlins employs to build by contrast the notion of *immanentist cultures*. In fact, while the 'axial civilizations' were characterized by their 'trascendentalism', or the displacement of the immanent divinity from this world to a distant heavenly realm, Sahlins contends that '[a]ll the world before and around [them] was a zone of immanence' (2). The first two chapters provide a plethora of examples from different societies to support these assertions. Despite displaying certain aspects of evolutionism and what the anthropologist Johannes Fabian terms as a 'denial of coevalness' (Engelke 2018: 75), Sahlins strongly advocates for the actuality of a myriad of *metapersons* or *metahumans*, a term he coined to designate the 'decisive agents of human weal and woe – the sources of their success, or lack thereof' (2). Moreover, reversing the Durkheiminian logic which renders the sacred as an 'idealized expression of the control [that] society exercises over its members' (22), Sahlins argues that it was 'the cosmic host of metahuman beings' (45) which gave origin to the social. He then presents in the third chapter ('Metapersons', 70-123) a comprehensive typology of these metahuman beings, including categories such as the 'masters of species and space', the ancestors, and the 'gods'. The fourth chapter acutely remarks on the hierarchical character of the metapersons' affairs, condensed in the notion of the 'Cosmic Polity'.

Throughout his career Sahlins made significant contributions to cultural anthropology, deepening our understanding of humanity. Thus, he remained a prominent figure of anthropology until the second decade of the twenty-first century, encompassing a trajectory of almost 70 years. Despite its irreducibility to any singular analysis due to its vastness, Sahlins' preceding work does inform this posthumous volume in certain respects. For instance, concepts such as metapersons and the cosmic polity, mentioned earlier, had already surfaced in a recent collaboration on political anthropology with the late David Graeber (*On kings*

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2017). More substantively, *The new science* echoes a move he executed exactly fifty years ago in *Stone Age economics* (1972), where he demonstrated that so-called hunter and gatherer societies were not historically living in abject economic conditions but rather in 'opulence'. In fact, Sahlins argues in this book that immanentist cultures have never been ignorant of the qualities of the divine. Instead, they construct their systems of knowledge from what we might term true knowledge about the world or experiential understanding. On the other hand, while in *How 'natives' think* (1995) Sahlins rejected any essentialist rendering of indigeneity – then represented by the category of the 'native' which he fiercely combatted– almost thirty years later he shows a rather different perspective, building on the opposition between 'immanentist' (or 'pre-axial') and 'transcendentalist' societies.

What Sahlins invoked in 1995 was a call for more rigour in approaching facts. However, what remains uncontested, since it is somehow taken for granted, is the question of what kind of sources and whose voices are deemed legitimate or authoritative for ethnological analysis. In fact, Sahlins appears to make a more or less explicit gesture to underscore this critique by voluntarily indicating the nationality (or 'ethnicity') of each author cited throughout the book (e.g., American, Norwegian, Scandinavian, etc.). Unsurprisingly, the result is that virtually all authors come from a Euro-American background. The only two exceptions are the earlier Omaha ethnologist, Francis La Flesche (1857-1932), and the Nigerian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (1931-2022). To be fair, the ventriloquist vocation is a signature of most anthropology, from Tylor onwards. On the other hand, in *The new science* we find an explicit and resolute call for the 'transcendentalist social science [to] adapt itself to, and take seriously, the cultural praxes of others' (176). However, besides the repetitiveness of these calls 'to take seriously the other' (a commonplace, for instance, of the so-called ontological turn), what exactly does this entail? The purposeful omission of categories such as *indigenous* or native, with the historicities they embed, plus the playful reversal invoking them only to refer to Euro-American schemes and science, underscores a lack of attunement with the concerns, aspirations, and trajectories of those implicit in the formula. The unilaterality of these representations renders problematic the author's formulation as it tends, for instance, to naturalize and universalize the (human) state through a comparison between Sumerian ancient civilization and contemporary Inuit society (137-173). Despite these potential limitations, the book constitutes an invaluable testimony to its author's mastery and an excellent starting point for a much-needed conversation within the discipline, regarding nothing less than what it is meant to become in the twenty-first century.

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

DANIEL RUIZ-SERNA. *WHEN FORESTS RUN AMOK: WAR AND ITS AFTERLIVES IN INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-COLOMBIAN TERRITORIES*. DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2023. 270 P. ISBN: 9781478019503

ANDRÉS GONZÁLEZ DINAMARCA[1]

Daniel Ruiz-Serna's *When forests run amok* sets out to explore the far-reaching effects of armed violence in Bajo Atrato (Chocó Department, Colombia), where since 1997 several Afro-Colombian and Indigenous (Emberá and Wounaan) communities faced forced displacement among other serious human rights violations. Ruiz-Serna's proposal is to go beyond the framework of human rights, as well as that of environmental damage. Drawing extensively from posthuman and relational scholarship, Ruiz-Serna argues that the assemblages of human and other-than-human selves in Bajo Atrato are a pre-condition giving rise to a territory considered to be a living entity by local communities (21). The notion of the land as a living entity was later developed by Afro-Colombian intellectuals and leaders and was legally incorporated by the Colombian state through the 'Victims' Law for Indigenous Peoples' (2011), while a ruling by the country's Constitutional Court (2016) extended its reaching by considering 'the Atrato River as a bearer of rights' (216).

A central concept linked to this understanding is that of the 'co-constitution of people and their territories' (18). According to the author this co-constitution evidences the 'ontological preeminence of relations and practices over ontologically derivative entities and substances' (ibid.). Within this framework, the effects of war in the relations composing said 'world-making' assemblages are made intelligible and traced through different instances, termed the 'afterlives of war' by the author (34, 208, 235). They go far beyond the depletion of forests, polluting of rivers, forced disappearances, and acts that lead to collective trauma. The first six chapters explore these afterlives in depth, providing further context to understand the transformations inaugurated by the widespread violence in the region. For instance, while flow and movement are essential conditions for the coming into being of this 'aquatic universe', the abandonment of rivers following forced displacement led to the impossibility of properly taking care of these bodies of water through the collective work of cleaning. Consequently, logjams (*palizadas*) have gone beyond control, now covering one-quarter of the soil. The main effect of this 'stagnation' is that territory ceases being produced since it 'does not exist before the relations and practices that constitute it' (123).

The alterations in the very properties of landscape have implied the consecutive disappearance of some presences (e.g., aquatic beings known locally as *fieras* formerly noticeable through features such as whirlpools). Conversely, emphasizing a somewhat 'generative' aspect of armed violence, Ruiz-Serna shows how new presences emerge, such as the ghosts of killed paramilitaries who did not have a proper burial. Existing threats also get amplified (e.g., an increased abundance of venomous snakes following the replacement of forests with oil-palm plantations, and man-eating jaguars trained by paramilitaries). These effects evidence the different ways in which the forests and rivers of the region have 'run amok' and become 'intermingled with armed violence' (34).

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My first ethnological approach to this region came from Donald Taylor's work (1996), which presents similar metaphorical and material reflections upon the idea of 'embarking' (Ruiz-Serna 2023: 61) in the Bajo Atrato region. However, there is no mention of this work. Although no explicit reason stands for this or other absences, they might well derive from the author's preference for not distinguishing the different ethnic groups of the region, proposing instead 'an ethnography of place' (30). However, this analytical blurring of ethnic boundaries seems to contradict the local inhabitants' own emphases, as the case of an Emberá man's death renders explicit (99-101). Yet the richness of the text undoubtedly stems from the profusion of ethnographic examples it provides, and the dialogue it fosters between them and a broad interdisciplinary literature.

The last chapter advocates for the emergence of a 'new commons' (*sensu* Rancière), aiming to overcome the limited and prescriptive multicultural paradigm of the modern state, which allegedly render the local communities' knowledge systems (and several entities' very existence) as mere 'beliefs'. Nevertheless, more than relying on Indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples' own arguments and dissents, the proposal problematically involves bypassing them, promoting for instance the 'generation of conditions through which rivers and forests […] find their place within the public sphere as persons whose interests and concerns may overcome those of the communities living near and in them' (226). In parallel, we have been comprehensively reminded throughout the book of the systematic ways in which the modern nation-sate fails to guarantee victims proper access to justice. They include governmental negligence (67), the 'always flagrant' connivance between the police and paramilitaries (102), the near total impunity of those who have committed atrocious acts of violence, and the continuity of armed violence throughout the country. In this scenario of realpolitik, where 'war becomes the continuation of political and economic neoliberal agendas by other means' (27), one wonders what the effects of a posthuman politics could possibly be, particularly having in mind recent cases of regressive politics elsewhere in South America. It becomes imperative then to bear in mind the theoretical and ethical complexities of the 'multiple-worlds thesis' (Nadasdy 2021) as these frameworks are being increasingly contested within and beyond academic environments. However, against mounting criticism of the 'ontological' anthropology, this book demonstrates why 'the most fundamental dimension of the struggles of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples in defense of their territories' (p. 235) is indeed ontological: they are 'not just defending something they have but also an entity with whom their very way of being becomes possible' (ibid.). In sum, *When forests run amok* represents both the tremendous potential and the inherent contradictions embedded in posthuman and ontological analyses in anthropology. Like transitional justice, academic work – however progressive – always risks 'simply reproduc[ing] a hegemonic approach [...] heavily embedded within colonial structures' (236).

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

MICHAEL M.J. FISCHER. *PROBING ARTS AND EMERGENT FORMS OF LIFE.* DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2023. 336 P. ISBN: 9781478019770

ARJUNVIR SINGH[1]

The role of the artist is exactly the same as the role of the lover.
If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see.
- James Baldwin

Ever since the publication of Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* (1998), art has been a subject of interest in anthropology. Art, and the ways in which it can captivate and enchant, incite conversations and build relationships, has invited the curiosity and scrutiny of anthropologists. And rightly so, as any study of human society would be incomplete without looking at the art that it produces, as it is something that can be seen as a portal into the history and culture of the place; or, as Baldwin points out, simply something that makes one conscious of things one tends to *not see*. This absence is precisely what Michael M.J. Fischer argues in *Probing arts and emergent forms of life* – the importance of art and seeing things from the perspective of the artists producing 'new forms of understandings' while not 'getting enmeshed in [the] all-too-fascinating philosophical and historical debates' (6).

Spread over eight chapters, the book explores the works of many artists from Southeast Asia and East Asia and presents them as case studies in 'artists' ethnographies', or what the artists themselves would call 'field research' (11). Through these case studies, he questions if it is possible to ethnographically study a place 'using primarily a montage of artworks and the discourse of the artists, privileging the artists rather than constantly referring to Euro-American theorists' (13-14). The examples in the book hint toward an affirmative response to the question so asked. Be it Charles Lim Yi Yong's *SEA STATES* project (chapter four), which explores the socio-political aspects of territorial water markers and shorelines in Singapore; or Ayoung Kim's video installations that discuss the struggles of Yemini refugees on Jeju Island (chapter two); or even the performance and installation arts of Zai Kuning that tend to inform people about the historical origins of the Malay community (chapter five), all illustrate that art can indeed be used para-ethnographically for anthropological purposes, especially in exposing 'things that cannot be talked about' (p. 205) in contexts that are highly politicised.

Fischer stays true to his original intent throughout the book, by placing the art and the artist at the forefront of all discussions. It is through the lens of the theories and ideologies of the artists that he entices the reader, rather than deriving an academic theory. Apart from possible art-anthropology collaborations, he also emphasises collaborations between artists themselves. He illustrates this configuration with the example of a display of artworks by Entang Wiharso and Sally Smart at Galeri Nasional Indonesia. He further complements the

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display by focusing on the curation of the show, specifically how it is designed 'like a Möbius strip', as the exit leads the viewer to the entrance making them realise 'that there is much more to see and tell' (98). With Wiharso's artworks, Fischer also focuses on the space of Asian art in the contemporary art world, presenting it as a part of 'the Asian shift in "what is happening" generally' (214). This is a particularly important discussion as Asian artists (other than the likes of Yayoi Kusama and Takashi Murakami) have been trying to establish a place in the so called 'transnational' artworld, which can indeed be highly localised in the West (Harris 2012, also see Weisenfeld 2010).

The one thing that I believe the book lacks, is visual content. I do acknowledge that the text is supplemented by several visuals, but while reading I felt like there was a need for more. Especially when the book begins with Fischer presenting an example of a short two-minute presentation he made about his research project, from which 'the only thing people remembered...was an image of Wiharso's colourful artworks that they found exciting in a stimulating and puzzling way' (9). This lack of visuals is particularly felt in the cases of exhibitions (i.e., not being able to see the space); and in discussion of Apichatpong Weerasethaku's films (chapter two), where, by and large, the use of colour is emphasised.

All things considered; the book provides enough evidence to support its argument. It challenges the notion that anthropology as a discipline is majorly based on epistemological theories and texts. It asks the reader to see value in art from an anthropological perspective and makes it an important discussion to be had within the discipline. It urges us to move away from the traditional approaches to anthropology and ethnography and to look at the possibilities that can be materialised by working with artists and art objects as potential research methods. And, in my view, it turns the reader in favour of the argument that it presents. To conclude, I leave you with one last quote: 'Rather than rehearsing the official stories of these histories, the artists lead us to conversations about cultural circulations in music, dance, and the arts as aesthetic and philosophical inquiries about the human place in the world, about the play of the affinities and differences that make up vibrant and resilient cultural tapestries and that militate against fundamentalisms, prejudices, and the turning of neighbors into alien others'. (213)

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

MICHAEL M.J. FISCHER. *AT THE PIVOT OF EAST AND WEST: ETHNOGRAPHIC, LITERARY, AND FILMIC ARTS.* DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2023. 365 P. ISBN: 9781478019893

EMILY LONG[1]

At the pivot of East and West: ethnographic, literary, and filmic arts begins with Michael M. J. Fischer's call to examine artistic works in conjunction with ethnographies to gain a holistic understanding of how fictional works can present historical truths, particularly for those whose voices were silenced or whose histories were buried and forgotten. This call to seriously consider the works of artists and creators continues throughout the book as Fischer highlights individual films and novels that encompass such topics as histories of war, coming-of-age stories, science fiction creatures, and local cuisines. The goal of such discussions is 'to reclaim literary and filmic productions as worthy of full incorporation into anthropological accounts of contemporary culture' (37). Fischer's exploration of a diverse range of films and novels creates a compelling view of modern Southeast Asia, particularly Singapore, in which historical circumstances collide with contemporary (and future) lives.

Chapter One focuses on the work of documentary filmmaker Tan Pin Pin, whose controversial work *To Singapore, with Love* (2013) was banned in Singapore due to its interviews with political exiles. Here, hinges swing back and forth between the present lives of the exiles and the historical circumstances that forced them from Singapore. This documentary, along with Tan Pin Pin's other works, weaves together Singapore's social and political history with contemporary Singaporean life by emphasising the passage of time and the creation of a national identity.

Chapters Two through Five form a section inspired by Hélène Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine* (1976) as Fischer promotes the work of female artists and feminine experiences of the world. Women's stories have often been relegated to the sidelines, but the idea of an *écriture feminine* has allowed for the personal experiences and thoughts of women to also constitute a history worth recording. Chapter Two centres on writer and filmmaker Sandi Tan and her novel *The Black Isle* (2012), a historical science fiction/ghost story that chronicles the life of Ling (later Cassandra) through migration to Singapore in the wake of the 1929 stock market crash, Japanese occupation during WWII, and Singapore as an independent state under Lee Kuan Yew. In Chapter Three, Fischer highlights the work of novelist Lydia Kwa. Kwa's novels, particularly *Pulse* ([2010] 2014), focus on the knots of personal identity and culture while playing with experiences of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. In Chapter Four, Danielle Lim's memoir *The sound of Sch* (2014), 'sch' referring to 'the first sound of schizophrenia' (150), likens mental illness to the history of illness and disease (particularly SARS and leprosy) that have played a role in Singaporean life and consciousness.

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The last chapter in this grouping of women's voices, Chapter Five, focuses on the works of Indonesian writer Laksmi Pamuntjak. Laksmi's novels *Amba: a question of red* (2014), *The birdwoman's palate* (2018), and *Fall baby* (2019) blend history and mythology with modern beliefs and ways of life in Indonesia. Through these works, Fischer argues the importance of privileging women's voices in speaking truth to historical situations where they might not have originally held importance.

Chapter Six explores the works of filmmaker Daniel Hui, focusing on politics and the creation of power both individually and societally. As a gay man, Hui sees himself – and, thus, portrays himself through his works – as an individual who is at once a victim and 'a privileged power holder' within the wider political lens of Singaporean life (210). Likewise, Chapter Seven examines the science fiction novels *The HDB murders* (Goh 2017) and *Altered straits* (Wong 2017) which represent a sense of unease about 'rigid social norms, rules, and bureaucratic procedures' that are a part of social and political life (235). Fischer argues that socially aware artists' works critique the systems they work within, alongside ethnographic writings on those locations.

Finally, in the Afterword and Exergue, Fischer backs away from novels and films to explore more broadly the social and political messages of other forms of art. In the Afterword, Fischer shares photos and descriptions of visual art pieces scattered throughout Singapore that overlap with the arguments or messages of previously discussed novels or films. In the Exergue, he touches briefly on Bangarra dance and its importance in connecting to and sharing Indigenous identity in Australia. These brief ending chapters serve to broaden the scope for the reader and make clear the possibilities for artistic and ethnographic overlap.

While Fischer's work is largely well-written, there were a few problems that stuck out to me as a reader. Fischer relies primarily on summarising the films and novels that he has chosen, but he places uneven emphasis on connecting these fictional works to the real histories of their settings. While some of the works are well situated within their cultural, historical, and political contexts, others lack certain information that might benefit the reader. Furthermore, the privileging of book or film summaries also means that Fischer's use of anthropological theories and concepts is thin in some places – though the chapters on *écriture féminine* effectively integrate gender theory. Additionally, the book as a whole might have benefited from another copy edit; infrequent misspellings of artist and politician names and inaccurate referencing of chapter content within the introduction tarnish its readability.

If nothing else, Fischer makes a compelling argument for readers to partake in a deeper exploration of films and novels created by individuals, particularly women, in Southeast Asia. His descriptions of the films and novels highlight the diversity of talent and experience that that these artists draw from. Furthermore, Fischer effectively conveys the idea that works of fiction can portray something more truthful to experiences of war, poverty, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and society than what has been written in historic annals or academic textbooks and that anthropology can benefit from taking these ideas seriously.

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

MICHAEL M. MUTHUKRISHNA. *A THEORY OF EVERYONE: WHO WE ARE, HOW WE GOT HERE, AND WHERE WE'RE GOING.* CAMBRIDGE: MIT PRESS 2023. 448 P. ISBN: 9781399810630

CAROLYN GOVER[1]

Muthukrishna's 'theory of everyone' outlines the importance of a science of culture. Our capacity to share and build upon knowledge in a collective brain, creating innovations that would be unattainable individually, has built the human society we see today. The book is as vast as it sounds, littered with references and analogies that make Muthukrishna's arguments clear, understandable and, most importantly, accessible. In fact, at times these inclusions go beyond necessity. However, Muthukrishna successfully draws links with other disciplines, both inside and outside of science. By integrating concepts in evolutionary anthropology, particularly the field of cultural evolution, with other disciplines, the book may be uniquely useful to anthropologists less familiar with the evolutionary sciences. This is key in regard to recognising the real-world applications of evolutionary anthropology. It was rather refreshing to see a popular science book claiming that 'no one thing explains everything'. His perspective as an economic psychologist who has seen the effects of the conflict and cooperation of humanity as a child, living during the civil war in Sri Lanka and through the Sandline Affair in Papua New Guinea, is particularly insightful and helps make his argument about the importance of a 'theory of everyone' more compelling.

His core argument is that the human sciences hold the potential to help us understand and solve the most fundamental problems facing our society. He proposes that the 'laws of life', namely the laws of energy, innovation, cooperation, and evolution, hold the system-level solutions required to tackle today's biggest contemporary issues such as inequality and climate change. Muthukrishna seamlessly links these laws together, providing a holistic account of how we reached today's society of fossil-fuelled energy, technological innovation and collaboration. However, as described by the law of energy, we are now facing falling energy returns as we deplete the planet of its resources. Consequently, there is less incentive to cooperate, and innovation also falls. Instead, competition between smaller, more polarised groups is favoured and we see more war, inequality, and civil unrest. Thus, we are facing a crisis in which the very laws of life are in jeopardy and society is pulled apart as a result.

Yet Muthukrishna provides an optimistic account, that these laws of life also hold the answers that may save us; by understanding how the laws of life created our intelligence, innovation, and cooperation we can break through the energy ceiling. To do this, the human sciences, which he describes as a 'young' science, need to undergo a revolution so they may be understood as fundamentally as the core principles of physics or biology. He makes this

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argument well: one thing readers are certain to take away from this book is a newfound appreciation for the importance of the human sciences.

Particularly useful is his application of these theories to propose real and actionable changes in society. For example, he argues innovating nuclear fusion is key and will require overcoming social and psychological barriers using a 'theory of everyone'. He expands on these real-life applications in the second half of the book, asking, 'Where are we going?' (211). He talks of the harm of inequality from a cultural evolution perspective, as it prevents diversity of ideas and innovation, which is becoming more important as we search for a way to tackle the falling energy ceiling. However, the book goes beyond describing the problem, making many proposals for how to use our understanding to better society.

For example, to tackle inequality he proposes a shift to land tax as the primary system. This a system-level solution which encourages productive use of land, developing or selling it to others who will better use it, disrupting the historical transfer of wealth purely on ancestry, and creating space for innovation. He argues this is a fairer capitalism. However, at times I felt Muthukrishna's opinions needed more explanation. His argument that billionaires have a place in this fairer capitalist system as their wealth is parallel to their contribution to society, fails to acknowledge the exploitation often involved in the path to these individuals becoming so rich. The book would benefit from expanding on how this 'fairer' capitalism could reduce the urgent problem of inequality. However, it was an interesting perspective, and I agree with Muthukrishna that bold and actionable change is needed towards a fairer world. I also appreciated his thoughts on the importance of open and honest science, in which discussion and disagreement are vital to progress.

Overall, Muthukrishna's 'theory of everyone' is an insightful look into how important it is to understand who we are. This understanding impacts where we are now and informs how we ensure a more prosperous and fair society in which cooperation and innovation are maintained, and resources are not so desperately fought over. The book reflects a growing recognition in the field of evolutionary anthropology, that key theories such as cultural evolution could have real-world applications and be informative for public policy. Thus, encouraging anthropologists to ask not just why their research is interesting but why it is important. Evolutionary anthropology now faces the challenge of overcoming its controversial past – rooted in Social Darwinism – and regaining the trust of the public. In this book, Muthukrishna shows a way forward. Though the book would have benefited from more discussion of the shortcomings of the field, it is nevertheless a useful read for anthropologists looking for insight into the applications of their work.

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

VANESSA GROTTI. *NURTURING THE OTHER: FIRST CONTACTS AND THE MAKING OF CHRISTIAN BODIES IN AMAZONIA*. NEW YORK: BERGHAHN BOOKS 2022. 212 P. ISBN: 9781800734586

CHO KIU CHIANG

How to deal with 'alterity' or 'the other' remains an ever-relevant inquiry as we come across strangers in diverse contexts. The persistent tendency of some to view the other as an enemy is a prevalent challenge. Within the Suriname forest, one could encounter the Akuriyo hunter-gatherers, who have been regarded by the Trio living in villages as 'wild and fierce people' and hence 'remote potential enemies' (3). However, the Trio, confronted with these enemies, feel the urge to 'bring them "help" and prayers', or 'to care for them and to nurture them' (3). Nurturing the Other encapsulates a profound exploration of 'coming to terms with enemies' (173), which need not involve confrontation or destruction but may entail 'coercion' and 'control' (126). This book can offer us valuable insights into the treatment of the other, especially enemies, in Amazonia and beyond.

The book conveys a clear message, if not a warning, that the (well-intentioned) incorporation of the other is not always positive or commendable. Notably, the communal feasts organised by the Trio, where both relatives and the unrelated (and thus 'potential enemies') are welcomed, shed light on the intricacies of social integration. Sharing manioc beer among other socialising activities is encouraged, and a temporary yet harmonious community composed of both kin and non-kin emerges. Such feasts, from which the 'collective euphoria' arises, are held regularly (59). At the same time, the author draws attention to concerns about these feasts: as the 'host attracts people and feeds them their own processed substances' as a kind of nurture, the former 'reassert[s] a form of control over the attendants', leading to the absence of 'an even and reciprocal socialisation among nonrelatives' (82).

In an even less celebratory tone, regarding everyday life outside celebrations, the author meticulously details how the Trio 'nurture the other', especially the Akuriyo, in their quest to make them 'human' (102). The Trio make contact with the Akuriyo, bring them to the village, and teach them the skills of 'managing a garden, cooking bread and making beer – three essential features of a socialising human' (105). Through Trio's endeavours to transform or even civilise the 'wild people', the author critically reflects on the idea of nurture. She succinctly states, 'domestication (or nurture)' is 'an asymmetric relationship, an asymmetry that shifts according to social contexts and scales, but that remains inherently hierarchical' (5). This relationship necessitates questioning any 'caring and "educational" aspects of exchange' (5-6) that nurture implies. To nurture the other is to assume a superior position and assign the other a subordinate status. In this unequal relationship, the nurturer purports to possess greater knowledge and more resources.

Nurture as real-life experience is not merely unequal but inequitable. The author, not 'considering this simply in terms of political domination', emphasises that the Akuriyo 'cannot be strictly understood as subordinates', as occasionally 'their powerful capabilities come into

their own' (130). The Akuriyo obtain their strength and fierceness – regain control of their bodies – only when the 'wild people' are 'rewilded'. It is difficult not to conceive of the Trio nurture of the Akuriyo as domination. However, in reading the book in its entirety, one gains the impression that the author provides a subtle critique when it comes to the Trio practice of nurture.

At the beginning of the book, the author tells the history of how the indigenous people in Amazonia were contacted and Christianised by missionaries, and that such an ostensibly religious process was considered intertwined with colonisation (14-15). Indeed, in the Trio language, *pananakiri*, which now denotes 'coastal Creole dwellers or distant foreigners', 'was originally used to refer to white-skinned colonisers (plantation owners, missionaries, etc.)' (4-5). Efforts of Christianisation are therefore colonial in nature. Throughout the book, the author juxtaposes foreign missionary works with the 'native' expeditions to the forest and the nurturing of 'wild people' by the Trio and other sedentarised, Christianised Amerindian people.

Furthermore, the book employs terms that bring to mind subjugation and slavery when describing the relationship between the nurturing Trio and the nurtured Akuriyo. This dynamic is characterised as 'mastery' and 'predatory', with the nurturer and the nurtured likened to 'captor' and 'captive' (100-101, 106). Drawing a parallel between 'Akuriyo helpers' and dogs in their respective relations to Trio households, the author highlights the similarities in their functions (e.g., hunting and generating income) and their humble and inferior inhabitation in the periphery of the society, despite the former being recognised as non-tradable humans and the latter as saleable animals (128-129). The distinction, according to the author, lies in the ability to transform into 'thoroughly humans'. The irony is that the Akuriyo are never acknowledged as fully transformed. The Trio logic seems to be that the Akuriyo are in a perpetual state of transformation, requiring constant care from the Trio. I would suggest that the author, with much sympathy and without excessive condemnation, exposes the darker facets of Trio nurturing.

In the end, the book presents an evolved perspective on the Amerindians: they 'no longer appear as the victims of the march of progress, but rather as "real people" who shape the world around them' (166). This conclusion is of course true insofar as the Trio are concerned. They perceive people and things as 'included and implicated in each other' (137), so they distribute 'things' — such as 'public names, woven artifacts, knowledge practices, or memories' — to extend the self and diffuse their influence (164). The Trio's eagerness to appropriate such items, including those belonging to the Akuriyo (141), underscores their agency, the display of which indicates, I think, in certain situations, they are not 'people without history' but people writing history, colonial or ethnocentric. Their (new) agential ways of life and domineering forms of sociality 'not just as receivers of change, but as active seizers of … opportunities' (173) are introduced to us in *Nurturing the Other*. This book merits attention not only for its empirical findings and theoretical discussions but also for the invitation to promising future studies.

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

ANDREA MUEHLEBACH. *A VITAL FRONTIER: WATER INSURGENCIES IN EUROPE*. DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2023. 274 P. ISBN: 9781478019831

ELLEN M. BURSTEIN[1]

One in four people cannot access safe drinking water. Nearly one in two people cannot access 'safely managed sanitation' (UNESCO 2023: 2). Climate change, armed conflict, economic inequality and crumbling infrastructures have fueled devastating disparities in access to water. As the world faces extreme water scarcity, can anyone truly 'own' water?

In *A Vital Frontier: Water Insurgencies in Europe,* Andrea Muehlebach, Professor of Maritime Anthropology and Cultures of Water at the University of Bremen, chronicles popular resistance to water privatization across Europe, exploring the 'frontiers' of water politics and ownership (3). In richly-detailed, ethnographic case studies across Italy, Ireland, and Germany, Muehlebach argues that contemporary resistance movements to water privatization challenge existing notions of democracy, law, property, and 'value' (33-34) – and the political and economic ideologies that sustain them. By 'conceptualizing these fault lines' where water's financialization encounters resistance as a frontier, '[she] insist[s] on financialization's contingency and volatility… at this frontier, the extraction of wealth from life is met with a resounding affirmation of life as the only form of wealth' (12). As in the Italian water movement, water is revalued as a '*bene comune* (a commons) that ought to be governed democratically and outside of the logic of profit' (47) – a life-giving resource that cannot be bought and sold as a product on the private market.

Muehlebach is an engaging and persuasive writer. Her prose integrates social and economic history, from the 19th-century waterways of Naples (40) and Berlin (108) to British colonial restrictions on Irish water access (75). Muehlebach weaves these histories with rich and vivid ethnographic encounters, from the 'meter fairies' vandalizing Ireland's water meters (88) to German parliamentary officials (117). She is persistently sympathetic to the aims and activities of the water mobilization movements, taking an 'engaged' approach to her anthropological inquiry. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner, defending the 'engaged turn' in anthropology, writes that 'to take an engaged stance does not in any way conflict with an adherence to the principles of accuracy, evidentiary support, and truth which are the basis of any kind of scholarly or scientific work' (2019: 1). Muehlebach's thoroughly researched arguments support that assertion.

Though not the central concern of her text, the resistance movements Muehlebach describes act in the shadow of the climate crisis. Climate change has dramatically escalated humanity's water crisis and the stakes of the debate over water's privatization – as well as created financial incentives for private investment in water (9). But Muehlebach reminds us that 'humans are not free to decide whether or not to use water' (17). She concludes, 'Water

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movements offer us ways to think outside of the proprietary logics wrought out of recurrent enclosure, challenging us to ask what a relation to the world as inappropriable would look like' (177). Notably, the demonstrations and political mobilizations in Italy, Ireland, and Germany occur in social and political contexts that permit political mobilization. Likewise, the resistance Muehlebach chronicles, from a practical perspective, may be ill-suited to the climate emergency, where acute crises threaten access to water. Future research might investigate alternative forms of resistance in such contexts. Nevertheless, in a world riven by socioeconomic inequality, and on a planet enduring escalating wildfires, warming temperatures, droughts and natural disasters, water mobilization efforts prod us to imagine a different future, one that protects the natural resources human activity has compromised.

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

LUCI ATTALA AND LOUISE STEEL, eds. *PLANTS MATTER: EXPLORING THE BECOMINGS OF PLANTS AND PEOPLE. 1ST ED.* CARDIFF: UNIVERSITY OF WALES PRESS 2023. 244 P. ISBN: 9781837720507

BEATRIZ MUTTER QUINDERÉ FRAGA[1]

When it comes to social science research, plants have not always mattered. Often merely part of landscape descriptions, vegetal beings are just now starting to receive in-depth scholarly attention. The edited volume *Plants matter: exploring the becomings of plants and people* (2023) is one of the most recent additions to the trend of plant research within anthropology. The book brings together an array of researchers – anthropologists, ethnobotanists, archaeologists, plant scientists, healers, and herbalists – intending to critique linguistic and epistemological structures that separate humans from plants. Despite the diversity of topics covered, all chapters have a common goal: inspired by New Materialities debates, the authors explore how humans and plants share, exchange, and co-create materials in a constant process of becoming together (2, 3).

This project is conducted in a Euro-American context, where plants are not seen as agentive or intelligent – at least not in a way similar to humans. This geographic frame is important since human/plant relations are often only studied in non-Western settings. Therefore, paying attention to the diversity of ways people in Euro-America see and relate to the vegetal world is an essential task in a time of accelerated bio-diversity loss and environmental collapse. *Plants matter*, however, does not overlook the importance of a dialogue with Indigenous knowledge to question our own understandings of plant life. Chapters 3 ('Plants as medicine in the Anthropocene', by Sarah Edwards) and 4 ('The world tree: humans, trees and creation on the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta', by Falk Parra Witte) adopt ethnographic perspectives, describing how different groups relate to plants as medicine and as kin, respectively.

But more productive is chapter 5, 'Composing with plants: discerning their call', which goes beyond an ethnobotanical perspective and is created in a collaborative effort between anthropologist Julie Laplante and Kañaa, a Baasa healer from Cameroon. Drawing on the latter's teachings, Laplante learned to hear the calling of plants to receive their guidance and cure illness. This new sensibility to vegetal materiality and faculties, when put in debate with European thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari, Emanuele Coccia, Tim Ingold, and Natasha Myers, enable the authors to conceptualise plants as fields of possibilities, where their taste, texture, and aroma are key features of their agency, which can be apprehended through close and attentive observation and conviviality. The strength of such a perspective is that 'this is a way that enables one to bring plants into academic compositions without becoming their spokesperson or turning them into objects. It seeks to notice attentionally from an increased awareness to their expressions in intimate copresence' (115).

Throughout the volume, this material and sensorial project is worked in different ways. Most chapters, however, choose to focus on the ingestion of plants, as eating is seen by multiple authors as the most intimate way to get to know them. The desire to eat certain types of grains, argues the author of chapter 2, 'The materiality of plants: plant-people

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entanglements', Marijke Van der Veen, led to the selection of mutants which could not disperse on their own, creating a complex entanglement between humans and plants of which neither can now escape. In chapter 6, 'The matter of knowing plant medicine as ecology: from vegetal philosophy and plant science to tea tasting in the Anthropocene', Guy Waddell argues that the physiological incommensurability between animals and plants can be bridged through consumption, which enables relationships (138). Seeking refuge from the COVID-19 pandemic led many to allotments and home gardens, describes Sarah Page in chapter 7, 'Escaping to the garden and tasting life', where they found a new way to interact with nature by growing their own food. Tastier and more nutritious vegetables enabled a deeper and more sensorial connection to their world. Acknowledging how plants can communicate through an often-overlooked sense – taste – is where the volume's focus on materiality shines. Rather than adhering to a view of agency, where only beings that can communicate visually or acoustically can act intelligently, this perspective elicits how plants can affect other beings and fulfil their wishes through taste and healing properties, what could be seen by others as the epitome of their subjugation.

Despite the merit of this consumption perspective and its potential to shed light on certain aspects of human/plant relations, the book's rather restricted theoretical approach at times loses sight of other forms that such relations can take. Other than ingesting, people also cultivate, own, sell, and care for plants, among others. What further theoretical insights could have been gained if more attention had been given to other ways of relating to plants? This shortfall can be identified in Laplante and Kañaa's critique of how plants were seen during the COVID-19 pandemic: 'In this current pandemic derailment, many are looking towards the vegetal. The vegetal emerges mostly as isolated molecules synthesised, unrecognisable, as part of a global biomedical tradition, already having lost sight of the plant from which they came. Plants however don't appear as lawful allies, as ways of enlivening bodies and regenerating the air we breathe, perhaps also reviving our cosmology' (128).

This appears to be a limited view of current Euro-American human/plant relations. During the pandemic, many turned to gardening and houseplants to seek refuge from the dangers that lurked outside. New social media trends began when people acquired several houseplants and started calling themselves 'plant parents', dedicating considerable time and resources to keeping such beings alive for their aesthetic, meditative, and affective potential. More than molecules to be ingested as medicine, plants did indeed become friends, children, and protectors – roles that cannot always be achieved when plants are seen solely as foodstuff or medicine. The book does try to engage with such other perspectives, especially in chapters 4, which focuses on the kinship and cosmological values of trees for the Kogi of Colombia, and 8, which explores technical and technological influences of tobacco in regions where its cultivation has been abandoned. However, such pieces do not fit well in the overarching volume and their arguments do not contribute to the book as a whole, these debates and arguments seem to have been included to add variety rather than strengthen the piece.

Such limitation is, nevertheless, small in comparison to the theoretical and epistemological advances achieved in *Plants matter*, which is a solid contribution both to New Materialities debates and social sciences' research on plants. Further, it is a shortcoming that arises mainly from its moment of publication, when theoretical engagements with plants are only burgeoning. Rather than seeing such limitation as a flaw, it should be seen as an exciting potential for anyone who wishes to work with plants that still have much more knowledge to give.

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

LISA MITCHELL. *HAILING THE STATE.* DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2023. 320 P. ISBN: 9781478018766

HARISH GOUTAM[1]

Lisa Mitchell's *Hailing the state* is a detailed, sensitive account of both state-making and statehood, as it pertains to the secession of Telangana and (as she puts it) to the state of India more broadly. Mitchell thus explores how democracy is practised in her treatment of a repertoire of mechanisms including *dharna* (sit ins), *bandhs* (shutdown strikes), the *rail roko* (railway blockades), *rāstā roko* (road blocks), and many more; practices woven into the fabric of Teluguvāru and arguably Indian politics and democracy. Significantly, Mitchell emphasises that 'hailing the state' in this way is often the last recourse taken by citizens (37, 185-186) and that just because this vernacular exists within India, does not mean such methods *only* relate to hailing the state as they can also be employed against the state (194).

Hailing the state, perhaps echoing its subject matter, is split in two, with Part I tracing the genealogies of these methods of protest and their use in compelling an audience. Part II explores the distinctions made between the political and criminal act, as determined by the state, by examining multiple mechanisms of the repertoire Mitchell alludes to at the beginning of the book.

The importance of spatial realities when hailing the state is present from the very first chapter onwards. Mitchell begins by exploring the *dharna* (sit ins) and their literal and metaphorical place within Indian democracy. Many hailing practices are partially or temporarily accepted and are designated spaces within parks, municipal property, and public areas (50). However, *dharna* can also be manipulated, moved, and sequestered in parts of the city, such as the protest square of Dharna Chowk (47). Interweaving the contemporary retelling of Dharna Chowk with a historical understanding of the method, Mitchell demonstrates how *dharna* has always been used to provoke dialogue and negotiation with the state.

In Part II, chapters on practices including alarm chain pulling, rail and *rāstā roko*, and *yātra* (journeys or pilgrimages) demonstrate the centrality of modes of movement and their role in communicating political messages. Halting the primary means of communication for much of India necessarily reverberates the message along the track or path (167). These practices are also demarcated by their supposed political significance. Given bus services are controlled by the individual states, and railways by the central government, so too was political action often bifurcated (166). Similarly, ticketless travel, and the fluidity afforded to groups who are granted it, demonstrate an acceptance of their various grievances, which Mitchell terms 'political arrival' (203-204).

In this way, the spatial reality of mechanisms to 'hail the state' (29-35) grants insight into who may utilise a given method. Mobility being integral to an industrialised society, the

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meaning of actions relating to transportation is heavily contested. Thus, alarm chain pulling (halting trains) is variously considered vulgar (158) *and* legally permissible (156). Relatedly, the second chapter introduces the concept of communicative 'style' alongside the traditional expectation for leaders to hold audience in India; where collective action operated to communicate demands to authorities, rather than topple them (81). As with the spatial accommodations of *dharna*, so called 'Grievance Days' (70-72) institutionalise 'styles' of communication, allowing for a *perception* of listening, if not its actual practice, and granting states the possibility to inscribe what airing grievances should look like. Similarly, chapter four's focus on highly organised trans-local and trans-communal general strikes (136-138) demonstrates how the East India Company demonised or ignored all but their defined 'legitimate' forms of redress, and only recognised individual actors within mass assemblies, thereby dissipating the collectivity's power (144).

Chapters two and three examine Dalit students' decade-long remonstrations to the University of Hyderabad's chief warden of hostels and academic board, and their subsequent characterisation by the media and other figures of authority as 'angry' (75), or 'uncivil' (113). Yet with little other recourse, practices like alarm chain pulling force the state to respond to demands from marginalised voices owing to their outsized spatial effect. Civility is therefore not a neutral act, but the preserve of privileged groups; '*a product of structures of authority that facilitate the recognition of political subjects and give audience to their voices…* [which, upon being recognised, provides] *the luxury of* appearing *to be more civil*' (121, emphasis in original).

The demonisation of those threatening authority naturally leads to a final repression by the state to erase collective assembly: criminalisation. Broadly comprising Part II, the classification of actions as criminal or political is an important political distinction, changing according to factors such as socioeconomic status (192), convenience to the state (163), or the degree to which actions are institutionalised and thus deemed acceptable (183-185). Therefore, *who* articulates an action is more important than *what* the action may be when characterising the perpetrator as a criminal or political agent (212). Mitchell describes this in terms of defining '*publics*', where one group is ostensibly comprised of successful political agents, and the other of labourers, thugs, and hooligans, who are thought of as unruly (205-210). Yet Mitchell's close historical reading of alarm chain pulling demonstrates how widespread this democratic practice was, from British rule to today (160-164). As such, distinguishing '*publics*' is another attempt to erase collective action and outline so-called legitimate political actors. The truth, according to Mitchell, is that democracy is ongoing, between and at elections, and through a multitude of methods which aim to 'hail the state'.

Mitchell's monograph is comprehensively researched, immersive, and a fascinating insight into the practise of democracy within Telangana and India, extensively employing both archival data and contemporary ethnography. She simultaneously centres democratic or dialogic attempts to compel an audience with the state, whilst taking care to acknowledge literature and action from those, like anarchists, who view themselves as oppositional to it (15) or even oscillate between these two modes (193).

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

LUDOVIK SLIMAK. *THE NAKED NEANDERTHAL*. LONDON: PENGUIN 2023. 208 P. ISBN: 9781802061819

KATYA HERBERG[1]

Homo neanderthalensis evidence was first found in Germany in 1856, their name literally meaning 'man from the Neander valley'. Since then, remains have been found across Europe and the Middle East, from the arctic tundra of Siberia to the coastal mountains of Israel. They have left behind more than bones: traces of their DNA subsist in *Homo sapiens*, and we have discovered tens of thousands of their flint objects, butchery marks and weapons. Palaeoanthropologist Ludovik Slimak navigates this miscellany with charm and ease, building a vivid history using his own archaeological work. Slimak takes us first through what he calls a 'boreal odyssey', an expedition into the polar latitudes where Neanderthals left collections of stone tools which he describes and interprets for us in detail. He deciphers the archaeological evidence so that every detail is made accessible.

Woven into this comprehensive exploration of the past is a philosophical story of self-consciousness. Whilst systematically dismantling almost every piece of Neanderthal art and culture the literature has provided, Slimak simultaneously builds a concept of Neanderthal aesthetics which transcends the *Sapiens* expression of ego. Even without evidence of intentional art or ritual practices, Slimak knits together a form of beauty in which the idea of self that haunts modern society sits on the periphery. It is this sort of interdisciplinary approach that makes a book so heavy on archaeological detail absorbing and engaging. Both scientific and political, Slimak tackles the extinction of *Homo neanderthalensis* as a singular event, caused not by climate change, disease, nor genetic or demographic weakness. He attributes their extinction instead to the emergence and dispersal of *Homo sapiens,* a claim which many other scholars question (Degioanni et al. 2019; Staubwasser et al. 2019; Houldcroft and Underdown 2016), pointing to 'colonialist guilt' as a reason why scientists tend to avoid this theory (chapter 6). However, this is a statement which has considerable implications. By drawing parallels with the colonisation of the American continent and the eradication of aboriginal societies, there is a danger of underplaying the severity of the atrocities committed against the native communities of the land in their systematic slaughtering and enslavement by European settlers. Whilst Neanderthals may indeed have been driven to extinction by the advance of *Homo sapiens*, this was by no means a political event in the terms we understand it now. Nevertheless, Slimak's insights are thought-provoking and may be accurate in the sense that humans tend to exonerate themselves in history, something particularly pertinent to anthropology with a still-relevant history of racism and colonialism (Diogo et al. 2023).

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This book gives a voice to Neanderthals in a new way, not as the brusque troglodytes of modern media, nor the cave-painting prodigies that some scholars want to believe existed. This species is not akin to *Homo sapiens*: they had a distinct culture and undeniable intelligence. This is a book which is moulded by questions, and Slimak does not claim to have all the answers. The truth is that we have very little to give us the responses we want. Frustrating as it is exciting, the more we find, the more we realise we do not know. It therefore takes both incredible critical thinking and imagination to see beyond the fragments of rock and bone without projecting what we hope it will all mean. Slimak dissects evidence with enthusiasm, keener to find the truth and liberate Neanderthals from the prejudices which we have imposed than he is to embellish the evidence for the sake of popular science. It is for this reason that I recommend *The naked Neanderthal* to members of an academic community that strive to conduct anthropological research ethically and robustly, rather than with the Western-tinted glasses that have resulted in decades of othering, exploitation, and alienation in the name of 'science' (Parsons 2022). Whilst his prose may be opinionated and heavy on the archaeological side, it is nevertheless a fascinating account of the Neanderthal existence and an excellent introduction to the field for those who are interested. A further commendation should be noted for David Lawson, whose translation of this text from French to English reads effortlessly and at times even poetically.

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

STÉPHANIE HOMOLA. *THE ART OF FATE CALCULATION: PRACTICING DIVINATION IN TAIPEI, BEIJING, AND KAIFENG*. NEW YORK: BERGHAHN BOOKS 2023. 374 P. ISBN: 9781800738126

LOKI HU[1]

Studies of traditional Chinese divination offer significant contributions to the study of divinatory arts in contemporary societies. Stéphanie Homola adds to this body of work with the publication of *The art of fate calculation.* This book was developed over a long period, starting from Homola's PhD studies to her ongoing anthropological studies on divinatory practices in Mainland China and Taiwan. It provides multifaced insight into the conceptions of fate calculation, and the transformations of divinatory arts within present-day Chinese societies.

The introductory chapter to this book outlines the world of Chinese divinatory practices, from the experiences of modern-day practitioners to the fictional adventures of Judge Dee (also known as Di Renjie). Homola follows a chronological sequence of field investigations (i.e., among two mainland and one Taiwanese fieldsite between 2007 and 2011: Beijing, Kaifeng, and Taipei (18)), gradually constructing detailed portraits of practitioners. This allows her to develop a nuanced understanding of the legitimisation processes and cognitive mechanisms at work in divinatory practices (18). Homola carefully provides a unique perspective on Chinese culture and history and raises questions about the role of divination in modern societies.

Following the introduction, the book is organised into five chapters and a conclusion. Homola's anthropological research began in Taiwan, focusing on the clients of divinatory services rather than the diviners. In Chapter One, Homola explores the sociocultural issues and consultation experiences among people living in Taipei. Based on the ethnographic research in Taipei (i.e., seven case studies, the sample group included one French diaspora in Taiwan and six Taiwanese), she demonstrates that the 'belief' of divination is used as a systematic framework to answer various questions in people's everyday life related to education, career, marriage, or political fate. However, clients primarily consult divinatory specialists depending on '*zhun bu zhun*' (were the predictions from divination accurate?) of the fate calculation techniques rather than '*xin bu xin*' (believe or not) in contemporary Taiwanese societies. Thus, it is not the main question of 'believe or not' that should count for Homola's ethnographic studies on divinatory practices, but what makes the consultation journeys meet the expectations of the clients and whether the clients follow their diviners' advice.

This book's second and third chapters focus more specifically on the dynamic of knowledge transmission and the development of divinatory arts in Taiwan, eight signs (*baizi*)

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and *ziwei doushu*. As a doctoral student of divinatory and religious studies in anthropology, I found much to appreciate, especially as it provides a combination of descriptive historical depth and traditional knowledge in the field of Chinese divination. Not only does Homola present a complex view of the world of divination that proves the legitimacy and rationality (science) of fate calculation through institutionalisation processes of academic disciplines, the descriptions of two primary traditional Chinese divinatory techniques (i.e., eight characters and *ziwei doushu*) also make it an invaluable guide for scholars of anthropology, religion, politics, sociology, and non-native Chinese speakers.

Having explored the role of divination in Taiwanese society, the last two chapters offer a compelling ethnographic exploration of the grassroots knowledge (*minjian*) of divinatory arts in contemporary mainland China's cities – ranging from professional to amateur practices in Beijing and Kaifeng. Here, Homola demonstrates that another aspect of the legal status of divinatory knowledge is a positive categorization in Chinese society through folk activities (204), e.g., 'luck tourism' in and around tourist sites of worship, rather than through the ideological challenges of science and superstition (*mixin*) (173). Throughout Homola's research, she highlights two contrasting ideal-types of Chinese divinatory knowledge transmission among communities in Taipei, Beijing, and Kaifeng (237), i.e., master-disciple and a dynamic of trust in friendship (*guanxi*). The processes of knowledge transmission among Chinese cities reveals the way thoughts are interpreted differently in different social contexts. Ethnographic research helps to understand a study of common human practices about divination across different sociocultural background (e.g., politics, education, and social relation).

Overall, this book explores how conceptions of fate, and the studies of fate calculation techniques are circulated to help people make better decisions in daily life in Chinese societies. However, it should not be defined as standardised divinatory knowledge as it depends on the various sociocultural realm of local customs, including legal status, conceptualization, and transmission processes. The book provides an excellent overview of Chinese divination and generates further research into the next generation (transmission of traditional divination, online divination, AI predictions). This book not only gives anthropologists a perspective on different ways to think about uncertain futures and decision-making in different human societies, but it is also suitable for anyone interested in gaining knowledge of Chinese divination or the ethnography of Chinese relationships.

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

DEBORAH A. THOMAS AND JOSEPH MASCO, eds. *SOVEREIGNTY UNHINGED: AN ILLUSTRATED PRIMER FOR THE STUDY OF PRESENT INTENSITIES, DISAVOWALS, AND TEMPORAL DERANGEMENTS.* DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS. 360 P. ISBN: 9781478019084

NATALIA LOPEZ[1]

What does sovereignty *feel* like? *Sovereignty unhinged* presents a unique exploration of the experiential dimensions of sovereignty and reconsiders this concept through a perceptual lens. This 'primer' transcends the familiar terrain of established discussions, and assumptions surrounding sovereignty, power production, and the nation-state, and instead finds its meaning through the prosaic everyday existence of the individual. Authored by a diverse array of contributors, each chapter of *Sovereignty unhinged* adds a distinct voice to this new conceptual discussion, weaving together explorations of sovereignty's presence within themes such as art, nature, love, food, and music. In highlighting the intricacies of sovereignty's everyday production and deconstruction, *Sovereignty unhinged* presents an ambitious foray into redirecting scholarly discussion to a more intense, collective, and reflective understanding of sovereignty – one that unhinges itself from traditional frameworks and engages with the full (dis)arrangement of everyday life.

This volume is divided into three sections with two media-oriented interludes designed to mix expressions of art and photography within the varied analyses of these chapters. The inaugural section, titled 'Capture/Escape', embarks on an exploration of the present-day impacts of historical phenomena and their effects on the dynamics of normative frameworks of modern-day sovereignty. These authors skillfully explore how the legacies of 'imperialism, civil war, and revolution' have unraveled and reconstructed sovereignty, and subsequently reconfigure the 'ordinary' (11). This section is capped by a series of photocollages by Leniqueca A. Welcome, designed to evoke the captured essence and feelings of 'mutual sovereign being' (96). This is a welcome start to the volume, as it includes well-needed historical context while simultaneously maintaining a vigilant focus on contemporary ruptures and anomalies.

The second section, titled 'Breaking/Making', places the reader at the center of the paradox of living within the contemporary context of both global and national sovereignty while also contemplating the possibilities of escape and the implications of existing beyond these constructs. Within these chapters, this volume's ethnographic rigor truly shines through. From service call centers and school cafeterias in India, to the industrial slaughterhouses of the United States, each author within this section has created a meticulous portrait of individuals living with the physical and mental repercussions of sovereign power, while also finding moments of revolution and remaking through community and interdependence. Lochlann Jain closes this section with an interlude illustrating the politics of

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giving, losing, and 'demanding breath' (211). While visiting several corners of the globe, this section still maintains a distinct throughline in highlighting the shared experiences, feelings, and conflicts of the sovereign human condition.

The final section, titled 'Exclusion/Embrace', is an exceptional climax to this volume. These chapters explore how, for better or worse, the feelings of living under various networks and architectures of sovereignty can be mobilized to create new social and analytical orders. Kristen L. Simmons, Kaya Naomi Williams and Danilyn Rutherford explore the implications of care, commitment, and shared feelings of loneliness and hope in creating new perspectives and methods of organization (18). Additionally, Danilyn Rutherford touches on the mobilization of rage, particularly during the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump (19). In his afterword, Michael Ralph uses the metaphor of jazz music, citing both its provocative history and its improvisational nature, to summarize this text as an innovative building block in 'tackling the predicament of sovereignty' (297).

From its content to its structure, *Sovereignty unhinged* presents a unique approach by embracing the individual's role in sovereignty. This volume clearly and convincingly argues that approaching sovereignty through the eyes and mind of the individual is not only a unique contribution to the field of anthropology, but an essential one. Through each chapter, this volume showcases unique theoretical and practical insights gained through understanding and capturing the personal affective dimensions of state and sovereign power. The editors of this volume, Deborah A. Thomas and Joseph Masco, present a variety of ethnographic foci while maintaining the volume's thematic throughline. Thomas and Masco also create complementary chapter groupings that place these sections in theoretical and analytical conversation with one another. The illustrations and photography included throughout provide a unique touch to the volume's structure and emplace the reader within their own affective introspection. While *Sovereignty unhinged* may not be perfectly suitable for readers new to anthropology, it remains a valuable and interesting read for researchers interested in innovative frameworks of sovereignty. Though this volume delivers a diverse array of case studies, it could have also benefited from an exploration into its geographical or thematic gaps in understanding the interplay of power, affect, and sovereignty. Overall, *Sovereignty unhinged* makes its case for a redefined understanding of sovereignty grounded in the personal, making it an essential read for anyone who wants to understand novel anthropological approaches to studying power and governance.

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

ANNE ALLISON. *BEING DEAD OTHERWISE*. DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2023. 256 P. ISBN: 9781478019848

NATASHA DURIE[1]

Being dead otherwise is a seminal ethnographic work on death, and a refreshing counter to the crisis narratives commonly used to describe modern Japan. Anne Allison draws on an impressive range of fieldsites, granting access to spaces from a high-tech graveyard to a futuristic death exposition, and from an unclaimed remains storage room to the disturbing aftermaths of a lonely death. The book attends to creative activities of charities, businesses, and religious organisations in response to changing demands. It also illuminates the surprising pleasure afforded from arranging one's own mortuary affairs. Allison reconceptualises what it means to be human before and after death in the context of a rapidly changing Japan.

The book focuses on three themes: managing the disconnected dead, planning for one's own death, and the role of non-intimate others in handling mortuary affairs. The first section opens with a philosophical discussion of death as both a material and abstract matter. Allison then undertakes an ambitious history of death in Japan from pre-history to the present. The subsequent chapter focuses on a convention exhibiting an array of coffins, memorials, and gravestones. Describing amusing displays of bone-shaped urns for dogs, humanoid robot priests, and stylish morticians, Allison notes how 'playfulness…need not be at odds with the subject of death' (66). From this, Allison introduces the monograph's central theoretical contribution of 'necro-animism'; the lively rituals and preparations surrounding death (108). The second section discusses the many ways that people curate their ideal 'self-death'. Without someone to care for your grave you risk becoming a 'disconnected soul', an alarming prospect for many Japanese people. In response, temples, companies, and municipalities are offering alternative 'ending plans'. Allison describes a non-profit organisation offering communal burial to customers wishing to avoid loneliness and the burdening of family with grave care. What is viewed as a crisis for some has also provided fuel for creative replacements to traditional structures. However, Iza Kavedžija's (2019) complimentary ethnography concerning elderly welfare is not mentioned. Reference to this monograph, grounded in long-term fieldwork, would enhance Allison's arguments about how people navigate happiness and responsibility in old age in Japan.

The third section, 'Departures', discusses the work of dealing with the material remains of the dead. Notably, Allison attends to the difficulties of managing 'lonely deaths', accompanying workers clearing houses where these deaths have occurred and visiting the storage room of a city hall where unclaimed remains sit on shelves (156). Whilst lonely deaths are commonly discussed on the news and in public imagination, this is a rare ethnographic insight. The final section considers the potential for technologisation and digitalisation of death

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practices. As people move further from their hometowns and ancestral graves, Allison proposes that futuristic graveyards or even digitally uploaded ancestors may close the physical and social distance between the dead and the living. This offers an interesting avenue to return to and develop with robust connections to the digital anthropology literature.

The concept of necro-animism is an adaptation of 'techno-animism' from Allison's *Millennial monsters: Japanese toys and the global imagination* (2006), referring to the healing capacities of techno-toys in a disconnected society. In the first chapter of *Being dead otherwise*, Tamagotchis are compared to the dolls given to soldiers during WW2 (43). The subsequent chapter, 'From Godzilla to the Ending Business', discusses the recent history of Japan alongside this pop-culture icon. Thus, Allison stitches her monographs together in a way that feels forced. As these toys don't appear to play a role in participants' lives or deaths (outside of novelty exposition displays), these references trivialise the topic of mortuary practices and present Japanese people as unconsciously animistic. Perhaps something other than the loaded term of 'animism' should have been chosen to describe the positivity and determination of people preparing for death.

The highlight of this monograph is in the breadth of its ethnography, giving the reader access to fascinating spaces and people relevant to death in Japan today. Allison contributes to the exciting body of literature concerning hope and creative counter-responses to loneliness, anxiety, and decline. This is an important work on modern Japan but also for the studies of end-of-life and death more generally, presenting not only other ways of being dead but also other ways of living in anticipation of death.

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JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

SASKIA WITTEBORN. *UNRULY SPEECH: DISPLACEMENT AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSGRESSION*. STANFORD: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2023. 250 P. ISBN: 9781503634305

WESLEY CHAN[1]

Saskia Witteborn's ethnography on the unruly communication practices of Uyghurs both at home and abroad has offered crucial insights into their multi-faceted struggle surrounding cultural identity, language and claims to social recognition. By highlighting the spatial character of transgressive communication practices spreading across geographical and social spaces, her ethnography serves as an important contribution to understanding the under-studied potential of proactive transnational migration in advancing contemporary political struggles.

In Chapter 1, Witteborn reflects on how transgression and limits are mutually constitutive, specifically regarding how transgressive speech enables the speaker to make visible the limits of acceptable political speech. This act creates a communicative space for immanent critique that exposes the arbitrary mechanisms of power that have hitherto remained hidden. She applies these reflections in a much more spatially dispersed context of the Uyghur community, which has continued its unruly communication practices across geographical and social spaces and co-created its national topographies and identities.

In Chapter 2, Witteborn examines the Chinese state's strategy to impose cultural assimilation with its offer of upward social mobility, which has attracted cosmopolitan Uyghur youths to relegate the preservation of their cultural identity to the private sphere of the family. She notes that in order to erase the Uyghur ethnic identity, the Chinese state has portrayed the Chinese language education as the language of collective optimisation promising socio-economic improvement, and through linguistic inequalities perpetuate the erasure of the Uyghur culture. This erasure is poignantly captured in her informant's account that '[the Chinese] want us to understand them but they don't want to understand us', exposing how hierarchies of language are interwoven with hierarchies of ethnic and social standings (65).

While older generations of Uyghur seek to preserve their cultural identities through intergenerational religious teaching and the communicative practices of oral traditions, Witteborn also reveals the generational divide evident as a younger generation of Uyghurs have turned to the promise of a modern Westernised life of celebrated individualism. This movement led to their co-optation within the Chinese state strategy of assimilation that engages them in state-sanctioned spaces of socioeconomic production and leaves cultural preservation in the public space behind. For those that seek to preserve their communicative repertoires of oral traditions, the further securitisation of Xinjiang has made many kinds of expressive identities difficult among the Uyghur population.

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In response to the challenges of self-preservation and representation, Chapters 3 and 4 shed light on the transgressive communication practices practised by the Uyghur diaspora. This group calls for political participation through human rights discourse and uses testimonio as embodied narratives of suffering to break out of their discursive erasure by the Chinese state. Overall, the book offers much-needed critical analysis of the ongoing project of cultural and social preservation by the Uyghur population and reveals the discursive significance of their unruly communication repertoire in the context of embodied surveillance and suppressed speech.

The strength of this study of communication practices among the Uyghur population lies in Witteborn's ethnographic sensitivity to the study of societies of distrust and political repression. Informed by her upbringing in East Germany, she appreciates how silence can be a meaningful reflection of society. In the introduction, Witteborn observed the verbal sanctioning and silencing among Uyghur youths who seek to utter the name 'East Turkistan', rather than the official name 'Xinjiang'. This silencing reveals the often-overlooked context of embodied surveillance and repression that existed before the imposition of digital surveillance, which has been the primary focus of Western academic literature. For instance, Witteborn references a video testimony within a re-education camp that seeks to show the larger infrastructure of violence and social engineering at work. By exploring the potential of place names as vehicles of collective belonging and beliefs, Witteborn offers valuable insights into how Uyghurs continue to cultivate communicative spaces to counterbalance transgression by the state.

Witteborn's comparative scope in documenting the domestic and diasporic discourses both inside and outside China has unearthed uncanny parallels between the discursive strategies of the Chinese state and the diasporic activists. In Chapter 2, Witteborn notes that the Chinese state has resurrected female historical figures in rewriting the history of Uyghur-Han relations to give the Uyghur identity a feminine and non-threatening appearance. In Chapter 4, Witteborn argues that transgressive speech by Uyghurs activists had to appeal to the human rights discourses in Western democracies, utilising the trope of the suffering ethnic mother to feminise their political struggle. With her comparative lens on the politics of Uyghur self-representation across geographical spaces and generations of Uyghur informants, Witteborn reveals that both discourses exclude and marginalise the increasingly cosmopolitan Uyghur youth in China that have challenged their preconceived notions of gender and traditions in search of life beyond the borders of China. In highlighting the apparent advantages and pitfalls behind strategic essentialism exercised by different parties in defining what it means to be an Uyghur, Witteborn's ethnography demonstrates the importance of studying the politics of self-representation in a fragmented landscape.

JASO Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford

ANDREA WRIGHT. *BETWEEN DREAMS AND GHOSTS: INDIAN MIGRATION AND MIDDLE EASTERN OIL*. STANFORD: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2021. 288 P. ISBN: 9781503629516

YU FURUKAWA[1]

Andrea Wright's meticulous research explores the intricate dynamics of the Indian immigrant population involved in oil production within the Gulf region. Through extensive multi-sited fieldwork involving Indian bureaucrats, recruiters, oil companies, and Indian communities, Wright compellingly illustrates the intersection of colonial, imperial, national, and neoliberal influences surrounding oil production on the experiences of Indian migrants. Her work illuminates how these structural logics shape migratory experiences and, in turn, how migrants navigate and respond to these structural constraints.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part I, spanning three chapters, Wright discusses how corporate, governmental policies and the international brand image of Indian immigrants configure the experiences of Indian immigrants migrating to the Gulf and examines their response to these configurations. Chapter 1 uncovers the Indian government's dual approach, stemming from the tension between neoliberal and colonial logic; advocating rights of movement while regulating outward mobility by invoking discourses of vulnerability. In addition to these conflicting logics, Chapter 2 demonstrates how the Indian state fosters Indian immigrant entrepreneurship to bolster India's global image within global capitalist markets. Thus, Indian immigrants to the Gulf find themselves situated within colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal structures. However, Chapter 3 showcases that this situation does not necessarily constrain these individuals within these structural factors. Instead, by creating networks with government bureaucrats, recruiting agencies and oil company managers, migrants attempt to navigate and negotiate within these structures.

Part II composed of Chapters 4 and 5, examines the significance that migrants and their families attribute to labour migration to the Gulf. Chapter 4 demonstrates that remitting or accumulating money for their daughters' or sisters' marriages is perceived, by male Indian migrants in the Gulf, as fulfilling familial obligations and showcasing their masculinity. In Chapter 5, migration is also described as a means for Indian migrants to enhance self-esteem by integrating themselves into India's modernity and national development. In one interpretation, it is safe to say that they are performing or internalizing roles imposed by the Indian state to protect India's brand image in the global market, as outlined in Part I. Becoming involved in such a national project also provides them with a sense of escape and a means to overcome the inequalities created by national immigration policies and colonial, neoliberal logic, as delineated in Part I.

Part III illustrates how colonial capitalism and neoliberal corporate practices legitimise and reinforce racialised hierarchies, along with the diffusion of self-responsibility ideology that results in limited workers' rights. Chapter 6 highlights the harsh labour conditions experienced by Indian migrants in the Gulf, characterised by their inability to organize strikes to protest current labour conditions and their isolation at labour camps. These unfair and inhumane treatments stem from conventional practices by oil companies and the British colonial government, still constraining migrant workers through the use of racialised

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hierarchies and associating oil production with national security. Chapter 7 shows how discourse on death and safety in oil production serves to create a disciplined and mobile workforce, placing responsibility for their safety on the individuals themselves. This individualised safety approach facilitates deflecting corporate liability regarding safety concerns.

The first intriguing aspect of this book lies in the metaphor of 'dreams and ghosts', through which migrants understand and explain their migratory experiences. They describe the involvement of national brand protection or engagement in capitalist oil projects as a pursuit of dreams. These dreams are built on the stories of ghosts that act as a reminder of past traditions, obligations, and histories. This juxtaposition between dreams and ghosts is indicative of a migrant's understanding of temporality. Temporality is one of the key logics and scales of both mobility and immobility (McNevin 2020). Temporality is often received as one of the governmentalities regulating human (im)mobility and as a key component shaping migrants' emotions – such as frustration and fear – during their migratory experiences. For example, being kept waiting for the visa application process discourages people from applying for it, effectively regulating migration while inducing frustration among applicants. Thus, temporarity serves as one of the important frameworks for migration analysis. Associating dreams and ghosts with future and ghosts respectively reflects on one of migrants' temporal understanding of their experiences. Notably, interpreting future temporality (dreams) through the past (ghosts) demonstrates the interconnectedness between past and future within their temporal reasoning. This interconnectedness highlights how migrants construct their temporal logic by bridging past experiences with future aspirations.

Another interesting part of the book is the interplay between structure and agency surrounding Indian migrants. It is widely acknowledged that migrants possess the agency to negotiate with structural constraints, before, during, and after migratory journeys (Castles, De Haas and Miller 2020). This dynamic was explicitly exemplified in the book, where potential Indian migrants form networks with governmental bureaucrats and recruiting agencies to enhance their chances of employment. Similarly, Indian migrants reframe their experience of being commodified in the global capitalist market and the ensuing denial of basic labour rights, by associating it with involvement in national projects and taking pride in representing India as a nation. These case studies provide valuable insights into how transnational migrants manoeuvre within and reshape global capitalism, colonial, and neoliberal logics and hierarchies. While it might seem ambitious, it would have been advantageous if the author had clarified how her work connects to discussions in the field of migration and economics. In particular, the aforementioned insights into migrant agency within structural constraints can be a potential counterpoint against functionalist approaches such as push-pull theory, which often overlooks agency-structural interaction. However, such contributions can be also articulated by potential readers and the book stands as an impressive piece of work.

Bibliography

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