

JASO-online

**Journal of the
Anthropological Society
of Oxford**

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In association with the

**School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography (University of Oxford)
and
Oxford University Anthropology Society**

New Series, Volume XII, no. 2 (2020)

JASO-online

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***Web Editor:* David Zeitlyn**

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ISSN: 2040-1876

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MARCUS BANKS

4 July 1960–22 October 2020



The untimely death of Marcus Banks, Professor of Visual Anthropology at the University of Oxford, at the age of sixty is a deep loss for anthropological communities in Britain, Europe and across the world. Over the course of a 34-year career, Marcus helped shape visual anthropology as a vibrant disciplinary sub-field, as well as making influential contributions to the use of visual methods in social research, the study of ethnicity and nationalism, and postgraduate training more generally.

Marcus studied social anthropology at Cambridge as an undergraduate and stayed on at Kings to read for a PhD. In 1986 he completed his doctoral thesis on the religious identities of two Jain communities, based on multi-sited fieldwork in two continents, and subsequently published as *Organizing Jainism in India and England* (Banks 1992). In 1987 he took up a temporary ‘demonstrator’ post at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA) in Oxford, and also studied film-making at the National Film and Television School. Two years

later he was appointed to a lectureship and remained in Oxford for the rest of his academic career.

Marcus quickly became involved in debates about the importance of theory within visual anthropology, the dangers posed by the ‘seductive veracity of ethnographic film’ (1990a) and the need for ethnographic film-makers to engage with cinematic conventions of realism (1990b). His research interests in the history and practice of visual methods within anthropology led to edited collections with Howard Morphy (Banks and Morphy 1997) and Jay Ruby (Banks and Ruby 2011), along with a special issue of *History and Anthropology* with Richard Vokes on photography and the archive (Banks and Vokes 2010). He played a leading role in developing Oxford’s specialism in visual anthropology, launching a new Master’s degree in the subject. He later oversaw its integration with the MSc in Material Anthropology, run by the Pitt Rivers Museum, creating the new MSc in Visual, Material and Museum Anthropology, which brought together different parts of the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography.

Closely interested in the technologies of visibility, both old and new, Marcus was ever curious, always learning new skills and engaging with new debates. Marcus saw the importance of all students gaining practical fieldwork experience, and during the 1990s he developed a range of pioneering courses in research methods. He became heavily involved in supporting innovations in doctoral training, both at ISCA and across the UK. In Oxford he helped doctoral students convene a series of events debating the future of research training in anthropology, including the 1998 ‘Marett Conference’ and the 2003 ‘Future Fields’ conference.

Many will remember being inspired by Marcus’s undergraduate lectures, whether on ethnicity, visual anthropology or fieldwork. They were accessible and calmly authoritative reviews of each field. Marcus would take his audience far beyond the discipline, offering capacious insights on contemporary theoretical debates, while being judicious about imposing his own perspectives. This sustained commitment to pedagogy is reflected in his writing, from his important early textbook on the anthropology of ethnicity (Banks 1996) to several editions of his books on visual methods in qualitative research (Banks 2001, 2007, 2018).

Marcus had a strong sense of the scholarly virtues that should inform academic life and university administration. He embodied and exemplified fairness, balance, and calm reflection. Marcus was endlessly generous with his time and took on a huge range of service commitments for his university and the discipline. Along with his long-standing membership of the RAI Film Committee, he was an Oxford University Proctor, and held leadership roles at Wolfson College, as well as serving as Head of the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography

from 2012 to 2016. He regularly served on ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) committees overseeing and assessing UK doctoral training programmes and made many contributions to European anthropology and visual anthropology. Marcus served on EASA's Executive Committee from 2017 to 2019, having been an EASA member since the early 2000s.

Marcus may have been a talented visual anthropologist with a rich diversity of research interests and administrative talents, but he will be most remembered for his generosity as a teacher, and his kindness and compassion. He cared genuinely about the discipline, but much more about the well-being of his students, colleagues and everyone he worked with. There are many deeply moving testaments to his wise counsel as a supervisor, teacher and mentor in the [online book of condolences](#) assembled by his college, Wolfson. Marcus's scholarly modesty is captured in his ten-word Facebook biography: 'I teach and research in social anthropology and visual anthropology'. There is so much more to say. He will be remembered as a scholar, a teacher, and a humanist.

DAVID MILLS¹

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Editor's note: Other obituaries of Prof. Banks can be found on the Wolfson College website, in *The Guardian* for 24 November 2020 and on the *Oxford Mail* website, via the following links:

www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/news/professor-marcus-banks-1960-2020

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/nov/24/marcus-banks-obituary>

[Obituary: University of Oxford professor Marcus Banks | Oxford Mail](#)

Below we reproduce an interview conducted with Prof. Banks in 2013.

**INTERVIEW WITH PROF. MARCUS BANKS, PROFESSOR OF VISUAL
ANTHROPOLOGY AND FORMER HEAD OF THE SCHOOL OF
ANTHROPOLOGY AND MUSEUM ETHNOGRAPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD¹**

Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė: Prof. Marcus Banks, I would like to ask you how you got interested in anthropology and the social sciences.

Marcus Banks: Because as a teenager, a young man, I was very interested in geology, and I went to university to be interviewed for a degree place in geology. And they said you don't have enough science in your background. But we do teach archaeology, and that's sort of the same thing: digging things up. So I said OK. But they said: you can't do archaeology by itself without anthropology. And so when I started that degree I realized I had little interest in archaeology but found anthropology fascinating. So it was an accident. I had never considered it.

R. R.-P.: You never thought about it in your childhood?

M. B.: A vague idea of archaeology as a child, but just children's fantasies about Egypt - pyramids and mummies. I didn't really know what archaeology was.

R. R.-P.: Maybe your parents had an influence on the choice of your speciality?

M. B.: No. My father was a chemist, a teacher of chemistry. My mother was just a housewife. Even today, now my parents are dead, even when I had my doctorate, my parents didn't understand what I did.

R. R.-P.: So you chose yourself.

M. B.: Yes.

R. R.-P.: Why did you choose Cambridge University for your studies? Maybe you attended a private school in your childhood? What was your preparation for Cambridge University?

M. B.: Very poor. I went to a state school and... I don't know, I just was good at school, and the headmaster of my school had been to Cambridge after the Second World War. The servicemen, maybe servicewomen, who had fought in the War... There was a

¹ *Editor's note.* Interview with Prof. Marcus Banks, conducted in Oxford on 2 May 2013 by Rasa Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė, Associate Professor, Department of Cultural Studies, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania (email: rasa.raciunaite-pauzuoliene@vdu.lt). Most of the interview was conducted in person, but the questions and responses marked with an asterisk (*) were elicited subsequently by email. The interview was subsequently published in Lithuanian in *Lithuanian Ethnology: Studies in Social Anthropology and Ethnology*, 14 (23), 237-45 (2014). I am grateful to the editor, Prof. Vytis Čiubrinskas, and Dr Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė for permission to reproduce this English version here.

scheme that certain servicemen who wanted to go to university could go for one year or two years without any entrance requirement. My headmaster had been to Cambridge and liked it. And when he saw that I was good at my exams, he suggested that I applied. I had never been in Cambridge before. So then I applied to do geology, as I said... I am very, very glad I did get to Cambridge. It's a terrific education.

R. What did you as a person get from Cambridge University? Why was it important in terms of knowledge and education?

M. B.: I discovered it was OK to be clever. My school did not have very high academic standards, so it was very difficult to be clever. When you come to Cambridge, you meet a lot of clever people who want to study. And I discovered anthropology, [which] as I said, I was not expecting. So it gave me anthropology. And I had very, very good teachers of anthropology.

R. R.-P.: Can you name some?

M. B.: Jack Goody. He was the head of the department in Cambridge University when I was a student. And my doctoral supervisor was Caroline Humphrey. Now she is retired, but she is an expert on Mongolia, on Central Asia. And I learned about museums - this was the first big thing I learned. I liked museums as a child. And Cambridge has an Archaeology and Anthropology Museum like the Pitt Rivers museum (in Oxford) here, but much smaller.

And my other doctoral supervisor, Deborah Swallow, was one of the museum curators, through whom I learned to appreciate and value material culture and got anthropological understandings of material culture. If I had gone to another university, for example, Manchester University, to do anthropology, I would never have come across material culture and museums, or not thought about them the same way back in the 1970s. And that's integral to how we teach anthropology here and how we do anthropological research here.

R. R.-P.: What did you find at Oxford University, when you came from Cambridge? What's the difference?

M. B.: The difference was – there was no undergraduate degree here. I had been an undergraduate and a graduate student at Cambridge. When I arrived here in Oxford there was just a graduate department with some anthropology teaching in Human Sciences, not very much. Then it was a much smaller department. Now it is the biggest department in the country, but I joined in 1987, and it was my first job. I finished my

PhD in 1985. I stayed in Cambridge for one year as a postdoc and then went to Film School for one year, and then I came here for my first job.

As it was a much smaller department, it was, to be honest, a little bit backward-looking, because it had such a strong presence in 1950s-60s under Evans-Pritchard. They hadn't really started looking forward after he and other members of staff retired. But over the next decade it started to recover itself. I was the youngest member of department by a very long way. All the others were near retirement age when I joined. Once it started to replace itself, the department became younger, bigger.

I discovered here a huge network of South Asian scholars, which is very good. There seemed to be a lot more South Asianists than in Cambridge. It was helpful for me to meet many people working in modern history, in sociology, anthropology. All worked in India or in South Asia more generally. I discovered migration studies, which was great, because my doctoral research was with a migrant community, but I didn't know anyone else in migration studies. It was a pleasure meeting other people working on migration. It was helpful for me thinking about my second book on ethnicity, for example. I could not have written that in Cambridge without meeting other people here who were interested in the same issues. And it is a great department, and it gives me a lot of freedom. I was able to develop my visual anthropology interests and now my forensic anthropology interests with almost complete freedom. No one tells me I can't do this, I must do that, etc.

R. R.-P.: And you didn't have such freedom at Cambridge?

M. B.: I was never employed at Cambridge. I am not sure there was such freedom as well, as I had never been in other departments. In some academic fields you really have to stick with the one thing you are hired [to do], not receiving the freedom to follow your own interests.

R. R.-P.: I have a question about the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA). What is the difference between ISCA in the past, when you came, and at present?

M. B.: It's nice. It was a very small department when I came. I think there were some six members of staff, and now with postdocs and contract researchers there are up to eighty, which is incomparable. Plus, of course, you know, ISCA has now become the home, the hub, for a much larger vision of anthropology through the School that includes science and technology studies, cognitive anthropology, migration studies, and

includes putting an anthropological understanding of all these diverse areas of social sciences together. Whereas when I joined it was just very straight, very conventional social anthropology.

R. R. P.: What changes has ISCA undergone in 25 years?

M. B.: That was gradual, I suppose. Now I look back and realize how much we have changed, but I didn't notice it happening at the time. I suppose the first big change was with Steven Vertovec. Now he is at the Max Planck Institute in Göttingen, Germany. He had a very large grant for his Transnational Communities Program. Now, that was the first very large, seriously large, external grant this department had had, which made it very confident. And he certainly brought a new way of working, working in teams, for example, rather than working as lone researchers, and having a research center dedicated to a particular topic, in this case, transnational communities, and that gave the impetus to other people think: I can have a very large grant, I can start a research center. So all the activity that you see now, to my mind, it was not necessarily caused by Steven's initial grant, but Steven's initial grant was the first sign that we could be something other than drawing our salaries, getting small grants to pay for an air fare, etc. So we could see a much bigger vision. And as a result, it has become a much more important department in the university. I think, previously it was so small and so self-contained that the university didn't take us seriously.

R. R.-P.: Could you compare your department of anthropology with the Cambridge University department?

M. B.: Cambridge is bigger in some ways – they have a bigger undergraduate programme, for example. They are already a serious part of Cambridge University. Plus they have fellows in the central Cambridge colleges, like King's College. The college links that our staff had at that time and still have to some extent today were with graduate colleges, which are historically the less powerful colleges in the Oxford collegiate system. But now we've got such a large research income ... Because of our research income we are really one of the big departments in social sciences, and they take us seriously and we work closely with the Social Sciences Division.

R. R.-P.: How did you discover visual anthropology? Could you tell something about your visual studies? You mentioned a visual school.

M. B.: Yes. After I ended my doctoral fieldwork I went back with a couple of people, my supervisor and another student, we went back to India to do another piece of fieldwork together. In fact they did the fieldwork and someone suggested to me that I

shoot some film. I'm trying now to remember how that happened, but ... I was quite close to another anthropologist in the department, Alan Macfarlane [...] He'd worked with a very famous Austrian anthropologist, who'd come to Britain, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. Von Fürer-Haimendorf had made films in India, and in Nepal. Alan Macfarlane was keen on films. I think he suggested to me, because he had a little Super-8 film camera, he said, why don't you just take this and shoot a little film on Super 8 camera. So I made a film, which we transferred to video. It wasn't very good.

But I became quite interested in film making as a process. And then the Royal Anthropological Institute advertised for positions for Film Fellows who'd be paid by a grant the Institute had been awarded by the Leverhulme Foundation, sent to the National Film and Television School to learn to become ethnographic documentary filmmakers. I applied on the basis of my little amateur film and got the Fellowship. So I went to film school for a year and trained in a proper documentary film programme at professional film school. I got to the end of the one year and realized that I wasn't ever going to be a filmmaker for various reasons, that I haven't that kind of skill or creativity, I think, but I was very fascinated by film as a medium, and visual representation more generally.

When I came here to Oxford, I met one of the leading people in the field of visual anthropology. Elizabeth Edwards was here at the time, at the Pitt Rivers Museum, an historian of anthropological photography: very influential, very important. Before I got the job here in Oxford, I hadn't realized Elizabeth Edwards was here and had these photographic interests, nor another colleague, Howard Morphy, who'd worked with the filmmaker [Ian Dunlop] in Australia during his fieldwork with Aboriginal people. And as I was interested in film we realized we could do something here. Elizabeth and I started running an option first of all, in film, and we eventually devised a master's degree in visual anthropology. So we got visual anthropology embedded in the university, where it still is. During this time I also worked a producer on some other people's films, because I knew how the business worked at that stage and could help them raise funds and act as a producer.

I then started thinking about visual representation, and how I'd like to organize a conference session, which led to a book, the book I co-edited with Howard Morphy, *Rethinking visual anthropology* (Yale, 1997). And that's where it really took off, and I realized I could spend the rest of my career working with images. So I had a big cataloguing project, where I tried to track up all the films from the UK and elsewhere that were historically important to anthropology. I then started my own research on

some of these films, shot in India during the colonial period. And so I made research trips to India to work in the archives there, and teamed up with other colleagues who work on historical film. And that kept me going till now: I've just been co-organizing a workshop in Cambridge on historical film and other images in India, so I am still working in that field.

In the last couple of years I've developed a new interest in forensic science, and science practice, and how science is visualized. I haven't really had enough time to do any proper fieldwork on that, but I've done a little fieldwork in a couple of laboratories, and had a research assistant working for me for a few months; I was in India last year doing a bit of work in the laboratory there. So I am gradually building my contacts and working out a way to make this project more visual, to look how forensic scientists use photographs, fingerprints, and DNA plots in the laboratory to make a narrative about a series of actions.

(*) R. R.-P.: Could you tell more about your HADDON project to catalogue archival ethnographic film footage at the Pitt Rivers Museum?

M. B.: You asked about the HADDON Catalogue of ethnographic film. Sadly, that is not available at the moment, for technical reasons, though a colleague at another university has a grant which we hope can be used to revive it. The Pitt Rivers Museum does not have an extensive archival film collection, but several of the films have been digitized and are online (<http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/film.html>), together with the very extensive photographic collections (<http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/photocollection.html>)

(*) R. R.-P.: What are the relationships between ISCA and the Pitt Rivers Museum? How do ISCA's anthropologists collaborate with the Pitt Rivers Museum?

M. B.: There is a very close relationship between ISCA and the Pitt Rivers Museum. Three of our colleagues – Clare Harris, Christopher Morton and Laura Peers – are Curators at the Museum and also Lecturers in the Institute, and together with our ISCA colleague Inge Daniels we all teach on the Master's programme in Visual, Material and Museum Anthropology. Most of our teaching is done in the Museum. As well as my colleagues, several of our doctoral students conduct research using or related to the Museum's collections.

(*) R. R.-P.: How do you imagine the future of ethnographic and anthropological museums, and what might be their perspectives?

M. B.: Good question. Certainly from recent work at the Pitt Rivers Museum the future seems to lie with helping museums to engage (or re-engage) with the so-called source

communities from which the museum artefacts were originally collected. The experience of my colleagues Clare Harris, Chris Morton and Laura Peers at the Museum is that working together with members of source communities on collections of objects or photographs is enriching for both parties.

R. R.-P.: How did you find Jainism? Why did you choose to research Jainism in India and England?

M. B.: That's more easily answered. I wanted to do a PhD, and I applied for funding, and initially I was going to work on pottery. I used to be a potter - you know, ceramics. And a colleague of mine, who was in the middle of his PhD, told me about a town in Nepal which is a town given over to ceramic production. And initially I thought I would study that. When I talked with people I wanted to supervise me, Caroline Humphrey and Debbie [Deborah] Swallow, they were less keen, I don't really know why, but at the time Caroline was just developing her own project on Jainism. She said, why don't you work with me on the project, so since the very early days there was a team of us working in anthropology. Caroline took on eventually three students, and we looked at different aspects of Jainism from an anthropological perspective. At the time, in the early 1980s, Jack Goody was the head of the department, and he was already worrying that there wouldn't be jobs in the higher education academic sector for all the doctoral students he was training, from the department. He encouraged us to think about other kinds of careers. One career that became appealing to me was a career working in the public museum sector in the UK, where special funding had just been announced to pay for museum curators who'd perform outreach work with ethnic minority communities.

And so I decided I could try and do the PhD I wanted to do (or the one Caroline wanted me to do), on Jainism, but instead of working in Rajasthan, where she worked, I went to Gujarat, the state to the south of Rajasthan. Many migrants in this country come from Gujarat. I went there to learn the language [so] that I could later transfer to a nonacademic position afterwards. As I said earlier, I'd already developed interests in museums anyway, which seemed to me like a perfect career. So I thought instead of just learning Gujarati, I should probably do some of my work in this country with Gujarati-speakers. And when I discovered there were migrant Jains in this country (Jains migrated from India in the late nineteenth century), I decided to do a comparison, to study how Jain migrants were making sense of Jainism outside India, which for technical reasons is quite difficult. So I ended up with a half and half study, half of my fieldwork here, half fieldwork there, in India. There was a combination of sort of being

in the right place at the right time, accident, future thinking, and it all ended up in creating this PhD package as it were. But then I got this job in higher education, and I never needed to worry about these museum jobs.

R. R.-P.: Later your research topics were ethnicity and nationalism. Why did you choose these topics?

M. B.: That's easily answered: because I'd worked with an ethnic minority group in this country, I already had been engaged with the ethnicity literature to make sense on my fieldwork experiences here in the UK. As I said, when I came to Oxford, I met other people, like Steven Vertovec, who was also interested in ethnicity, and also a lot of people who have since left Oxford. And it seemed to me that was a topic that I could develop and make my own; I was giving lectures at that time on ethnicity theory and nationalism. So I did it.

R. R.-P.: Could you tell more about your current research, funded by the John Fell Fund?

M. B.: Okay. So, as you know, there are many sociologists and some anthropologists who study science; they are not actually doing science, but they are studying scientists and how scientists make science, which has also interested me for various reasons. But there's a particular branch, a particular set of scholars working in visual anthropology who work with what is called 'expert vision' or 'skilled vision'. Certain groups of people learned to develop particular ways of seeing the world, often in a technical way, such as radiologists, for example. That interested me, too, and I realized that studying scientists and how scientists look at things could be quite interesting, but I wanted some field of activity, a fieldwork location for my study where the things scientists look at and make pictures of really matter in some sense beyond the laboratory. So pure science isn't very interesting to me, and biological science is a bit too complicated, because I don't really understand genetics properly, but I settled on forensic science, because there you've got other people, non-technical people, who need to have stories told to them about what evidence means, sometimes in material forms, sometimes in visual forms. And at that time the US drama serial *CSI* was very popular on television. Everybody was watching, everybody was talking about forensic science in the public realm. I said OK, why not study something that people are actually interested in, as supposed to studying something people aren't very interested in. So I started to study forensic science. Initially I obtained permission to work in a fingerprint laboratory for a while. And more recently I obtained Fell Fund funding, which paid for my research

assistant, who is working in a mixed forensic laboratory just outside Oxford. So it's still very early days: when I finish my work as the head of the department, I will actually do the main fieldwork for this project.

R. R.-P.: You wrote some books, two books deal with visual research methods and visual methodology, other books deal with ethnicity, nationalism, etc. Which book do you like most of all? Why do you like it?

M. B.: My first book on the Jains is the best because I've put most work into that. That was my doctorate, my PhD.

You know, it was the thing that turned me from just being a student into a professional anthropologist. Plus, although no one ever reads that book, I still think it's got some important data about the lives of Jain people. It's now very old, though. My other books, most of them, are written from secondary sources: they contain some original data but not to the same depth. My book on the Jains is the most serious piece of ethnography I've ever done, and I am quite proud of it.

R. R.-P: What are your future plans?

M. B.: To survive the next two years as the head of the department without losing my hair! And sometime in the next year or so to apply for a big grant to do the work on my forensic science project. I suppose I am nibbling at it around the edges, which is all I can do at the moment because I have two years before I leave as the head of the department, and I can only do small pieces of work. That's my plan anyway!

R. R.-P.: Thank you very much for your exciting interview.

M. B.: Not at all.

NOVELS AS ETHNOGRAPHIES:
THE CHALLENGE FOR THE ANTHROPOLOGIST AS READER

C.W. WATSON¹

Introduction

It can be taken as axiomatic that in one way or another the novel was, and is always, a commentary on the contemporary world of the intended reader.² This is true even when it is most seemingly remote from that world. Where the visibility of this commentary finds its most palpable form, however, is in the realist novel, the focus of this article, which directly challenges the reader to contrast what she knows directly, her experience, with the representation in the novel, requiring of her an extension of intellectual sympathy from her known world to that which is beyond the immediate boundaries of her experience.

When readers take up a novel written some time in the past, this task of contrasting experiences and values still continues, but it is harder, because they have to work to understand what was the implicit moral and intellectual consciousness of the first intended readers to which the novelist was making implicit reference. The conversation between readers and the novel thus takes on an added dimension, since the movement of interpreting and evaluating requires an initial appreciation of the intellectual structuring of the writer's world before it can engage with the individual arguments and insights of the particular novel being read. This to-ing and fro-ing in the reader's interpretive endeavour should sound familiar to anthropologists: it is, after all, how they follow their metier when they confront experiences 'on their surface enigmatical', as Geertz (1973: 5) puts it.

The similarity is not coincidental. Literary critics who write to identify how particular works embody 'the structure of feeling', in Raymond Williams' phrase (Williams 1965: 64, cf. Williams 1979: 159), of a time and a place are in fact working anthropologically. Whether they realize it or not, in offering their readers an account of how, through their novels, writers imagine and position themselves in their own societies, they have become ethnographers,

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² Those who may still have lingering doubts about this, or who subscribe to a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', should read Harry E. Shaw's magisterial but sometimes difficult *Narrating Reality* (1999), in which he sets out the contemporary debates on the issue. In his analysis of the novels of Austen, Scott and Eliot he convincingly demonstrates how readers engage dialogically with the novels in seeking to clarify their own positions: 'construing the world', as he puts it (Shaw 1999: 266). See also Stierle (1980).

albeit of a special kind, doing the job of explaining one intellectual world to another. Anthropologists perform the identical task using other materials: they observe the practices of everyday life, the rituals and performances of a community, and its institutional frameworks. And then they, too, try systematically to explain the rationality of what they have seen and heard to readers unfamiliar with that world. In the past they confined their observations to non-literate societies, but the 'field' of their research has changed over the last hundred years. 'Primitive', 'non-literate', 'race' and 'tribe' are no longer useful categories; furthermore, the advance of technology has meant that not only have the anthropologists' tools changed, so have the material dimensions of social life to which they need to pay attention: smart phones ubiquitously cover the globe.

In all this redirecting and refocusing of the anthropologist's gaze, too little, it seems to me, has been made of the potential of the novel as a now near-universal form; yet, as literary criticism has demonstrated, this is a resource that, interpreted carefully and critically, can yield valuable insights, equal, say, to the analysis of myth which proved so fruitful in the past.

In particular, with respect to novels written about societies with which anthropologists have become familiar through long research and residence, it is they, from their privileged positions, even more than literary critics, who should be drawing out for us the implicit understandings and interpretations of social life of which the novels are expressions.

Writing in the nineteenth century about what she hoped her novels would do, George Eliot stated that she wanted to extend the range of the reader's experience by introducing characters, situations and social classes with which the reader might be insufficiently familiar. The same wish indirectly to educate and inform and, in some cases, titillate the reader frequently seems to be the intention of non-indigenous, outsider novelists, as I shall call them, who deliberately take as their focus 'other' societies. And, as we shall see, even when indigenous, insider novelists are writing for readers in their own societies, as a novel-writing tradition develops, the evolution of their intentions follows the same trajectory as their outsider predecessors: a movement which begins with wanting to depict a range of communities and intellectual universes at the periphery of their readers' experience and moves towards an increasingly refined close analysis of those minds, which are seemingly

familiar to their readers but are explored at depth in order to surprise the reader into greater self-consciousness.

It is these novels, which represent what are, to the reader, worlds still relatively foreign, that I shall be confining myself to. In the first place, however, some ground-clearing is called for. We need to recognize that these novels go about their modes of representation in different ways depending on who the intended readers of the texts are taken to be, but even before we consider this matter, we have to clarify more sharply what it is of an ethnographic nature that the anthropologist, as a special category of reader, hopes to obtain from her reading, while stressing that it is not, on the whole, the material details of life-styles that are at issue here.

It seems possible to condense what anthropologists might reasonably expect down to three issues, each of which is open to more discussion, modification and argument than I have the space for here, but which in their schematic form will at least indicate my general position. First, the reader expects to be fully introduced to the moral universe of the characters of a novel: that is, she expects to be informed of the set of values, norms and customary practices of those characters who must be seen to be acting under the constraints of accepted social conventions, especially when the focus of the narrative is to explore the revolt against those constraints. Unless the reader feels confident that this moral universe has been adequately described in order to frame and make comprehensible the actions of the characters – and this is what verisimilitude is all about – then the novel is inevitably going to be judged to be flawed.

A second requirement is that the action of a novel be dependent on an awareness of change. At one level this can simply be a change brought about by a collision between characters who are forced to confront a difference between themselves and others in the social environment. At another level, not separate from the first, and indeed very frequently the motor or cause of it, this change in the environment is the product of large historical events, socio-economic developments or dramatically altered material circumstances. It is the credible response of the characters to change in the context of the moral universes under which they operate, and with which the reader needs to be conversant, that makes the novel open to appropriation by the reader, making it possible for it to be taken up into her own intellectual and moral discourses.

And finally – perhaps the most tendentious of the three points – the reader must be satisfied that, however eccentric and idiosyncratic the actions of the novel are and however finitely the individual temperaments have been described, the characters are representative of

a world, a collectivity of a kind, and not simply of themselves. Now I am aware that a statement like this harks back to what some would argue is the rather tired Hegelian category of the universal-particular. And I am also aware of the seeming paradox that the realist novel goes out of its way to define itself as individual rather than typical against the grand narratives of the epic and classical drama. Nonetheless, I want to insist that if a novel is to make sense to the reader to the extent that it moves significantly past the point of being entertainment and amusement, then the characters have to assume, in the reader's grasp of them, a dimension which gives them a representative status, at least at some points in the novel.³ As a rider to that I would push the argument further by saying that one purpose of criticism of the novel, though it is not the only one, must be to demonstrate the representativeness or otherwise of the characters. This would seem to me to be simply the uncontroversial demand that we judge any artistic creation by whether or not it succeeds in what it sets out to achieve.⁴ There may appear to be a circularity here: I am defining a good novel in terms of its representative function and then saying that if it fails to fulfil its function it is not a good novel; but then my argument is that, in terms of intrinsic form and its subsequent history, this function is indeed what distinguishes the novel from other literary forms.

To recap: anthropologists as readers want to see a convincing correspondence between their knowledge of the world and the reality of the novel which should comprise a moral and intellectual universe sufficiently explicated and explained (Ricoeur 1981: 157-64) to render comprehensible the dilemmas faced, the resolutions made and the actions performed by characters in the text. We need now to consider how writers satisfy their readers' demands.

Still restricting ourselves to those novels written more or less explicitly to inform the reader of what it means for individuals to be fully themselves in situations and contexts which at first sight may perplex, or at least be unfamiliar to the reader – and discounting for the moment how individual readers differ in time and space from a writer's ideal – we can

³ Nussbaum (1995: 70-2) deals briefly but cogently with the issue of whether, through the depiction of individual character, we can come to an understanding of a class or group.

⁴ On this point Booth (1987: 43), commenting on Henry James's criticisms of Flaubert for having written about uninteresting characters such as Madame Bovary, notes that James seems to have forgotten his own principle of allowing a novelist to write about what she/he wishes. 'We must grant the writer his *donnée*', says James, but then criticises Flaubert. I may be appearing to repeat James' error here, but in fact my point is not that there are some classes of people or societies which are intrinsically unsuitable for representation in the novel, but simply that the novel, certainly the realist novel, is predicated on a contract of reading, implicitly agreed upon by writer and reader, that there is a correspondence, more or less close, between the reality known to the reader and the *mise-en-scène* of the novel.

usefully distinguish three types of novel. First, there are those written by observers external to the social environment, which has been chosen as the critical focus of the novel, for the benefit of readers who are equally outsiders. Second are those written by writers who are in some sense participants or members of the social environment they describe, but who also write for outsiders. Finally, some novels are written by writers for their peers or fellow insiders. In relation to each of these categories, as we might expect, writers make different assumptions, partly with respect to the prior knowledge which their readers bring to the appreciation of the material and cultural environment of the novel. However, far more significant for our analysis here, they make assumptions in understanding the social demands made on individual characters in terms of inter-personal relationships controlled by structures of kinship, power or exchange. Decisions regarding the necessary framing of the actions of the novel inevitably also affect the degree to which the conflict or collision or dynamic of the novel, its explicandum, can be properly conveyed to the reader. Put another way, if the writer feels that her readers are more or less ignorant of the universe she intends to reveal to them, this inhibits her capacity to delve into the sophisticated nuances of dramatic situation, the details of which would be lost on the reader.⁵

The reader's assumed universe enters into consideration at another level too, since not only does the novelist need to be aware of the reader's potential ignorance, she also has to grapple with the assumptions which the reader may be bringing from her own moral universe. When readers and writers inhabit the same universe as the characters in the novel, then the problems are relatively minor, and the text can afford to indulge in a variety of sophisticated linguistic and literary devices ranging from highly wrought metaphorical usage to finely calculated irony and allusively complex reference.⁶ This last issue introduces the final point we need to note in terms of the crucial relationship between readers and writers. In all cases the novel, written and read, derives from a textual tradition, a knowledge of which the writer assumes that readers bring to their reading. That is, the writer assumes an awareness of different kinds of story-telling tied to one or other of the many such existing within any one

⁵ This question of what significance one should attach to notions of the ideal reader (Booth 1987: 140; Holub 1984; Jauss 1982: 20-45) lies at the heart of reception theory. Suleiman (1980) provides a useful summary.

⁶ The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, very much aware of this issue, made a deliberate decision to abandon ignorant readers to their own devices and consequently, rather than write in English for Anglophone readers who would need continual explanations of linguistic and cultural references in the text, he has made a point of writing in Gikuyu (Ngugi 1985). This has consequently meant that when his novels are translated into English his readers have to work hard to pick up the necessary cues, as reviewers of his novel *Wizard of the Crow* have noted (Van der Vlies: 2006, Gurnah: 2007).

community of readers and listeners. Thus a reader and listener are assumed to have an ability to evaluate the elements in the story-telling and the overall composition which those elements are working to construct.⁷ In other words, a knowledge of literary conventions is taken for granted. As we know, things can go remarkably wrong when the conventions are misunderstood. A well-known instance of this occurs when Laura Bohannon's native audience fails to grasp the conventions of Elizabethan revenge drama, as described in her article, 'Shakespeare in the Bush' (1966); the same misunderstanding or category mistake underlies the humour of James Thurber's story, *The Macbeth Murder Mystery*.

Whatever construction or reading we place upon the tale the novel tells, then, these elementary rules of reading need constantly to be at the forefront of our critical appreciation: what is being assumed of me as a reader, and are those assumptions necessary for my understanding of the text? The anthropological reader, used as she is to distancing herself or bracketing out pre-conceptions and assumptions in order to move closer to the cultural universe of others, is, in this respect, a privileged reader, but also a more discriminating one.

What we now need to attend to more closely is precisely how that discrimination should come into play with respect to the three types of novel in question.

The outsider's novel written for outsiders

Within the western tradition and, as far as I am aware, in the Arabic and Chinese traditions too there has always been a travel literature recounting the wonders and resources of a world beyond the immediate experience of the reader. In most cases the intention of the writer – Ibn Battutah, Ma Huan or Mendes Pinto – has been to provide information about the potential advantages and perils of engaging these distant other worlds in trade. In Europe from about the sixteenth century onwards, roughly from the period of Montaigne's famous essay on cannibals, in which he avails himself of travellers' chronicles, an additional motif enters into the text – that of deliberately using the strangeness of the other to comment on the social conventions of contemporary European society. This tendency reaches its peak in Europe in the vogue for Chinoiserie and the setting of literary texts and dramas in exotic foreign locations or with foreign observers as the principal characters: think of Dryden's *Aurangzeb*

⁷ In an article on Conrad in which the question of the 'writing community' is discussed in full, Mulhern convincingly demonstrates how it was only when, after a long period of writer's block, Conrad settled on whom he took to be the listeners of his, and Marlow's, narrative that he was able to write fluently again (Mulhern 2006: 63-4). See also note 17 below.

(1675), Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) or Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772).

This last example, however, marks the end of this literary trope, which is gradually superseded by the collective ambitions of Enlightenment thinkers to amass quantities of empirically observed facts and submit them to the prism of rational analysis and thence to systematic classification (Zhang 1988). Montesquieu's own *L'Esprit des Lois* (1748) is sometimes singled out (Evans-Pritchard 1981: 3-12) as a significant turning point in this respect, and for anthropologists perhaps the best known text of this kind is Degérando's *Considerations* (1800). From then on throughout the nineteenth century, as we know, the scientific impulse fuelled by social evolutionism and encouraged by post-Napoleonic European colonial expansion (and American curiosity about its native populations) leads to intense, almost feverish efforts to record as accurately as possible the 'manners and customs' of non-European societies. Now, we know from the work of Raymond Schwab (1950) and Edward Said (1978) that much of that proto-ethnographic description was predicated on colonial assumptions and projects tied up in the exercise of power and authority (Schwab 1950: 41). While acknowledging that point, however – and bearing in mind the well-founded criticism of some of Said's critics, such as Irwin (2006) and Clifford (1988: 255-76) – we should not ignore the strenuous efforts of those who, though they may have been caught up in the perspectival *Zeitgeist* of the time, were both sympathetic and respectful, almost reverential, towards the dignity of the non-European traditions they encountered, arduously and meticulously recording what they observed in the belief that it also represented great human achievements. In the context of my own field, the Indonesian-Malay world, one thinks immediately of men like Stamford Raffles, William Marsden and John Crawfurd,⁸ not omitting Dutch scholars such as P.J. Veth, F. Junghuhn, C. Snouck Hurgronje and others of whom E.M. Beekman (1996) has written extensively.

When the first novels adopting this new colonial perspective appear towards the end of the nineteenth century, they no longer share the ambitions of their seventeenth-century predecessors. Instead, they set out with three aims in mind, which jostle for primacy according to the authors' imagining of their readers. Although the weave of the pattern and the colour contrasts change over the course of a century or so, each of these three skeins or strands is clearly visible. The first of these is the plot of adventure and intrigue, increasingly

⁸ For a superb, detailed account of the thinking of British scholar administrators in the Malay Archipelago, see Maier (1988).

important throughout the nineteenth century, not only in popular literature and melodrama, the theatrical genre of the period, but also in the major novelists: what is Dickens if not melodramatic? Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century the vehicle for such tales of intrigue was often the historical novel, but thereafter we see the rise of the detective novel, such as Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*, and the colonial novel, the latter perhaps best summed up in the oeuvre of Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. It is the description of dramatic actions, confrontations and episodic struggles in which the writers excel and into the excitement of which they draw their readers (Green 1980). At the same time, there is a desire on the part of writers to demonstrate their credentials as observers, a desire which coincides with the structural need to make their plots realistically credible. This leads to the second strand of the textual weave: the specific placing of local detail as it relates to both the physical environment – the humid dripping tropical jungle and the strangely perfumed cosmopolitan bazaars of the towns – and the social relationships that bind the native population together in a complex web of family ties, political obligations and commercial transactions. Again, we can think of Kipling here.

Contemporaneously, political and economic developments are independently leading to a greater detailed knowledge of other cultures and climes, which, through a feed-back loop, creates a thirst for more and more detail, which can now be supplied not only through the written text and oral accounts, but also increasingly through photography and then film. Consequently, relieved of the need to provide substantial descriptive detail, the formal development of the novel as a genre is pushing writers much more towards the exploration of the interiority of their characters. And this element of psychological exploration, the third of our strands, also finds expression in novels set in foreign locations, where the pressures of the local circumstances lead to the highlighting and accentuation of moral dilemmas and passionate excesses. Here, of course, one thinks primarily of Conrad and, from a later date, Graham Greene.

This heuristic reference to three compositional strands in the structuring of the novel should not, however, lead us to suppose that writers were consciously combining these elements in a judicious mixture as their own preferences or the expectations of their readers required. It was not as mechanical as that, and the novelists were all, I think, aiming at higher seriousness as well as entertainment in their novels and short stories. Malinowski once said that he wanted to be the Conrad of anthropology in contrast to Rivers as its Rider Haggard. At one time I thought that this statement implied a literary evaluation of Conrad and Haggard by Malinowski, with the former being seen as the intellectual superior, but I now think that

perhaps Malinowski was alluding first to the issue of nationality – he was like Conrad a Pole – and, secondly, simply to a historical evolution of form: Conrad was using the same mix of elements but taking greater pains to explore the psychology of Europeans facing difficult moral choices in theatrically charged exotic locations.

How, then, should anthropologists be reading these novels? What weight should we be ascribing to the different intentions of the writers and the balance between the elements in those passages in the narrative where we can distinguish them? My own reading experience leads me to think that in fact, taken as accounts of non-European societies, the novels are on the whole unreliable. In the first place the writer, despite a superficial impressionistic facility, simply lacks the knowledge of the indigenous society which he – or occasionally she – purports to describe. At a very elementary level – and this should resonate with anthropologists in the Malinowskian tradition who stresses intimacy with the language as the *sine qua non* of access to native society – the writer does not have the command of the language which would allow him to understand native institutions.

There are exceptions. British administrators like Clifford in the Malay Archipelago did have that facility and understood the institutions thoroughly. His qualities were readily acknowledged by his friend Conrad, but, as the latter implied, this capacity to explain that society was never demonstrated in Clifford's short stories and novels. It is easy to account for this deficiency as a lack of creative genius – whatever the socio-historical conditions conducive to the rise of the realist novel in the 19th century, not all novelists are Flaubert, as Sartre, I think it is, points out – but there is more to it than that. Understanding what that is can help us to see why later external observer novelists, however perceptive, often fail to represent native society plausibly. Clifford's mind was firmly moulded according to the *mentalité* of early twentieth-century paternalistic colonialism: he was not simply sympathetically drawn to native Malay society, but emotionally and psychologically identified himself with it. Going out to Malaya at an early age, he had for years lived side by side with Malays and had had relatively little contact with Europeans. Understandably, the experience had led him to recognize Malay values of friendship and kinship and take them into himself. At the same time, he recognized his obligations to the whole colonial mission of social improvement, raising standards of welfare, creating conditions for a better quality of life, and committing himself to those with whom he was charged. The impediment to that improvement frequently lay, in his opinion, with the abuse of power exercised by the native ruling elites, and it was right that the colonial authorities should intervene to curb that abuse. On the other hand, it was also apparent to him that the restructuring of native society to

conform to western models would also destroy the pristine innocence of native society as he had understood and experienced it. It is these twin themes that control his descriptions and presentations: writing short stories for his peers in *Blackwood's Magazine* or novels for the wider public, he lingers over the romance of native society and the descriptions of the landscape which are its correlative. At the same time, however, he spells out warnings about both the menaces internal to that society in despotic rulers and chiefs and, paradoxically, what can go wrong if native society is encouraged to abandon its institutions in the interests of progress.⁹

The same paradoxical thinking is to be seen in the great Dutch colonial novel *Max Havelaar* (1865), which deserves to be better known outside the Netherlands than it is. Like Clifford, Multatuli, the pseudonym adopted by the Dutchman E. Douwes Dekker, had an intimate knowledge of native society: in general, it would seem, because of their greater dispersal and less frequent contact with fellow Europeans, Dutch colonial officials were more conversant than their British counterparts in India with native society. Douwes Dekker was accordingly torn between his paternalistic obligations to that society and his waveringly hesitant view of it as a primitive Arcadia, as is strikingly evident in a famous episode in the novel describing the young love of two villagers, Saidjah and Adinda. Douwes Dekker, less able than Clifford to contain his frustration at the direction of official government policy, resigned in protest at the failure of the Governor-General to act against abuse, and *Max Havelaar* is his famous account of the affair.

For all their seeming knowledge of native society, then, these novels are not to be read for the profundity of their interpretations of native society, and we misread them if we think of them in this way. What, however, we can read them for is their representations of colonial society. Reading Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934), for example, we find descriptions of the expatriate community which, despite our reservations about those who are more caricature than character, convey to the reader vivid impressions of an environment which the reader fully recognizes but, without the experience, does not know directly. It is the same tropical expatriate society that Somerset Maugham describes so brilliantly in his Malay stories: a society comprising a mixture of misfits and idealists, all in their way eccentric and behaving oddly, but in a manner eerily consonant with the climate, with nature, and with the imaginary of primitive culture still lingering in the European mind as a vestige of nineteenth-century

⁹ A lot has been written about Clifford, who continues to fascinate scholars of colonial Malaya. For a recent comment on his understanding of Malay society, see Muhammad (1986: 138-46).

evolutionist ideas. Contemporary Dutch novels (known as *Indisch* novels, a term which refers specifically to the expatriate society of the Dutch East Indies) evoke that same sense of colonial life-style corrupted by the relentless dripping influence of oriental ways of being.¹⁰ We find this sardonically evoked in the marvellous novels of P.A. Daum, an admirer of Zola, but its best known example is probably Couperus' *De Stille Kracht* (1906), for the nearest contemporary equivalent of which in English we have to turn to Henry James' elaborate ghost stories.

Sometimes, however, these colonial novelists do turn to the native society which lies outside the world of the servants and sutlers of the colonial regime and try to represent individuals in their own context. The enterprise now strikes us as arrogant in its facile assumption of how native life-styles can so quickly and easily be intellectually appropriated, a reflection of ours that adds an entirely proper dimension to our contemporary reading. Thus we baulk at Leonard Woolf's portrayal of Sinhalese peasants in *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), however sympathetically the characters are portrayed and however correct the detail. These novels are, at least to anthropological readers, simply not credible. Augusta de Wit's *Orpheus in the Village* (*Orpheus in de Dessa*, 1903), about a flute-playing young buffalo-herder, falls into that same category. It was popular in its time and remained so for several decades because it met the expectations of those readers who still cherished the romantic idyll, one which had now been displaced from rural Europe to the tropics. We read these works too for the representative articulation of appropriations by European writers of the colonial other, not for insights into the complexity of inter-personal relationships. Even a novel like Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, written later (1938), where there is, as in *Burmese Days*, an attempt to pair a description of expatriate society with native society – though with greater emphasis on a singular character, the eponymous Mister Johnson – the anthropological reader now finds herself squirming uneasily at the grossness of the depictions.

The way in which that novel is read deserves more comment than I have space for here, but it is worth noting that not only was it, at least until recently, a book recommended as good reading to sixth formers, but it continued to be reprinted in the Penguin Modern Classics series, and in 1997 was again re-issued with a new sympathetic introduction by Tom William Boyd. (.) This time, it is not the strength of the romantic idyll which the alert reader

¹⁰ Maier (2004) has written very perceptively about these *Indisch* novels and shown the evolution of the form from the early twentieth century to the publication in 2002 of Hella Haasse's much acclaimed novel *Sleuteloog*. See also Termorshuizen (1990).

notices, but the hardening trope of the half-educated native, the pernicious trickster-villain, caricature again. Even when obviously comic and satirical, it is insufficiently contextualised for the innocent reader to place the character and therefore measure the appropriate critical distance from which to make a proper judgement.

Only two novels in this category make what seems to me a serious appeal to the reader to reflect self-critically, and neither is by a writer claiming special knowledge of native languages or long years of residence. The first is E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, about which I have written elsewhere (Watson 1995) and which I shall only comment on here to note that, in the combination of those three strands which constitute for readers the required characteristics of the colonial and post-colonial novel, in Forster's case the dominant strand is that exploration of inter-personal relations which he inherited from the literary conventions of the novel of manners. The description of expatriate society is there, as is something of the colour of the Indian environment, but his is above all a novel of misunderstanding and the development of self-knowledge. Precisely for that reason, then, it makes different intellectual demands on the reader than the other novels (vide Rapport 1994). In *A Passage to India* one is not expected simply to accept native characters but to puzzle over them.¹¹

The other novel I have in mind is Vargas Llosa's *El Hablador* (*The Story-Teller*; 1987, 1989). This is not so much a colonial novel, though it clearly has affinities with one and certainly falls easily into the category of post-colonial. It was written in 1980 and takes as its subject the plight of a native Andean Amazon ethnic group, the Machiguengas, as filtered doubly through the consciousness of the narrator, a Peruvian writer, and the shadowy figure of a Jewish Peruvian intellectual friend of his who becomes, it seems, a native story-teller. The appeal of the novel, one that immediately endears it to the anthropological reader impatient with the pretensions of so many other novels, lies in exactly that same candid disclaimer of specialist knowledge that Forster makes explicit Forster.¹² Neither he nor Llosa

¹¹ An article by Frank Kermode (2007) relying on his research among Forster's papers in King's College Cambridge shows how perceptively Forster actually drew upon his personal experience of India, relatively brief though it was, and of his Indian friends for his fictional representations.

¹² In one of the best works I know written by a novelist describing the relationship between reality and his fiction, Llosa writes specifically: 'I also have had great difficulty writing about Indian characters in my own novels because I am a realistic writer in the sense I write out of personal experience. My personal experience of the Indian worlds is limited because, for one thing, I do not speak the Indian languages. I remember in writing *The Greenhouse*, I wanted to have an Indian character, a primitive man from a small tribe in the Amazon region, as the central figure in the novel. I tried hard to invent this character from within in order to show the reader his subjectivity, how he had assimilated some kinds of experiences with the white world. But I could not do it. It was totally impossible for me to invent a persuasive description of a man who was so far away from me from a cultural point of view, a man who had, not a rational, but a magical relationship with the world. I felt I was

know the native society they describe in any specialist way, but they attempt to grasp it sympathetically and imaginatively, just as the anthropologist in the field tries to do, and not simply render it comprehensible, but turn it into the reader's dialectical interlocutor. Both approach the subject obliquely, and both are intensely committed to exploring technically the narrative conventions of the genre they employ. Forster offers us the ruminations of Professor Godbole and the colour and spectacle of the festival of light and the Hindu temples; Llosa intersperses his narrative with Machiguenga creation myths. And both writers conclude with reflections indirectly articulated by their narrators. For Forster it is the recognition of the present difficulty of full understanding between two men from different cultural milieux who are striving for a union of spirit, and for whom is held out the promise of it in the future. For Llosa it is the sad acknowledgement that a way of life cannot and perhaps should not be preserved if the struggle for it demands so much suffering. In both cases these seem to me to be opinions, the supporting logic of which is embedded in the narratives of the novel, which compel the anthropological reader to engage, giving or withholding assent in exactly the way in which a good ethnographic text encourages the reader to confer or withhold assent to its propositions. And it is precisely this sort of engagement and this sort of text that Rorty (1989) endorses as an appropriate human – read 'anthropological' – stance.

These externally observed accounts are, then, predicated on calculated notions of what the readers of the novels already know and what they anticipate learning. Any critical view of them needs to begin by formulating what these assumptions are and how they are differently articulated from period to period and from writer to writer, although they share broad commonalities of structure and convention. Working as an anthropological reader with these novels for the most part requires a willingness to evaluate the accounts of native society not as transparent ethnographic descriptions but as a frame through which to view the historical evolution of a colonial and post-colonial mentality. By contrast the internal observer writing for the external reader can be seen to challenge that mentality while at the same time bringing it into sharper focus by so doing.

making a caricature of this character and finally decided to describe him through intermediaries, through characters whom I was able to divine and to perceive' (Llosa 1991: 19; see also p. 79). Writing as the narrator in *The Storyteller*, he makes a similar point about '... the difficulty of inventing in Spanish and within a logically consistent intellectual framework, a literary form that would suggest, with any reasonable degree of credibility [*verosimilmente* in the original], how a primitive man with a magico-religious mentality would go about telling a story. All my attempts [to write about the storyteller] led each time to the impasse of style that struck me as glaringly false [*tan obviamente fraudulento* in the original], as implausible as the various ways in which philosophers and novelists of the Enlightenment had put words into the mouths of their exotic characters in the eighteenth century, when the theme of the "noble savage" was fashionable in Europe' (1989: 158).

The insider's novel for the outsider reader

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was explicitly written to this end. Achebe declared that he was spurred to write the novel after a reading of Cary's *Mr Johnson*, which he desired to rebut (Innes 1990). He wanted to correct the distortions and misrepresentations of native society which he felt Cary's readers were being encouraged simply to accept without question. Consequently, Achebe's intended readers were both those for whom Cary had written directly and those to whose attention the novel had been subsequently been brought – scholars of English like Achebe himself, as well as the lay reader and generations of schoolchildren. Given that this, explicitly, is his readership, Achebe's task was to familiarise readers with, or at least make sympathetically understandable to them, the motivations and values which determine the actions of the community, opening up the possibility of an alternative interpretation to that offered by Cary. And that sympathetic rendering of the community, by interpreting the actions and characters of the novel, of necessity impels him to the description of ethnographic detail, knowledge of which he cannot assume is known to the reader. Good novelist as he is, however, he is alert to how easily that provision of detail can tip over into otiose didacticism, a pitfall he carefully avoids, making the reader work for the knowledge by not translating terms and by compelling her to make imaginative leaps to understand the significance of customary ways of behaving.

The anthropological reader is better disposed to accept such an account of native society rather than those discussed in the category of external observer novels not only because the writing is better informed, but because of the subtlety of the representation and the contextualization of the events. However, no matter how well informed the writer, the anthropologist, so used to encountering the knowledgeable but not always reliable, interlocutor in the field, will inevitably respond, at least initially, to the assertions of any individual indigenous novelist, too, with a measure of questioning and doubt. In the case of *Things Fall Apart*, for example, a sceptic might want to query the historical reconstruction of a native pre-colonial mentality which Achebe imagines. Okonkwo, the central character, is a powerful tragic figure, but how reliable is the portrayal of the flawed and baffled hero? On what basis has Achebe delved into his interiority and imputed those ambitions and hubristic actions to him? Is he not a mythical rather than a realist protagonist? And, in terms of the historical context, is the conceptual isolation of the community from economic, political and cultural movements of the time credible, given what we know of the process of change that was occurring at that period? These are questions which a critical reading should explore, but

their relevance for our immediate purposes here is to demonstrate how they are implicitly brought to the reader's attention precisely because an argument, an interpretation, is required for the intelligent appropriation of this kind of novel.

In this respect, *Things Fall Apart* exemplifies how the imagining and planning of an explicitly ethnographic novel working hard to convince the reader of its documentary accuracy and the presentation of its argument can be consciously influenced by whom the writer sees as his or her readership. The less informed the reader, the greater the need to insert the appropriate contextual stage directions.

Amit Chaudhuri, however, has called into doubt how significant the issue of the intended reader really is (2006). Indicating his frustration at the question often put to him on public occasions about whom he is writing for, he suggests the question is illegitimate because it presupposes that there is a discrete audience in mind, an educated and sophisticated middle-class European reader, for example, for whom he is tailoring his description, whereas in fact audiences do not exist in such neatly partitioned categories. I think there is something disingenuous in what he says here, for two reasons. First, it was certainly the case that until relatively recently Anglophone writers – indeed all native writers writing in European languages in a colonial or immediate post-colonial context – were writing for those European readers who were drawn to portrayals of colonial and ex-colonial social environments, and only in some contexts did they include their own educated peers. Secondly, the conventions of the novel to which the Anglophone writers subscribe do assume a readership accustomed to following certain cues towards interpretation that are only available to those educated within certain reading traditions. This, of course, is not to circumscribe a category by a national culture so much as by a common globally available style of education.

Chaudhuri himself points to Nirad Chaudhuri as deliberately addressing himself to a western reader, but he implies that this is something of an exception. However, one could equally have referred to Mulk Raj Anand or R.K. Narayan. Anand's great naturalist novels, *Coolie* (1936) and *Untouchable* (1935), were clearly intended for non-Indian readers unaware of the material circumstances in which the poorest in Indian society lived: the descriptions in the novels are designed to enlighten them. Familiarization again. It may well be that, as I have taken to be the case with *Things Fall Apart*, in ascribing a certain psychology to his central characters he makes some unacceptable leaps, but there is a plausibility in the contextualization which the anthropological reader is grateful for. Narayan's readership, too, is non-Indian. However, it is noticeable that his attention to environmental detail is not so obtrusive. We can, I think, attribute the change to his being a generation away from Mulk Raj

Anand, at least as far as his major novels are concerned, since the historical evolution of the form over a relatively short time can affect the writer's choice of subject. Also, however, as described above, an awareness of the increasing sophistication and knowledgeable understanding of the non-native reader requires less explicit material description and a greater intensity in the exploration of character, something which Amit Chaudhuri himself, along with his fellow (Indian) writers, now exploit to the full.

Curiously, the many indigenous Anglophone Caribbean, African and Indian writers, as well as perhaps their Francophone counterparts in Africa and the Caribbean, are not matched by a corresponding number of Anglophone writers in Malaya – or at least not until very recently – nor by Dutch language writers in Indonesia (the Dutch East Indies of the colonial period).¹³ There is, however, one important exception here over which it is worth pausing, Suwarsih Djojopoespito's fine novel *Buiten Het Gareel* (*Out of the Harness*), unfortunately not yet translated into English. The history of the publication of this autobiographical novel in the Netherlands in 1941 with the support of the Dutch writer and intellectual Edgar du Perron is familiar to specialists of Indonesian literature, and sufficient has been written about it to make it unnecessary to go into detail here.¹⁴ For our purposes, several critical points merit a brief mention. There is almost a complete absence of European characters in the book; indeed, the only one portrayed, besides the officers of the Political Intelligence Service, is Du Perron himself, and even he appears only in a relatively insignificant episode. The preoccupation of the novel is the depiction of the universe of the Dutch-educated political elite which is heavily committed to the nationalist movement for independence and works in the fields of education, journalism and social reform. Perhaps because it leans so heavily on autobiographical conventions – largely as a result of Du Perron's influence – rather than on conventions of the contemporary realist novel, there is only a perfunctory attempt to construct a central intrigue around which the action of the novel can be plotted. Instead, the

¹³ Good historical reasons account for this in terms of the different histories and educational policies of colonial governments. Novels in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies were certainly written and read by the native populations, but they were written in the regional vernaculars, and very different assumptions were made of the readers in terms not only of prior knowledge but also of the conventions that framed the narratives in general. Critical questions relating to the audience were also asked of the writers by their peers, as, I suspect, *pace* Chaudhuri's scepticism, they were also being asked contemporaneously (circa 1925) of Indian vernacular writers such as Bibhutibhushan Banerjee (Ghosh 1976). For the anthropological reader, as we shall discuss below, there is more intrinsic interest in these novels in the vernacular than in those so obviously written for outsiders, since she is after all curious about common assumptions to which the former implicitly refer.

¹⁴ For a review of some of the literature on the novel and an account of how surprisingly proto-feminist it is in the Indonesian context, see Watson (2009).

description follows an episodic chronology over the course of two years, during which the tensions arising in the intellectual and social milieux of the principal characters are vividly rendered. A good knowledge of contemporary circumstances is assumed in the reader, and indeed there is some ambiguity about whom the novel is appealing to. Despite its publication in the Netherlands, it would seem to be her Dutch-educated peers that Suwarsih is addressing, but there was also a wide potential readership among the Dutch population domiciled in the Indies who would have been potential readers.¹⁵

There are, then, degrees of accommodation which native writers make to their non-native readers. Furthermore, in the context of not being entirely certain who the readers are or are going to be, one can accept the justice of Chaudhuri's statement, certainly as it applies to recent post-Rushdie literature, that the question of the readership is not always significant in determining either the way in which the writer consciously decides to shape her material or to make an interpretative argument. Nonetheless, it remains true that many writers have deliberately chosen to write for the sophisticated but ignorant non-native reader. How quickly the anthropological reader will be able to make discriminating evaluations relating to the nature of informative authorial interventions in such texts will inevitably depend on the extent of the critical education and anthropological learning she brings to the reading.¹⁶ These factors will also, of course, determine her response to the final and potentially most rewarding of the fictions she has access to: the novels written by writers in the vernacular for their own linguistic and social communities. These works, when they have a serious purpose, are not written simply for entertainment or the confirmation of a community's unique linguistic identity in the world, but with the deliberate intention of engaging their readers in debate. 'Defamiliarizing' them would be one term for it, jolting them out of their unreflective

¹⁵ It was republished twice after the war, and the second edition published in 1949 seems to have circulated among the Dutch population still resident in Indonesia. The fourth edition, published as recently as 1986, seems to have been restricted entirely to Dutch readers in the Netherlands. Two editions of the Indonesian translation (1975 and 1999) have gone relatively unnoticed, but see Goenawan (2013). For details, see Termorshuizen (1986).

¹⁶ I once came across a very telling example of this in my teaching. I had assigned Camara Laye's *African Child* (*L'Enfant Noir*), an autobiographical account of a West African childhood, to students to read. In the course of discussion in a seminar, one of my students said that scribbled in the margins of the library text which she had borrowed was a note next to a description of a particular ritual stating that the information was incorrect. Like my student I was astonished by the temerity of anyone questioning this ethnographic feature of the text and wondered who the anonymous commentator might have been. It was not until some years later, during a conversation with my colleague Clive Wake, that I learned that there was a controversy about the degree to which Laye could properly be considered the author of the text. The question of its authorship has now been thoroughly examined by Adele King (2002), and the discrepancies noted by the anonymous commentator can now be understood.

communal security and forcing upon them a frequently uncomfortable self-scrutiny. The impulse towards estrangement underlying these novels runs quite contrary to the novel written for outsiders and therefore has profound implications for interpreting the statements being made in the texts.

The insider's novel for insiders

We have to begin here with one immediate qualification to pre-empt a possible criticism. The insider's novel frequently assumes a reader who is only partly incorporated into the social and moral universe at the heart of the novel. Indeed, a great number of the novels which appear in the contemporary European novel-publishing industry deliberately take as their point of departure the readers' relative ignorance of the context of the action even when that action is set in the midst of their own societies. It might therefore seem that the distinction between writing for outsiders and insiders is a specious one. But in fact, even though the element of the strange and slightly alien does play a part in the appeal of these European novels, no one, surely, would dispute, first, that the dynamics of the novel and the articulation of the subtlety of the interaction between the characters rely heavily on the reader sharing in great part the attitudes and indeed experiences of the principals in the novel. Nor, secondly, would anyone be likely to argue that, where the intention of the novel is more than simply the display of ingenuity in the construction of the plot – the old element of adventure – the writer is implicitly assuming the reader's familiarity with the universe of decision-making and reflection at the heart of the novel. It is precisely this familiarity which needs to become the possession of anthropologists working in what is, at least initially, a more or less alien moral and social environment. One avenue to acquiring an intimacy with the complexities of that universe, I am arguing, is through the critical reading of novels in vernacular languages.

In these circumstances, the reading of the novel presents a double opportunity: the intermittent exploration and incremental learning of indigenous readers' consciousness, implicitly addressed in the assumptions of the novel; and also a testing of the degree to which the anthropologist has indeed already appropriated the universe of discourse and can therefore fully enter into the *'αγων*, (*agōn*), or central conflict, of the novel.

Within our own intellectual socialization, we have the experience of growing into reading maturity, a slow development of critical judgement acquired after more or less intensive and extensive reading and reflection over a range of literature, where there occurs a cumulative acquisition of reading sophistication set against a continual broadening and

deepening of personal experience.¹⁷ The process increases our confidence in our habits of discernment and evaluation. The same process occurs or should occur with the anthropological reader: working within different milieus, local, ethno-linguistic, regional or national, she comes to acquire the confidence not of the occasional sojourner but of the near native. And an index of that confidence, as within one's own intellectual milieu, is an ability to engage critically in the propositions made in the novels in relation to inter-personal relations within the context of shifting moral values and political ideals.

When a writer is working at this level of appealing directly to his or her peers, the conventions and direction of the novel, despite the apparently similar exploitation of verisimilitude to which the form is intrinsically wedded, will be very different from the novel written for the outsider. And this is not simply a matter of excluding glosses of indigenous terms or explanations of local rituals, but, at a far more telling level, of taking up matters that perplex the native reader and eschewing those that are only likely to appeal to the (voyeuristic) outsider. An acute awareness of this point lies at the heart of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decision to abandon writing novels in English, since the latter could not but be directed to outsiders, and to write instead in Gikuyu for his own community (see note 6).

This dilemma of deciding whom to write for never acquired the same urgency in India, since, despite Macaulay's best intentions, from the nineteenth century Indian intellectuals had continued to write in the vernacular languages and had quite happily taken over the form of the novel and adapted it to the needs of their increasing numbers of readers.¹⁸ Thus for well over one and a half centuries Indian writers have been probing the potential of the novel to make statements about their own society. One of the examples best known to English readers is Bibhutibhushan Banerjee's *Pather Panchali*, brought to wide notice as a result of Satyajit Ray's famous film of the same name. In the preface to the translation Clark (in Banerji 1969) makes the point that, in order to facilitate the non-native reader's understanding, various glosses have been inserted into the text by way of explaining otherwise potentially obscure references, rather than using footnotes for this purpose. Occasionally, unobtrusive as most of

¹⁷ With regard to this acquisition of critical reading competence, I strongly concur with Stanley Fish and others who talk about an 'interpretive community', and with Jonathan Culler, who emphasises a shared understanding of the conventions of reading: '...works remain opaque to those who have not assimilated the appropriate conventions.... Reading and interpretation may be carried out in solitude, but they are highly social activities' (Culler 1980: 53). Suleiman (1980) provides an excellent overview of these perspectives on reading. In exactly the same way as Culler prescribes, anthropological readers should, in my view, endeavour to assimilate the textual conventions of the literature of the communities in which they become immersed. See, too, note 6 above.

¹⁸ Clark (1970) provides a good overview of how this happened.

them are, these insertions do create the appearance of a text written for outsiders. In fact, however, the narrative is so obviously strange to the outsider (not just in terms of the exploration of the social conventions and interdependent relationships which make up the dynamics of village society at that time in India's history circa 1905) and yet so clearly familiar to the novels' intended readership that the anthropological reader is immediately challenged and excited by recognizing that this is a tale told by a teller to his own community.

Because most of us outside Bengal know the novel only in translation, it is, of course, inevitable that there is much we miss. However, here is not the place to discuss the limitations of the novel in translation. The arguments are well known and to none better than to the anthropologist, but the inevitable limitations should not obscure the potential of the translated novel.¹⁹ We all have reading experiences of great translated works of fiction, and we are immeasurably richer for that reading. To reiterate, this is not because of the factual information we learn indirectly from those texts, but from glimpses into complex webs of understanding. Most of us know this from translations of the great European novels, some of us from the translations of the equally great novels of India, the Arab world and the Far East.

The professional anthropologist, the specialist in the region, if she is serious in her desire to disseminate a wider understanding of the societies in which she engages, has, it seems to me, an obligation both to herself to take seriously these fictional versions of the reality she knows, and to her readers to direct them to those works in translation or in the original language which seek to disclose the deeper meanings, sets of values and entanglement of emotions underlying superficial appearances. The anthropologist must also be a literary critic. Let me demonstrate what is at stake here by exploring within my own area of competence, modern Indonesia, what such criticism might look like.

As noted above, in contrast with Africa and India, there has been no tradition of European language writing in Indonesia or Malaysia. Writers there have consistently written their fictions not for outsiders but for their immediate peers. However, this remark requires some qualification, especially with reference to Indonesia, since we find that the Indonesian language, although the national language, is a second language to a large percentage of the population, especially so in the past. Moreover, writers, especially those from the Minangkabau region of west Sumatra, used to exploit the potential of this widespread second

¹⁹ Even such a determined champion of the near impossibility of responding appropriately to works of literature which are not written in one's native language as Dr Leavis felt that he could comment on *Anna Karenina* in the Maude translation, although, admittedly, he had some reservations (Leavis 1967: 9).

language to address readers outside their immediate ethno-linguistic groups and inform them of the peculiarities of their systems of tradition and customary practice. Furthermore, Dutch colonial government sponsorship of publications often set the parameters of the discursive space of the novels in terms of what the Dutch regarded as the bounds of good taste and political correctness.²⁰ Nonetheless the novel in Indonesia has evolved rapidly since then, and in the greater intellectual freedom of contemporary times, novelists now make assumptions about the common understandings shared by their readers and consequently push them in greater earnestness to reflect on their positioning in contemporary Indonesian society. This is especially noticeable in historical novels dealing with the colonial period, such as those by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Umar Khayam and Y.B. Mangunwidjaja. Contained within all those novels, however, are not only reflections or descriptions of colonial conflicts seen from the native's point of view, but also wider debates about the values and structures underpinning indigenous social organization.

In novels and stories dealing with contemporary issues, there is no hesitation in representing the political dimension of recent history, especially in relation to the period following the coup of 1965 and the subsequent period of Suharto's so-called New Order. And within the last two decades, with the extraordinary expansion of the publishing industry, in addition to what might be termed the 'serious novel', there have emerged those novels which one associates with globalization: teenage romances, religion inspired fiction, campus novels, chick-lit (known in Indonesian as *sastra wangi* [perfume literature]), and many translations. Most of these novels take as their cultural locus contemporary metropolitan life-styles, often spilling over into foreign locations: this is the educated middle-class writing for itself and assuming a sense of shared expectations and values in relation to what contemporary Indonesia has to offer it.

At a very different level of appeal, regional literatures in the vernacular reach another readership altogether. Let me illustrate this with reference to the Sundanese language spoken in West Java by 35 million speakers as their mother tongue. The weekly Sundanese popular journal *Manglé*, published in Bandung, carries a variety of representative fictional material, several short stories, one or two serials, one of which is usually a translation, and a jokes page. The stories range from a description of Indonesians living in the US to minor personal and family tragedies occurring in the cities of west Java to ghost stories set in small villages. The magazine is pitched in such a way that it appeals to both the lower middle classes and

²⁰ For a comprehensive account of Dutch policy in this respect, see Jedamski (1990).

Sundanese -speaking intellectuals with a sense of local belonging, but the limited range of reference makes it on the whole unappealing to those who read the metropolitan Indonesian fiction described above, even when they have the linguistic skill to read it. Nonetheless, the detailed local reference and the earnest gesturing towards realism and verisimilitude, even in the ghost stories, constantly invites the committed reader to recognize her own positioning within west Javanese society and to respond appropriately to the probing of the fiction (Watson 2019).

Realist Indonesian fiction is, then, wide-ranging, but before addressing the question what a reading of it will convey to the anthropological reader, let me enter a caveat. Much of this fiction, judged in its own terms – that is, according to the conventions of realist fiction filtered through the demands and expectations of Indonesian writers and readers – is disappointing stuff: in other words, the intellectual and moral challenges presented to the reader are not profound. There are, of course, exceptions here, as the international acclaim accorded to Eka Kurniawan's *Tiger Man* demonstrates. However, the argument has not been that anthropologists should read this literature exclusively in the expectation that it will be 'profound', but that in grasping the assumptions made of the reader, the anthropologist will find herself coming that much closer to the goal of shared understanding. Irrespective of the credibility of the narrative, the fiction carries dimensions of humour and irony, and indeed the panoply of linguistic rhetoric, as well as making implicit references to a set of positional moral values and social understandings which, if they can be appreciated and appropriated by the reader, allow a synoptic access to the society. An anthropologist's understanding is built up laboriously from personal encounters in the field from which, gradually, an always tentative composite impression of the society is half-consciously constructed. What this insider fiction offers is an opportunity to participate at the writer's meta-level of the interpretation of contemporary reality.

Let me illustrate at this point the potential of the exercise with a few remarks on a prize-winning short story by a well-known Indonesian writer, A.A. Navis (1975). It is entitled *Jodoh*, and the word itself immediately alerts the anthropologist to the need not only for translation but also a measure of interpretation. The word means a match, something or someone who fits with something else. But for the Indonesian reader it carries a heavy connotation of an ideal marriage partner. This does not convey any necessary idea of romantic love; it is more a question of suitability, but even that is not quite right, because there is also almost a sense of fate, destiny, in the word. If two people who seem ideally suited do not in the end get married, then one can still say they were not *jodoh*. Seeing the

word as the title of the story, then, the reader is consequently prepared for reversals and misfortunes as much as marriages. Most Indonesians reading the story will recognise Navis as a male Minangkabau who writes frequently about the socio-cultural milieu of his own society, with its matrilineal institutions and its strong profession of Islam. They will also know that he has a strong bent for humour and mordant satire. This knowledge, then, creates a predisposition in the reader in relation to the narrative that follows and how it should be critically approached.

The expectations arising from the reader's predispositions are immediately met by the structure of the narrative – the tale is told through the perspective of a thirty-year old man looking for a suitable wife – the mild irony, the stylised linguistic humour, and the twists of the plot which relate how a young couple eventually get married after a falling out. The humour of the story lies in picking up the various cues relating to attitudes to courtship and marriage and the behavioural conventions which accompany those attitudes. Among the topical issues raised are the potential fear of Badri, the hero, of being drawn in to a uxori-local marriage, the advisability of looking for a wife who has a steady income as a civil servant, and his own unattractiveness as a suitor because he is not a 'pure' Minangkabau – his mother is not an ethnic Minangkabau, although she was brought up in West Sumatra. Now all these matters strike resonances with the Indonesian reader and constitute the appeal of the story. But to anyone unfamiliar with the society it might read as rather banal. For the Indonesian, as for the anthropological reader, I would submit, it is almost Chekhovian in the manner in which it mockingly dissects courtship practice in a gentle comedy of manners. It is not that the story simply supplements one's knowledge of the society, any more than Chekhov's stories could be considered supplementary; it is more that, taken as whole, the story offers an entrée into a way of thinking, perceiving and evaluating. Its appreciation relies on an exact distancing between the reader and the reality of the narrated subject, which is carefully defined through the manipulation of literary realism. It is not sufficient to understand the surface reality of the story; one must be able to grasp its point, its interpretive perspective, and before one can fully accomplish that, one must be inward with the society.

Conclusion

If the intention of anthropology is to explore human relationships in the past and present with a view to enhancing our capacity for self-understanding by moving ever deeper into the *Lebenswelten*, the conceptual worlds, that are different from one's own formative personal experience, then the critical reading of the novel must now, in the 21st century, be a major

element in that anthropological endeavour to understand and interpret. Not all of us will have the linguistic skills to read the novels and the stories – or the archives and the newspapers – and consequently most anthropological readers will have to rely on translations and commentary. But the anthropological specialist whose responsibility it is to interpret and mediate understanding must be able to inspire confidence that she has the required facility, that the constructions which she offers her readers for acceptance do emerge from an earnest and intense grappling not just with the observable lived experience but with the attribution of meaning and value to that experience by those who live it. The novel provides the anthropological reader with unique access to the production of cultural meaning,²¹ since, although an interpretation, it is not over-interpreted; and although synoptic and tending to closure, it is not as systematically categorical as an ethnography and is therefore open to shifting positions of agreement and dissent within a full critical engagement.²²

It is, of course, the critical response that needs emphasising, not the simple understanding. As a consequence of European colonialism, the legacy of which still blurs the vision – perhaps even more so today, when it is refracted through the contemporary influence of globalization and the production and transfer of knowledge – novels describing the experience which the curious anthropologist wishes to explore still come in the packaged categories described above. Written from different perspectives as observers and insiders, each is directed to a different readership and each is offered as a distinct version of the construction of the society. In reading and recommending these novels, it must be the anthropologist's task to point out the differences among them and make those fine discriminations that will allow us to recognize the universality of the prompting to record with all seriousness, by means of its textual resources, a society's self-reflections over time and distance, as well as across mental worlds.

²¹ Fabian (1993) makes the same point forcefully. He argues that, as a consequence of global expansion, texts are to be found in even the remotest communities and that anthropologists should pay heed to them by relating them to the specific contexts of their production and reading.

²² It is the recognition of the peculiar epistemological status of the novel that has prompted ethnographers in these post-modernist times (see Visweswaran 1994: 15-16 for a useful comment) to suggest that ethnographers too should use the strategies of the novel to present their accounts, those of the external observer again, but one more informed as a consequence of a different positioning within the world of the subject than her colonial predecessor. Andrew Strathern also describes how the form of the autobiographical novel is a useful vehicle for conveying Diltheyan 'understanding' (1993: 93). The issue of how the new ethnographic novel should be written and how we should be training our students in the writing of these texts, in the same way as we train them to make ethnographic films or write doctoral theses, has yet to be fully addressed.

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GIFTS WE GIVE THROUGH EVILS WE TAKE

EMPATHIC EXCHANGE OF EMBODIED EXPERIENCES AS THERAPY

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Abstract

Therapeutic empathy entails understanding a patient's illness and relation to that illness, communicating that understanding and acting on it in a helpful manner. Explanations of its efficacies in improving patient outcomes in the biomedical literature are limited and centre on latent consequences such as facilitating more accurate diagnoses, thus neglecting the role of social processes in healing. In an attempt to provide this insight, this study performs an ethnographic sensory analysis of *xemátiasma*, a Greek healing ritual for the evil eye in which a healer temporarily takes on the evil affecting the patient (thereby partially embodying the patient's symptoms of *mátiasma*), expels it through intense yawning and tearing, and relieves the patient's pain. Much of existing literature on the evil eye in Greece privileges an ocular-centric perspective that focuses on the symbolism of the ritual steps and materials in *xemátiasma* to explain its effectiveness, rather than on the dynamic, lived interaction between patient and healer. By showing how ethnographic accounts of evil-eye infliction invoke visual, acoustic and tactile synaesthetic features, I explore if and how an exchange of embodied experiences occurs in *xemátiasma* and delve into the ritual's social and bodily-felt efficacies. I argue that *xemátiasma* provides evidence for a multisensory form of therapeutic empathy that allows healers to perform acts of care and create new orientations through which patients can experience their illnesses. This relationship between therapeutic empathy and *xemátiasma* provides a platform to contemplate differing claims to efficacy and highlights the importance of social and sensory experiences in healing, including in the biomedical consultation room.

Introduction

This article engages with ethnographic work and critical theories in medical and sensory anthropology to examine therapeutic empathy within the context of a healing ritual for the evil eye in Greece, called *xemátiasma*. Sensory anthropology draws on phenomenology to emphasize the body as a moving entity that elicits sensory experiences and generates potentialities for transformation, making it particularly useful for exploring how *xemátiasma* changes the way the body is oriented in the environment. The central research questions lie in whether and how *xemátiasma* facilitates an exchange in embodied experiences, what the therapeutic efficacies underlying this exchange are, and whether this sensory analysis can challenge and provide insights into the biomedical explanations and outcomes of therapeutic empathy interventions.

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To complicate hypervisual discourse on the evil eye and provide foundations for a discussion of *xemátiasma*'s efficacies, I begin with a sensory analysis of evil-eye infliction, affliction and (re)moval. Second, I explore the multiple efficacies of *xemátiasma* to showcase a synergistic collection of processes that go beyond symbolic descriptions in the existing literature, particularly by exploring the interplay between symbolic, processual, social and bodily-felt ritual efficacies. Finally, I relate *xemátiasma* to empathy in order to consider how ethnographic work can explain the healing mechanisms of therapeutic empathy and oppose it to the understandings of biomedical literature. I conclude with reflections on the implications and recommendations for investigators of the evil eye in Greece and therapeutic empathy, as well as various stakeholders in biomedical health-care systems. The remainder of this introduction provides a background to therapeutic empathy in biomedicine and the evil eye in Greece.

Therapeutic empathy

Empathy, a word coined by Robert Vischer in German as *Einfühlung*, was originally used by the philosopher Theodor Lipps to express how a person can project their feelings into aesthetic objects (Bizzari et al. 2019: 91). To this day, its core meaning lies in the process through which we understand and share in the world from another person's subjective experience, though the ways and extent to which this is possible are widely contested (Hollan and Throop 2011: 2-5). In this article, I engage with a phenomenological approach that highlights the body as central to acts of intersubjective understanding and that frames empathy as a 'dynamic process of embodied, embedded, and actively engaged enquiry' (Hardman and Hutchinson 2020: 4), which some cautiously propose could be complemented by the discovery of mirror neurons (Zahavi 2012: 245-50). By applying Husserl's notions of a *Leib*, or lived body, and of embodiment, which Merleau-Ponty (2002: 112-70) and Csordas (1983: 5-12, 1993: 135-43) expand on, the body's sensory experiences through movement in space can be seen to shape how we empathize with people. Rather than a matter of inference or representation, empathy is one of relations between our immediate embodied experiences and orientations and another's. This is critical in medicine, as cognitive accounts of empathy fail to recognize patients as present, feeling, actively participating beings, and risk perpetuating their treatment as defective machines. Empathy is an intersubjective process involving both the experience of understanding and that of being understood, which differentiates it from projection (Hollan 2008: 482-3). The intersubjectivity of empathy must also be explored with consideration of people's realities, values, discernments and practices.

Therapeutic empathy is both a theory and an intervention that has increasingly been adopted and tested by biomedical institutions through randomized controlled trials (RCTs). It involves not only the interpersonal understanding of empathy, but also caring action. According to Howick (2018b: 233), it entails a three-step process of 1) understanding the patient's pain and illness, 2) communicating that understanding and 3) helpfully acting on that shared understanding. Many studies show that therapeutic empathy improves patient outcomes, including Howick's (2018a) recent systematic review of interventions in which practitioners enhance the expression of empathy through spending more time with patients, attentive bodily gestures and positive expectations (Kaptchuk et al. 2008; Mercer et al. 2012; Little et al. 2015; Elliott et al. 2018). The RCTs in these studies test the effects of empathy on acute and chronic pain conditions, such as those accompanying depression, cancer, osteoarthritis, back pain and diabetes. Interestingly, therapeutic empathy has also been shown to serve as a preventive factor for physician burnout (Thirioux et al. 2016: 8). While the fact that biomedical institutions are acknowledging the significance of the social in therapeutic encounters through this resurging interest in empathic communication in patient-doctor relationships may seem like a positive move, their proposed mechanisms through which therapeutic empathy improves outcomes have shortcomings. These efficacies include increases in practitioners' diagnostic accuracy (as patients are more likely to share concerns and symptoms with empathic clinicians) and a better understanding of patient needs, resulting in personalized, patient-centred treatment, reductions in patient anxiety, and patient empowerment (Mercer and Reynolds 2002: 9; Mercer et al. 2012: 253-4; Howick et al. 2017: 3-4; Howick et al. 2018b: 233). While true, these explanations overlook efficacies that engage the sensory experience of empathetic techniques and the intrinsic value of social processes in enhancing health.

By linking the workings of therapeutic empathy to its ability to lead to accurate diagnoses, prognoses and shared decision-making, its efficacy is attributed to latent functions that reduce the worth and healing powers of emotional, bodily-felt attunement between patients and healers to extrinsic consequences. Apart from these valid but reductionist explanations in the biomedical literature, there is a lack of explanation for how therapeutic empathy is enacted and how it fundamentally mobilizes therapeutic effects in people. I therefore argue that a sensory analysis of *xemátiasma*, a Greek ritual in which a healer temporarily takes the evil from a patient to relieve them of their pain, may prove useful in substantiating the underlying efficacies of therapeutic empathy.

The evil eye in Greece: mátiasma and xemátiasma

The evil eye is an ancient and ever-present phenomenon documented world-wide, a testament to its deep roots in perceptions of well-being and personhood. Here, I will focus on its manifestations in Greece.

Some of the first references to the evil eye in Greece can be traced back to Greek mythology and classical texts that attribute it with substantial potencies that have different sources, from envy and hatred to love and admiration. While Aristotle suggested that vision and the evil eye spread through *pneuma*, a life-sustaining energy and force linked to breath that flows within and between people, Democritus proposed that it is energy effluxes in the whole body that project the evil eye (Elliott 2016: 20, 50-65). The conception of the evil eye as an energy exchange is perpetuated in modern Greece, where many believe that a person's energy inflicts the evil eye and that certain people elicit that energy to greater extents than others. This perspective complements views in sensory anthropology, as it endows active components with vision and speaks to the ability of the body to elicit sensory experiences.

The evil eye in Greece is called *kakó máti*, or 'bad eye', and it results in a bodily illness called *mátiasma* ('eyeing') (Seremetakis 2009: 342). Its symptoms consist of headaches, a lack of energy, dizziness, moodiness, stomach upsets, discomfort and a sense of disconnection, among others. The spreading of the evil eye occurs in everyday social interactions between people; young children and individuals with particular 'distinctiveness' and high social status are considered most susceptible to it (Roussou 2011a: 86). Though *mátiasma* has ties to Christian Orthodoxy (the dominant religion in Greece), being mentioned in the Bible as *vaskanía*, the beliefs and healing techniques of its practice in contemporary Greece also incorporate the influences of eastern spirituality (yoga, feng shui, reiki) and 'New Age' spirituality (energy channelling, incense burning, etc.) (Roussou 2011a: 85; 2011b: 134). Ethnographic studies of *mátiasma* support the idea that people emit energies that tangibly affect others, though a sensory analysis of how this occurs is lacking in the existing literature. Beyond this, the sensory synaesthesia of evil-eye transmission has hardly been explored (apart from some work by Seremetakis (2009)), despite evidence of the interplay between vision, sound and touch in people's accounts of *mátiasma*. This article addresses this gap, as it is important for understanding *xemátiasma*.

Xemátiasma, i.e. 'de-eyeing' or 'taking one's eye out', is a healing ritual for *mátiasma* that is widely performed in Greece today (Seremetakis 2009: 343). While the Church has a similar ritual performed by priests, *xemátiasma* is situated more in the everyday lives of families and communities and is performed by 'lay specialists', most of whom are women

(Roussou 2011a: 86). Most anthropologists have focused on its practice in rural villages, though Seremetakis (2009: 339) and Roussou (2011a: 87-8) point out its persistence in urban settings and between people across large distances, as evidenced by ‘telephonic divination’, or *xemátiasma* carried out over the phone. *Xemátiasma* rituals broadly involve healers taking on the energy of the evil eye that is affecting the patient and expelling it through intense yawning and the tears that shed from their eyes while yawning. At least theoretically, it entails a therapeutic empathy in which a healer partially embodies the patient’s experience of pain, communicates and enacts this exchange through bodily gestures, and relieves the individual’s pain associated with *mátiasma*. By paying attention to the dynamic sensory interaction between patients and healers themselves, rather than just representations of the ritual materials and procedures separated from their social context, I provide an account of a multisensory form of empathy at work in ritual.

Sensory experiences of (*xe*)*mátiasma*

Evil eye transmission in Greece is mediated through energy transformations that are elicited and registered by people, a process in which bodies exchange messages and create bonds of shared substance. To articulate these sensory exchanges, I first outline how the evil eye moves about the world, drawing on ethnographic evidence of sensory synaesthesia that mingles visual, auditory and tactile elements. Then I examine the bodily-felt experience of *mátiasma*, specifically *kommára*, characterized as a sense of disconnection and heaviness that stagnates vitality, in order to set up the foundations for the therapeutic effects *xemátiasma* provides. Finally, I investigate whether *xemátiasma* comprises an exchange of embodied experiences between people.

Synaesthetic exchanges of evil-eye infliction

Major works on this theme (Herzfeld 1981; Veikou 1998) tend to emphasize the evil eye in Greece as a form of ‘ocular aggression’ or ‘visual appropriation’ used as a tool to underpin social classification and the social order (Seremetakis 2009: 341). People who attract the evil eye are especially distinctive enough to escape fading into the background, thereby becoming susceptible to the admiring and envious gazes of others. However, the evil eye is not solely a visual phenomenon; it involves synaesthetic interaction, particularly between sight, sound and tactility. Synaesthesia in this case alludes to Young’s (2005: 61-4) work on the correspondence between greenness and odour for Native Australians in the Western Desert, whose synaesthetic experiences are embodied and socially transmitted, rather than cognitive,

psychologized phenomena. A common expression describing the cause of *mátiasma* is ‘someone eats you with the eyes’ (Seremetakis 2009: 342). Yet, the evil eye is also transmitted through ‘being seen’ or ‘eaten’ by the tongue: people often attribute *mátiasma* to *ghlossofaghiá* (*ghlossa* = tongue and *faghia* = eating) (ibid.). When people talk and gossip about someone, their tongues move in their mouths as if they are eating. Talking about another person with too much of either negativity or admiration is a gesture of oral and ‘acoustic violence’ (ibid.). Those who utter negative things about another have a ‘poison tongue’, or *farmakóghlossa*, and the sounds of these tongues talking spread the evil eye. A voluntary way of casting the evil eye is through a hand movement called *moúntza*, which involves spreading fingers widely and quickly moving the hand with palm facing downward towards another person (Hardie 1923: 160). This can be accompanied by the other hand hitting the dorsal aspect of the hand slanting towards the person, causing a ‘smacking’ sound that adds to its power. When giving a *moúntza*, people often say ‘*ná, pár’ta*’, meaning ‘here, take this’. The existence of *ghlossofaghiá* and *moúntza* points to associations between the gazes of others, the sounds of gossiping, the movements of hands and tongues, and their tangible effects on people as illness. The bodily-felt symptoms of *mátiasma* indicate that ‘someone is thinking about you’ (*kápios se meletái*), revealing an ability to detect other people considering, chatting about and examining you (ibid.); indeed, in many ways, *mátiasma* is a sense within itself.

How do these sensory modalities intermingle and become transformed into tangible manifestations on people’s bodies separated by long distances, and why can even the looks and sounds of admiration transmit the evil eye? An examination of Roussou’s (2011a, 2011b, 2014) ethnographic accounts of the evil eye in Rethymno, Crete, and Thessaloniki, northern Greece, can partially illuminate this. Many Greek informants consider life to be imbued with a spiritual field of intercommunicating energies; Roussou refers to people as having ‘energetic somata’, *sómata* meaning ‘bodies’ in Greek (2011b: 139-41). As Antonia, a Thessalonikian woman, explains, ‘Mátiasma involves the transmission of energy and thought between people’ (Roussou 2011a: 95). People have certain amounts of energy, of different intensities, moving through porous bodies. When someone comes into contact with and possesses another person’s energy, *mátiasma* occurs. Eva, an evil-eye ritual healer from Thessaloniki, remarks, ‘People’s negative energy often influences me. You feel that there is something negative about a person and, by being in close touch with him, you become negative and moody, or you get a headache’ (Roussou 2011b: 140). This signals that people’s energies have tactile features; they touch people’s bodies and cause bodily-felt symptoms. When people pointing a

moúntza exclaim ‘Take this!’, they imply that they can concentrate negative energy in their hands and push it in the direction of the person they want to inflict. Mina, another informant, explains that you can also inflict *mátiasma* on yourself in the process of spreading it to someone else:

I think that if you cannot manipulate the negative energy you want to send, then don’t do it. Since then, I try to avoid any bad thoughts because I feel I can send negative energy. And it can come back to me, like a boomerang. (ibid.)

Though some informants speak of positive and negative energies, the fact that positive words, looks and thoughts can impose the evil eye suggests that the intensity of energy plays a large role in its ability to precipitate *mátiasma*. The danger of the evil eye may not lie in the energy having an intrinsically negative nature as much as in its capacity to threaten a person’s energetic balance. Ethnographic accounts in a thesis by Souvlakis (2020), focusing on the evil eye in Corfu, provides further evidence for the relevance of balance in evil-eye transmission. A thirty-year old woman named Georgia describes:

When the energy exceeds a certain threshold, or drops below it, then the individual can cause or be inflicted by the evil eye. This means that a negative thought, or just a gaze, can cause damage to someone as the person who emits that energy is highly emotionally charged. (Souvlakis 2020: 113)

The importance of energy balance can also be discerned from evil eye prevention. One is the practice of ‘silencing and low voicing’, explained by Seremetakis (1991: 56; 2009: 343) as a method of self-surveilling pollution resulting from visual and verbal admiration. Seremetakis recalls a story an Athenian doctor shared with her about an old lady from his village:

Every single time she met a gorgeous young woman admired by all, she greeted her with a derogatory word [*ghia sou plakoutsomita mou*; ‘hi, my flat-nosed one’], till she was confronted by the [woman’s] brother. She was doing it to avoid inflicting evil eye on the beautiful woman. (Seremetakis 2009: 343)

To counterbalance the adulatory energy attracted by the woman’s beauty, the older woman greeted her with a derogatory phrase as a protective measure, which ostensibly resembles an insult. Spitting is another popular protective technique; often, when Greek people compliment someone, they spit or imitate spitting on the person by saying ‘*phtoú, phtoú, phtoú*’ to avoid unintentionally inflicting the evil eye (ibid; Lykiardopoulos 1981: 225; Raftopoulos 1983: 30). Again, this superficially rude action is a way of offsetting the excessively positive energy radiated by flattery. One can particularly see people spitting in the presence of babies, who are especially vulnerable; for this reason, young children are adorned

with protective amulets against the evil eye that redirect people's attention, and there is a tradition of keeping babies at home until their baptism, a ritual that helps prevent the evil eye (Hardie 1923: 161; Lykiardopoulos 1981: 226; Raftopoulos 1983: 30, 39).

Though energy is typically perceived as an invisible, intangible force that eludes Western scientific sensory schemas, Greek informants' descriptions of it grant it tactile qualities that can be sensed by the body and experienced through *mátiasma*. It is not clear whether the sights, sounds, movements and touch associated with evil-eye transmission produce this energy, serve as it, or perhaps both. However, there is an intermodal and synaesthetic nature to them, similar to the intermodality of tactile properties of the eyes spreading to other body parts described in Esposito's analysis of *butoh* dance (Esposito 2013: 106-26). That the evil eye has a means of projecting itself through multiple modalities to create a perception of *mátiasma* speaks to the idea that senses 'should not be understood as separate keyboards for the registration of sensation but as organs of the body as a whole, in whose movement, within an environment, the activity of perception consists' (Ingold 2000: 268). The energy exchange of the evil eye is also intertwined with spirituality, as many believe spirits can participate in this exchange. *Pneuma*, a breath-like vital force, is often conceptualized as one's spirit and can also evoke wind; in Greek antiquity, winds circulating a body were linked to 'breaths sustaining life within' (Kuriyama 1999: 229, 236). Parkin (2007: 540-2, 547-8) mentions the cyclical transformation of smell, wind, air, breath and conceptions of spirits described by Bantu-speaking people of the East African coast, where spirits can manifest themselves through smell, wind, or breath, rendering them accessible to the senses. He references Poirier, who explains the interactions between breath, wind and spirit in Kukatja ontology in Australia's Western Desert:

In local representations of the body, when the wind penetrates any one of the human body's openings, it becomes breath; as breath, the wind could not possibly be considered intrusive ... the wind is thus consubstantial with humans: they share the same ancestral essence. (Poirier, 2004: 59)

From this it appears that the energy of the evil eye enters bodies as breath, serving as a shared substance that links people to other people, people to spirits and people to their environments. This potential transubstantiality between breath and energy, in which one substance becomes the other, is made clearer below, in a later section dedicated to *xemátiasma*. The multiple, synaesthetic sensory exchanges of evil eye transmission provide evidence for the materiality of spiritualities and socialities.

Feeling kommára in xemátiasma

When the evil eye disturbs a person's energy, it can result in varying severities of *mátiasma*, an illness characterized by headaches, fatigue, fogginess, and a sense of disconnection, disorientation and isolation. Some people claim that it is the experience of possessing someone else's negative energy; informants in Corfu express the idea that they carry the suffering of another person during *mátiasma* (Souvlakis 2020: 110). One of the most common symptoms is the loss of energy and presence known as *kommára*, semantically related to the Greek word *kóvo*, meaning 'to cut' (Roussou 2011b: 142). In other words, it is an overwhelming feeling of being cut from the rest of the world and of experiencing heaviness, extreme tiredness and numbness. Sofia, a woman from Thessaloniki, describes the experience well:

I feel as if I am not present here. If you ask me to perform a task, I will not be able to understand what you are talking about. It feels like I am one step behind. It is as if I have entered another dimension from which I observe the present one. As if I cannot observe the present. As if I cannot be here. (Roussou 2011b: 141)

Many accounts reflect the sensation of a drop in energy levels, sleeplessness, a weakened spirit, a lack of focus and isolation from both oneself and others. Souvlakis records testaments from his informants that convey a sense of disembodiment; Stamos, a man in his mid-twenties from Corfu, explains:

I know that I have the evil eye not only because of the symptoms but mostly because there is a strong sense of not belonging anywhere, a sense that my body is not part of me and I am just like [a] ghost, not grounded anywhere. (Souvlakis 2020: 172)

Kommára is a symptom of asynchrony with one's own body, one's social relations and one's sense of time. When someone has *mátiasma*, they lose their *kéfi*—their spirit, joy, motivation, excitement and liveliness. *Mátiasma* resembles the illness of 'spirit loss' of the Yolmo in Tibet that Desjarlais (1996) describes, in which the *bla* or 'spirit' parts from the body and causes a person to feel heavy and lack the energy to socialize, eat or work. Desjarlais writes that the afflicted person 'loses the sense of kinaesthetic attentiveness or presence' (ibid.: 145), which is notably similar to descriptions of *kommára*. As people's symptoms of *mátiasma* lie in core shared experiences of feeling 'cut' from themselves, others and their surroundings, and of possessing someone else's energy, healers must ameliorate this through a ritual that removes this energy, reinvigorates their spirit and re-establishes feelings of embodiment and synchronicity.

Xemátiasma as an exchange of embodied experiences

There are many varieties of *xemátiasma*, depending on influences as wide in scope as the traditions of the region it originates in and as particular as a person's conception of self. Healers are typically women—though men also perform it—who learn it through friends and relatives in their communities (Seremetakis 2009: 341; Roussou 2011b: 138; Souvlakis 2020: 69). When healers recognize symptoms of *mátiasma*, they sit down with the afflicted person in a quiet area and prepare the materials for the ritual. The most popular practice of *xemátiasma* involves the elements of water, olive oil, words (*ta lógia*) and breath. One first takes a cup or bowl, fills it with water and pours three drops of oil into it while mumbling the words, or spell, associated with the ritual. This first step is diagnostic; if the oil dissolves into the water or falls to the bottom, it is clear that this is a case of the evil eye. The healer at this point feels the heaviness of the person with *mátiasma* and begins to yawn:

When someone tells me that he feels strange and he feels *kommára*, that he has the evil eye and all, I feel it. It is like I receive a wave which he casts. I feel an unbelievable heaviness on my forehead, and I want to yawn. I say my prayer. And when I take a big breath I feel I have absorbed his evil eye, I have healed him. (Roussou 2011b: 143)

The intensity of the yawning is a reflection of the strength of the evil eye. Healers continue saying the words and yawning until they absorb the patient's evil-eye energy, and the ritual concludes once the oil stops vanishing in the water. The patient takes three sips of the water, which is then discarded. Finally, the healer asks the person to move out of their position to prevent a relapse; this is also done in everyday life as a preventative measure after one hears bad news or has a bad intuition (Seremetakis 2009: 340). Healers may exchange oil drops with three pieces of hot charcoal or pinches of salt, and some may make the sign of the cross, sprinkle water on to the patient and even stroke the patient's forehead with their thumbs. The significance of the materials, words, numbers and specific steps involved are discussed further in the following chapter.

Healers develop diagnostic knowledge of *mátiasma* based on its manifestations in the patient's body, their own body and the ritual process, though the techniques used to reveal its origins (i.e. the gender of the eye), its presence and its strength are not homogenous. Rituals that also incorporate holy flowers, incense, prayers and other elements have been documented (Hardie 1923: 165-70; Gubbins 1946: 196; Lykiardopoulos 1981: 228-9; Raftopoulos 1983: 34-8; Herzfeld et al. 1986: 110; Souvlakis 2020: 133), illustrating the diversity in the ritual's performance. However, much of this literature overwhelmingly fails to expand on the bodily interaction between healers and patients, leaving readers curious as to how *xemátiasma*

addresses the problems of evil-eye energy imbalance and *kommára*, and how it induces pain alleviation. Roussou (2011a: 95-6; 2011b: 143) describes *xemátiasma* as an exchange of positive energy entering the patient's body from the healer and of negative energy leaving the patient's body, entering the healer's body and escaping. Similarly, Souvlakis's (2020: 132) informants in Corfu state that a healer absorbs the patient's negative energy in order to understand and alleviate the latter's suffering. Taking a closer look at the persistent presence of intense yawning in *xemátiasma* may provide insight into how this is said to occur.

Healers compulsively yawn in the presence of *mátiasma*, causing them to tear up as they 'take on the evil' from the afflicted person; patients then also begin to yawn, allowing the energy associated with *mátiasma* to leave their bodies and enter the healers' (Seremetakis 2009: 342). This practice suggests that yawning and tearing enable the healers to expel the energy they take on from the sufferers. It also supports the transubstantiality between breath and energy, as the energies are absorbed and expelled through the inhalation and exhalation of breath, the shared substance connecting the two bodies. As the healer yawns and momentarily embodies the patient's intense energy and painful experience, the patient embodies the healer's positive energy. Patients ultimately regain a sense of connection with their own bodies and with the healers themselves through this reorientation of the senses towards immersive breathing and towards each other's relationship in the present moment, thus re-establishing a balanced state of energies across them both. Meanwhile, the healer temporarily adopts *mátiasma*-related symptoms; Herzfeld et al. (1986: 110) note during fieldwork in the village of Glendi that healers yawn, weep and even suffer headaches for a while following a healing session. In this way, *xemátiasma* can be considered an exchange of embodied experiences facilitated by yawning and characterized by a radical empathy in which a healer takes on someone else's suffering. However, it is important to note that this does not mean that the healer embodies these experiences of pain identically to the original sufferer; the healer's ability to tap into the embodied painful experience of the patient is only partial, in line with phenomenological approaches to empathy I expand on in the last section. The efficacies of this empathic exchange are multiple, working synergistically to positively transform the patient's condition of *mátiasma*.

Multiple efficacies of *xemátiasma*

In biomedicine, the efficacy of a treatment—its ability to produce a desired effect or a beneficial change—is generally determined through RCTs, which attempt to pinpoint the 'active' effects of treatments in relation to placebo controls. Though the bioefficacy of a

treatment is important, its dominance in clinical research and biomedical health-care renders efficacies rooted in the meanings that patients, practitioners and medications elicit, the processual nature of illness and its alleviation, the contribution of social relationships in everyday life, and the embodied subjectivities that constitute patients' experiences as illegitimate factors of the healing process. *Xemátiasma* relies on a combination of these non-pharmacological-centric factors, thereby contributing to existing evidence of multiple efficacies—the idea that treatment has multiple abilities to provide therapeutic transformation. In this section I first expand on the symbolic and processual efficacies of procedures, materials, side-effects and spells of *xemátiasma* and then elaborate on its social and ritual, bodily-felt efficacies.

Symbols, signs, side-effects and spells

The meanings attached to elements comprising therapeutic environments, including the physicians or patients (appearance, language, attitudes), their interaction, and substances (colours, shapes, amounts, type of treatment), have significant physiological influences on treatment outcomes; this is part of what constitutes the 'meaning response' (Moerman 2002: 14; Moerman and Jonas 2002: 472-4). In *xemátiasma*, one notices the presence and repetition of meaningful numbers that enhance the potency and efficacy of the ritual. The number three is frequently invoked, serving as the amount of times a healer may make the sign of the cross over the water and 'spit' on the patient, the amount of oil or charcoal dropped in the water, the number of pinches of salt thrown into a fire, and the number of sips a patient takes from the water (Hardie 1923: 171; Gubbins 1946: 196; Lykiardopoulos 1981: 228-9; Raftopoulos 1983: 29-39; Roussou 2011b: 143). The number three references the Holy Trinity of Greek Orthodox Christianity, tapping into the perceived power of the sacred. Many of these rituals also include the number forty (*saránda*), which has multiple references in the Bible as the length of liminal periods that are precursors to positive changes and new phases, such as the number of days between Jesus' resurrection and ascent. There is also a tradition in which mothers who have recently given birth remain indoors for forty days before the baby's baptism, which marks a return to normality (Hardie 1923: 161; Herzfeld et al. 1986: 110; Seremetakis 2009: 343). Healers may repeat their spells forty times, count to forty, massage patients' foreheads with salt forty times, or sprinkle water on their patient eight times with five fingers to make up the number forty. Healers, having completed a *xemátiasma*, take forty steps to alleviate the symptoms they have taken on (Herzfeld et al. 1986: 110). The number has such ritual significance that *xemátiasma* is also referred to as *sarándisma* (ibid.;

Seremetakis 2009: 343). The use of meaningful numbers in this ritual is one example of its symbolic efficacies, which centre on the ability of symbols to materialize meanings, as well as emotional, spiritual and other affective forces, in treatment (Wahlberg 2008: 82).

As discussed earlier, various signs throughout the process of *xemátiasma* (dis)confirm the presence and intensity of the evil eye. This shows an intimate interplay between the symbolic and processual efficacies of *xemátiasma*; processual efficacy refers to how the passage of time and the series of outcomes throughout a therapy determine whether a treatment works. If the oil used in *xemátiasma* creates a separate layer from the water, as expected, then there is no evil eye. If the oil disperses in smaller amounts, then the case is not a strong one. However, when the ‘water drinks the oil’ (the oil is dissolved) and the healer yawns, this signals its intense presence (Hardie 1923: 164; Raftopoulos 1983: 29; Seremetakis 2009: 343; Roussou 2011b: 143; Souvlakis 2020: 133). A healer continues the *xemátiasma* until the oil stops dispersing or dissolving, making this sign integral to determining whether the therapeutic process is working. The water and oil utilized in *xemátiasma* have significance in their own right as well. As one informant states, water is critical in *xemátiasma* ‘because we cannot live without it, it is a natural element of nature and of the human organism, and important for baptism’ (Roussou 2011b: 148). The water must be brought into the ritual space in silence to ensure it is ‘unspoken’ (*amílito*); speaking pollutes the ‘purifying ability of the water’ and compromises the ritual’s effectiveness (Gubbins 1946: 196; Lykiardopoulos 1981: 228; Souvlakis 2020: 132). Olive oil is a sacred gift in Greece’s history and mythology and is incorporated in many church rituals. The oil for the ritual often comes from the oil lamp (*kandili*) that is lit daily in the iconostasis, a family altar of holy icons and a place for reflection in many Greek homes (Roussou 2011b: 143; Souvlakis 2020: 132-3). The meanings of side-effects provide another example of symbolic efficacy in relation to processual efficacy; Etkin explains, in the context of Hausa interpretations of therapeutic outcomes in Nigeria, that what is called a side-effect in biomedicine is interpreted as an indicator that a therapy is ‘on course’ in other medical paradigms (Etkin 1992: 102). In *xemátiasma*, a patient who sneezes, hiccups or feels itchy during the ritual tells the healer that the ritual is working (Raftopoulos 1983: 35-6; Seremetakis 2009: 343, 346). Seremetakis (*ibid.*: 342) explains that body parts exchange messages with each other and with other bodies, these ‘involuntary gestures’ confirming the efficacy of the *xemátiasma*.

The words a healer speaks throughout *xemátiasma* consist of religious prayers and ‘narrative charms’ with rural imagery, such as those documented by Hardie (1923: 166-7) in northern Greece. She also records words associated with the cleansing nature of *xemátiasma*,

including washing away evil eyes, curses and days. The symbolism of washing away the evil is enacted by disposing of the used water at the end of the ritual. When healers drop hot coals into water or throw salt into a fire, they demand that the evil eye burst along with the sounds of live coal sizzling and salt sputtering (ibid.: 169). Other religious spells tap into the divine powers of the sacred, calling to Christ and the saints to conquer ills and facilitate the return of evils to their original source. The manner through which healers transmit knowledge of these ritual words to other people has important consequences for the words' efficacy, which is why I avoid sharing them in their entirety. One tradition claims that a woman who wants to reveal the words to another woman must first pass them through a male mediator and *vice versa* to prevent their effectiveness being lost (Hardie 1923: 165; Herzfeld et al. 1986: 109-10; Roussou 2011b: 137; Souvlakis 2020: 126). Herzfeld explains that this restrictive transmission prevents the dilution of spells and loads the responsibility on to the healers: 'as heirs to formulae that must be transmitted by the sexual zigzag rule, they are themselves significant elements within the expressive complex of curing that they direct' (Herzfeld et al. 1986: 110). The words' efficacy may also cease if they are said out loud by one person using them to another who wants to use them in the same lifetime; people avoid this by sharing them through writing (Hardie 1923: 165). For this reason, healers whisper or murmur the spells during *xemátiasma* so they are not stolen. Seremetakis (2009: 343) shares how her elderly relative once complained about a popular Greek television programme broadcasting people's testaments of *xemátiasma*'s effectiveness, where some even shared their spells; 'They speak truth, but who on earth heard of giving your spell out in public! What do they think it is, an aspirin? What value do these spells have now'? This comparison with an aspirin reveals the symbolic meanings attached to *xemátiasma* spells—words shared intimately as gifts. As Seremetakis explains, aspirin is 'cheap' in comparison to *xemátiasma*. It also lacks symbolic meaning and does not 'speak'; rather, it is a 'utility item' that anyone willing to pay its small cost can buy (ibid.: 344). *Xemátiasma*, meanwhile, is a priceless exchange between giver and receiver, in which healers are willing to share their words, time and energy, and both witness and take on another's pain. People respond in medically significant ways to the values, symbols and social gestures in healing processes, emphasizing the extent to which healers manage meaning in and alongside medicine (Sullivan 1993: 230).

Caregiving and synchronicity via somatic witnessing

Xemátiasma, as often performed by close friends and relatives, serves to reaffirm relationships and allows loved ones to perform acts of care, especially in communities

separated across long distances as a result of urbanization and globalization. The popularity of telephonic divination, in which healers perform *xemátiasma* over the phone, attests to this. As cities do not share the proxemic interconnectedness of rural villages, telephonic *xemátiasma* provides a means of overcoming social isolation and fragmentation (Seremetakis 2009: 339-40; Roussou 2011a: 95). A phone closely attached to the ear and almost touching the mouths of both the patient and healer creates a sense of continuity and privacy, one that is necessary during *xemátiasma*. It provides an opportunity for people living far apart to remain core contributors to the health and alleviation of suffering of their loved ones and practice ‘the ethic of helping’ (Seremetakis 2009: 340). After healers complete a telephonic *xemátiasma*, they hang up and expect the patients to call back to confirm that their *mátiasma* has disappeared. This is part of an ‘antiphonic relation’, referring to a dynamic of reciprocity in acts of giving and taking (ibid.). Seremetakis’s (1991) fieldwork on the mourning songs called *miroloi* in Greece’s Mani region relays the significance of antiphony in ritual transformation. After someone’s death, female mourners (*moiroloyístres*) organize mourning rituals (*kláma*) in which the woman closest to the deceased (*koriféa*) and the chorus of *moiroloyístres* practice an ‘antiphonic’ dynamic as they continuously ‘take the lament from each other’ (Seremetakis 1991: 99-100). Without kin reciprocating and validating each other’s pain, there is a poverty of witness that manifests itself in a silent and ‘bad death’ (ibid.: 76). During *xemátiasma*, the healer not only witnesses the patient’s pain, but also attempts to embody it to alleviate the latter’s suffering. By taking the pain of another in return for bodily and verbal confirmation, the healer and patient participate in an antiphonic relation. Healers are offended when a patient compromises this exchange by failing to call back after a telephonic *xemátiasma*, as this leaves the ritual incomplete (Seremetakis 2009: 340). Just as the pain of death must be dealt with in the context of antiphonic relations to be valid and true (Seremetakis 1991: 120), so must *mátiasma* and its alleviation through *xemátiasma*. This is the social efficacy of *xemátiasma*—the ability to affect betterment through ‘the relations between those enacting illness and treatment’ (Whyte et al. 2002: 23). Whyte et al. develop this concept through Hardon’s study of self-care techniques in Metro Manila’s neighbourhoods, detailing mothers’ evaluations of medical efficacies in allowing them to perform duties as caregivers and allay relationship distress (ibid.: 25-6). The witnessing and reciprocal exchange of *xemátiasma* is an act of care that reinforces relationships between healers and patients and ensures the effectiveness of the ritual. Lock’s study of moxibustion in Japan and commentary on how sick time provides opportunities to fulfil *amaeru*, ‘a desire to presume upon another’s love’, and communicate feelings in nurturing actions also portrays a

social efficacy grounded in care-giving performance (Lock 1978: 163-4). Witnessing in *xemátiasma* is expressed and experienced somatically, making tangible the social relationship between healer and sufferer.

The ‘somatic witnessing’ in *xemátiasma* consists of bodies talking to each other as they yawn, sneeze, hiccup and confirm the efficacy of the ritual (Seremetakis 2009: 340-2). The yawning of a healer followed by that of the patient facilitates an exchange of embodied experiences in which the patient regains feelings of attunement with themselves and other people and serves as proof of *xemátiasma*’s efficacy. I argue that this bodily exchange is a form of ‘generating synchronicity’ in which a patient and healer are immersed in the same event, thereby materializing their relationship and creating predispositions for positive transformation (Hsu 2017: 92-5). Hsu describes this phenomenon in acupuncture when a doctor works on needles inserted in certain loci on a patient’s body until there is an instance of tension and concentration between them; this marked moment of presence is maintained until the patient calls out, ‘Dele, dele [alright, alright]—I got it [the *qi*]’ (Hsu 2005: 78). This shared, synchronic heightened alertness between healer and patient open ups and predisposes the patient’s body to positive change and makes the social relationship between them ‘physically real’ (Hsu 2008: 439). Furthermore, this elicitation of bodily-felt *de qi* is a crucial indicator of acupuncture’s efficacy (Hsu 2011: 167). When the patient and healer are both immersed in intense yawning during *xemátiasma*, they orient themselves to their breathing and each other. This synchronization necessitates an engagement with the present moment, calling for the afflicted person to pay attention to the exchange of breath between them and the healer. Reclaiming a sense of presence is a major goal of *xemátiasma*, given that the illness of *mátiasma* is characterized by a lack of it, providing support for the therapeutic qualities of generating synchronicity. This comparison is particularly interesting given the similarities between the *qi* flowing through bodily channels that acupuncture facilitates and the pneumatic exchange of energy implicated in *xemátiasma*, with both *qi* and *pneuma* described as vital energy sources akin to breath (and associated with wind) that sustain the body alongside blood (Kuriyama 1995: 17, 43-5; 1999: 199, 236). Similar to how *de qi* constitutes the opening phase of a ritual (Hsu 2017: 94), referring to the ‘stage of separation’ of van Gennep (1909) or the ‘predisposition’ stage of Csordas (1983: 27-30), that separates patients from their habituated states and awakens them, yawning in *xemátiasma* (ironically) serves as an energy-enhancing body technique that quite literally opens patients up and reorients their senses towards the immediate bodily reciprocity with the healers. The somatic witnessing of *xemátiasma* generates a synchronicity between patient and healer, making the

antiphonic relationship between them physically real, even when they are miles apart. Yawning is a ritually induced, bodily-felt efficacy in *xemátiasma* that reinforces its social efficacies, providing an example of how the senses mediate social meaning and social relations. The accessible nature of *xemátiasma*, as one can call up a relative or go next door to a family member to receive it at no cost, also provides insight into how its social efficacies reinforce the economic efficacies of its affordability and sustainability. In reality, it is impossible to strictly categorize these efficacies, as they often overlap and serve manifold functions. For example, yawning, sneezing, hiccups and itching reside at the intersection of symbolic, processual and bodily-felt efficacies. None of these mechanisms work alone; instead, they cooperatively interact in multiple directions with differing intensities depending on the context in order to induce therapeutic effects.

***Xemátiasma* ↔ therapeutic empathy**

Coming to an end of this analysis of the sensory experiences of evil-eye infliction, affliction and (re)moval, and the multiple efficacies of *xemátiasma*, I now incorporate its findings into the larger conversation about empathy, more specifically therapeutic empathy. I first clarify how the exchange of embodied experiences that occurs in *xemátiasma* relates to phenomenological approaches to empathy and establish to what extent *xemátiasma* entails therapeutic empathy. I then explore how the analysis of *xemátiasma* can contribute to the workings and efficacies of therapeutic empathy beyond its barely discussed (and, if discussed, often limited) explanations and finally consider the implications for criteria of legitimacy and truth in medicine.

***Xemátiasma* in relation to (therapeutic) empathy**

Ethnographic accounts of *xemátiasma* indicate that a healer and a patient undergo an exchange of embodied experiences, in which the healer takes on (and subsequently expels) the painful symptoms of an afflicted person's *mátiasma* through a variety of bodily techniques to alleviate the burden of the latter's suffering. I would argue that this engages empathic processes, as the healer attempts to share in the patient's painful subjective experience. As Husserl points out, due to the asymmetry between any two people, there is an alterity in their experiences of empathy; one person cannot have genuine first-hand access to another person's lived experience in that person's body using their own body (Husserl and Cairns 1982: 108-120). The exchange that occurs in *xemátiasma* is not an exact 'swap' of whole subjectivities between healer and patient, but rather a bodily dialogue engaging

multiple efficacies that then leads to an exchange of experiences that are embodied differently in both of them. The patient's original experience of pain is not the same as the healer's eventual experience of pain in *xemátiasma*; the healer takes on the energy that induces another *manifestation* of the patient's original embodied experience of pain. Though healers take on the energy causing the patient to feel ill, their symptoms of temporary *mátiasma* (if they do not manage to fully expel them in the process of *xemátiasma*) often manifest themselves in different ways. The patients may have come down with a headache and fatigue, whereas the healers may feel instead an upset stomach for a while after 'taking the evil' upon themselves. The connections and synchronicities formed through the somatic witnessing between healer and patient in *xemátiasma* facilitate an embodied intersubjectivity, as the healer attempts to understand and experience bodily the kind of pain the patient is similarly feeling. This phenomenological feature of 'opacity' in empathic encounters (Bizzari et al. 2019: 92) extends to *xemátiasma*, though it does push its boundaries.

To recall, therapeutic empathy as defined by Howick et al. (2018b: 233) and inspired by Mercer and Reynolds (2002: 10) specifically includes 1) understanding what an illness means to patients, 2) communicating that understanding and 3) acting on that understanding in a helpful and therapeutic way. In *xemátiasma*, a healer 1) not only understands what *mátiasma* means to the patient but also physically embodies similar (though not exact) symptoms of it, 2) communicates this embodied understanding through bodily gestures such as yawning and tearing, and 3) in the process alleviates the patient's pain. However, there are a few key differences. Though the definition of therapeutic empathy outlines three seemingly separate 'steps' that may initially be interpreted as linear, *xemátiasma* seems to accomplish all three simultaneously. The healer's understanding of the illness, communication of this understanding, and helpful and healing contribution can all occur at once, all through the techniques and expressions of the healer's body as it takes up the evil-eye energies imposing *mátiasma* on the patient. I suggest that what is imagined in the case of therapeutic empathy as described in the biomedical literature is that a doctor understands what an illness means to a patient by examining the latter's body and following descriptions of the patient's experience with it, rather than taking on that experience of pain themselves, as is done in *xemátiasma*. A healer still does this prior to enacting the ritual of *xemátiasma* itself, though this understanding takes on new, explicitly embodied dimensions during the ritual. Furthermore, the communication of the shared embodied understanding that occurs in *xemátiasma* through bodily gestures of yawning and tearing up is unlikely to be the same as the kind envisioned in Howick's interpretation; in biomedical clinical settings, the communication would come in

the form of verbal validation, a touch of the shoulder, eye contact, nodding, etc. However, once again, this kind of communication also occurs between healer and patient just prior to the start of the *xemátiasma*; it is just further reinforced during the somatic witnessing that occurs throughout the ritual. In these ways, the entire process of *xemátiasma*, from the moment a patient expresses painful symptoms to the completion of the ritual, does not just entail therapeutic empathy, but reveals to be a deeper, expanded version of it. There are limitations to this relation, given that the construction of the definition of therapeutic empathy did not have illnesses like *mátiasma* and rituals like *xemátiasma* in mind. The empathetic interventions discussed in the meta-analyses of therapeutic empathy consist of verbal and non-verbal validations of pain, longer consultations, positive expectation-inducing suggestions of treatment effects, two-way discussions allowing the patient to ask questions and the clinician to provide explanations, verbal emphasis on patient comfort and well-being, clarifications of patients' understandings of the causes or meanings of their condition, warmth, smiling, active listening, eye contact, a slight leaning towards the patient, hand gestures, etc. (Mercer and Reynolds 2002; Mercer et al. 2012; Elliott et al. 2018; Howick et al. 2018a). These are by no means equivalent to the techniques of *xemátiasma*, even though many of these qualities are intrinsic to its ritual process, including verbal and non-verbal validations of pain, longer times spent between patient and healer, positive expectations (when healers tell their patients that they will take the evil inflicting *mátiasma* away from them), and attentive body language. As expressed by Howick, empathy interventions are difficult to standardize, as there is no single form of empathy (Howick et al. 2018a: s2-3). Though *xemátiasma* and the empathetic interventions of biomedical clinical settings are not to be conflated as equal (especially given that not even the interventions comprising the latter category can be), they certainly share similar qualities and aspirations defining the framework of therapeutic empathy. I contend that *xemátiasma* involves a radicalization of the processes outlined in the definition of therapeutic empathy. *Xemátiasma* suggests the existence of a therapeutic empathy that goes beyond intellection and affect and foregrounds its bodily and multisensory engagements.

Reframing the efficacies of therapeutic empathy

If one treats *xemátiasma* as a radical therapeutic empathy, then to what extent can the efficacies of *xemátiasma* help reframe the efficacies of therapeutic empathy as discussed in the biomedical literature? The latter claims that the efficacies of therapeutic empathy lie in more accurate diagnosis and prognosis, enhanced patient satisfaction, shared decision-

making, anxiety alleviation, patient-centred treatment and ‘patient enablement and compliance’ (Mercer et al. 2012: 254). These are significant and valuable contributions of therapeutic empathy, but they do not grasp the crux of its efficacies. These are all *extrinsic outcomes related to* activities of therapeutic empathy; they are not intrinsic to the therapeutic effects of empathy itself. Keeping in mind the intertwined social and embodied efficacies of *xemátiasma*, one can recognize in these explanations the lack of therapeutic powers attributed to the social interactions that are intrinsic to therapeutic empathy.

The foregoing analysis of *xemátiasma* has revealed that part of its efficacy resides in its ability to demonstrate care and generate synchronicity through antiphonic relations of somatic witnessing. This reorients the senses of both patient and healer to the present moment and to each other, enhances vitality and attunement, makes their relationship feel physically real, and contributes to the opening phase of transformation that predisposes the patient to positive change. Though perhaps to a lesser extent, the empathic interventions described in the biomedical literature also establish a kind of synchronicity through an antiphonic relation between patient and healer. The above interventions that emphasize the importance of time and bodily (including verbal) gestures to enhance the ability of both healer and patient to fully attend to each other are acts of simultaneous immersion; do they not also generate synchronicity through their modes of witnessing? Is the performance of care and empathy in these interventions not a source of its efficacy? Given that a biomedical clinical consultation is certainly not devoid of ritual, therapeutic empathy could contribute to the opening phase of the transformation discussed in ritual practice. Therefore, these practices of therapeutic empathy, which predispose and open up the patient to the potentialities of the positive effects of subsequent treatment, serve an integral role in affecting transformation—they are acts of healing within themselves. Therapeutic empathy is efficacious not just in its capacity to lead to better diagnoses or patient-centred decisions, but in its capacity to create new orientations through which patients understand and experience their illness through the heightened attention and alignment between healers and patients it affords. Allowing patients and healers the time to attend to and ‘witness’ one another and granting the opportunity for physicians to show that they care about the patient are powerful components of the healing process.

Contestations for truth in medicine

This comparison between *xemátiasma* and therapeutic empathy reveals problems in biomedicine’s practices of delineating truths in claims of efficacy. The RCT pinpoints the specified activity of a treatment as opposed to the ‘unspecified’ activities of a placebo

(Sullivan 1993: 221). The term ‘placebo’ has been widely used to describe the ‘unspecified effects’ of a treatment, including contextual factors of care, such as branding and labelling medication, method of treatment, and verbal and non-verbal cues imparted by practitioners. As placebo effects are placed in contrast to the ‘specific activity’ that determines a treatment’s ‘true’ efficacy, placebo effects have been rendered illegitimate for biomedical standards. The ambiguous nature of the definition of a placebo has unsurprisingly helped perpetuate the misguided idea that healing methods that fail to fit the standards of biomedical practices are ineffective and even fraudulent. This risks marginalizing non-biomedically focused healing practices that incorporate the significance of sensory experiences and meaning-creation in the healing process. This is precisely why institutions like the National Health Service and National Institute of Health formerly label them as ‘alternative’ or ‘complementary’ in the first place (National Health Service, 2018; National Institute of Health, 2018). Therapeutic empathy seems to bypass these troubles, despite its emphasis on what RCTs would designate the ‘unspecified activities’ of patient–doctor interactions. From a biomedical standpoint, a ritual such as *xemátiasma* would be reduced to the category of a placebo. However, the efficacy of therapeutic empathy interventions for which the existing literature provides only limited explanations have been accepted as part of that category of ‘specified effects’ that more traditional healing practices are rarely attributed. Why is a ritual like *xemátiasma* so susceptible to trivialization, when therapeutic empathy is not?

This inclines me to consider the very political entanglements of the adoption of placebo controls. Delving into the history of the RCT reveals that its invention stemmed not only from a desire for rigorous treatment evaluation, but also a struggle for the power that comes from funding and academic support. In other words, it was a tool for building a discipline (Kaptchuk 1998: 393). Biomedicine did not innocently choose not to elaborate on the so-called non-specific effects that make up the context of care; their dismissal was a means of asserting superiority over treatment practices that value them (Kleinman 1997: 33). Powerful stakeholders in biomedicine—including insurance companies and pharmaceutical representatives—maintain biomedicine’s status as the ‘official supplier of health services to the populace’, partly by examining the claims of ‘alternative’ medicine (Waldram 2000: 617). Unlike *xemátiasma*, and despite its inherently empathetic processes, the concept of therapeutic empathy was devised in consideration of a western clinical form of consultation and is just subtle and ‘toned-down’ enough to not challenge the interests of the biomedical stakeholders just mentioned. Therapeutic empathy interventions, which encourage physicians to give time to patients, validate their pain, open up a reciprocal dialogue, attentively engage

them, and express warmth and positivity, demand what should be expected to be practised during consultations. However, short consultation times, huge caseloads, long working hours and meticulous documentation in electronic medical records (leading to less attention being paid to patients), among other factors, precludes physicians from doing so (Shanafelt et al. 2016; Patel et al. 2018; West et al. 2018). This makes evident the dangers of constructing a health-care system without consideration of social and sensory efficacies in healing, ultimately burdening physicians and doing a disservice to patients in the process. The fact that therapeutic empathy interventions are accepted as efficacious, while rituals like *xemátiasma* that intrinsically enact forms of empathetic care are side-lined as placebos, remains open to question. It seems that stakeholders in biomedical institutions are only willing to accept efficacies they can maintain dominance over, despite the evident reality that they have much to learn from the ritual practices they dismiss.

Conclusions and recommendations

By means of a sensory analysis of *xemátiasma* and its relation to therapeutic empathy, this article has contributed to efforts to articulate the value of sensory experiences of ritual healing, further the claim for multiple efficacies, advocate the use of ethnographic evidence in elaborating medical concepts, and challenge biomedicine's neglect of the social in precipitating therapeutic outcomes. I started by describing the background to the advances and shortcomings of therapeutic empathy in biomedical practice and argued that a closer look at multisensory processes of empathy at work through the ritual of *xemátiasma* could provide an explanation where biomedical literature could not. To do this, I first explored the sensory experiences of evil-eye infliction, affliction and (re)moval, arguing: 1) that its transmission, perception and practice involve a synaesthetic, transubstantial energy exchange between people, challenging its depiction as an ocular-centric phenomenon; 2) that *mátiasma* is experienced as *kommára*, which is characterized by disconnectedness, disorientation, heaviness and asynchrony with one's own body, other bodies and time; and 3) that *xemátiasma* entails an exchange of embodied experiences in which healers take the pain-inducing energies of their patients on to themselves through a series of bodily techniques, most importantly yawning. Second, I analysed the multiple efficacies of *xemátiasma*, elaborating the interplay between 1) symbolic and processual efficacies of numbers, signs, materials, gestures, side-effects and words (and their cautious dissemination), and 2) social and bodily-felt efficacies in materializing long-distance socialities, enabling loved ones to perform sustainable acts of care, and engendering predispositions to new orientations through

generating synchronicity facilitated by somatic witnessing and antiphonic relations between healer and patient. Finally, I returned to the topic of empathy 1) to establish *xemátiasma* as a radical multisensory manifestation of therapeutic empathy; 2) to suggest that the efficacies of therapeutic empathy do not just centre on outcomes that are external to social processes, but also on their capacity to reorient the patient to new understandings and experiences of their illnesses and predispose them to positive change through processes of performing care and generating synchronicity; and 3) to argue that biomedicine's adoption of therapeutic empathy and its simultaneous marginalization of it in ritual practice that challenges its narrow standards of efficacy is intentionally rooted in a desire to maintain its powerful status.

To improve understanding of the techniques of accomplishing the radically empathic exchange of embodied experiences that occurs in *xemátiasma* and the ways it affects therapeutic transformation, more ethnographic research is needed focusing on sensory experiences and interactions between patient and healer, rather than solely on the symbolic meanings of the ritual. Given the similarities in the associations of breath, wind, energy flow and vitality between Chinese and Greek conceptions of health, future research should investigate these patient–healer interactions in rituals from both regions, such as acupuncture and *xemátiasma*, that attempt to manipulate this energy for the sake of healing.

Furthermore, researchers of therapeutic empathy should explore ethnographic accounts of empathy in healing practices both inside and outside biomedical frameworks to learn more about its intrinsic social and bodily-felt efficacies, the existence of multiple types and multisensory enactments of therapeutic empathy, and the allowances and boundaries in the extent to which we can understand and feel another's pain. Due to the increasing need to attend somatically to patients in health-care and the concurrent increasing constraints on physicians in being able to do so, and despite efforts in the direction of 'patient-centred care', biomedical health-care requires a structural, educational and cultural shift to re-establish the practice of medicine as a meaningful ritual interaction. One step towards accomplishing this is to ensure that pre-medical and medical education encourages critical analysis of claims for what treatment deserves to be called efficacious and clarifies that the 'contextual factors of care' that have fallen into what constitute the placebo effect should not be rendered less important than active drug ingredients, as this dismisses crucial healing efficacies of sensory and social experiences in patient–doctor interactions. These efficacies should be taught by experts like medical anthropologists in medical schools, so that future physicians have a stake in countering the mode of technological fixation, desensitization and detachment that accompanies the 'clinical gaze'.

Health-care administrators, policy-makers and researchers who influence and structure medical learning environments and the delivery of care also need to incorporate this knowledge into their training to *allow* physicians to properly attend to and give time to their patients. This calls for longer consultations, the incorporation of specialists to assist in electronic health-care record documentation, scheduling that incorporates follow-up continuity and shorter shifts, among other changes. There also needs to be more research on sensory experiences in ritual healing in order to build educational curriculums that foster respect for and acknowledgement of the mingling of the social and biological in medicine early on, as well as structural adjustments in the everyday practice of care delivery for physicians themselves to attentively understand, respond to and relieve a patient's pain. *Xemátiasma* makes it clear that the virtues of therapeutic empathy lie at least partly in facilitating the performance of attentive care, establishing multisensory exchanges of healing gifts and painful evils, and creating positive predispositions and reorientations in talking bodies that long to be listened to, thus helping reintroduce core aspects of ritual care into biomedical clinical consultations.

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SPATIAL CHANGES IN AN OXFORD PUBLIC ASYLUM

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Abstract

This article examines spatial changes at Littlemore hospital in Oxford between 1846 and 1956, the period since its foundation as a Victorian public asylum to the very last years before a radical psychiatric reform was implemented. I propose to see the asylum and later hospital spaces of Littlemore as being bodily sensed and co-productive with social processes. Specifically, I discuss the entanglement of these spaces with three factors: (panoptical) control, considerations of cost, and residents' comfort. With emphases on residents' bodily well-being and experiences, I aim to present a dynamic account of this part of the history of institutionalized mental health.

Introduction

Existing anthropological literature on mental health in public institutions has a strong interest in power. As noted by Lorna Rhodes in her ethnography of maximum-security prisons in the USA, although she does not see her project as 'an application of Foucault to prisons', she has found it impossible not to address the distinction between reason and madness and the phenomenon of panoptical observation (Rhodes 2004: 15). Regarding the specificity of her research topic, which is about severe mental health in the most secure prisons in America, an orientation towards these themes is both reasonable and suitable.

Rhodes' later work on psychiatric citizenship looks at it from the inmate's perspective. By analysing the interviews, letters, poems, and drawings she obtained from Sam, an inmate whose mental health worsened in this supermax prison, Rhodes discusses how psychiatric citizenship is formed in a strictly controlled institutional setting by one's attachment to a psychological report made on one's case, which also led Sam to a new way of making sense of his own history (Rhodes 2010). This perspective is perhaps both more nuanced and slightly more 'hopeful' compared to a mere focus on panoptical observation when analysing mental health in prisons. Nevertheless, the theoretical framework adopted by Rhodes still falls within a broader

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Foucauldian tradition, namely that of biopower and biopolitics (e.g., Rose 2001, Rabinow and Rose 2006).

The Foucauldian tradition is not the only one that examines mental health in public institutions from the point of view of power. There is also Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Anne Lovell's introduction (1987) to medical anthropology that revolves around the essays of the Italian psychiatrist and reformist, Franco Basaglia. Their introduction to these essays is based on a review of the anti-psychiatry movement in Italy from the theoretical framework of the political economy of health (PEH). Scheper-Hughes and Lovell explore how Basaglia was influenced by Marxism, specifically the works of François Tosquelles, Antonio Gramsci, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Furthermore, the authors introduce Basaglia's own critique of asylums, which was arguably more radical than the Foucauldian framework mentioned above. The movement that Basaglia launched from a provincial asylum in Gorizia, northern Italy, between 1961 and 1969 is called democratic psychiatry (*psichiatria democratica*). Helped by new anti-psychotic medications developed in the 1950s, the democratic psychiatry movement has eliminated all forms of violent physical constraints that are common in asylums. Instead, meetings (*assemblea*) are organised for the patients' free expressions of 'anger, passion, and unreason', which are not acted on by any member of staff or interpreted by any doctor from the perspective of psychoanalysis. According to Scheper-Hughes and Lovell, the aim of organizing these meetings is to challenge the 'underlying structure of power relations' directly, the ultimate aim of the movement being to shut down all the asylums in Italy (ibid.: 27).

Basaglia's influence has also been profound on social research into psychiatric movements. His work has been discussed, for instance, by Helen Spandler (2006) in her book on the therapeutic community at Paddington Day Hospital, and by Nick Crossley (2006) in his analysis of anti-psychiatry in the UK. Besides, Basaglia's movement has also had a direct social impact, as it led to the Italian Mental Health Act of 1978 (also known as the Basaglia Law or Law 180) and influenced many similar movements initiated in Brazil, Mozambique, and the US (Pandolfi and Bibeau [2005] 2007).

However, a focus on power may arguably not capture the multiple developments in psychiatric history, such as the deviation of some public asylums from the panopticon prison prototype. Indeed, although many asylums constructed in the seventeenth century adopted the radial layout of the prison, as we shall see later, many public asylums constructed since the early nineteenth century turned to a more humane alternative.

Moreover, public asylums and many other mental-health institutions are often investigated from an atemporal perspective, being somewhat ‘frozen’ for a focused analysis of their internal organizations, even when the latter are in a process of radical reform. However, the spaces of a mental-health institution actually appear as more changeable if viewed over a longer period of time. These subtle changes are often reflected in architectural and spatial alternations, such as the choice of a new layout, the placing of an additional building block and some even smaller material changes during a refurbishment. A public mental-health institution, viewed through the prism of its architectural and spatial changes, is therefore an ever-changing place entangled in social processes. This makes it more hybrid and complex than a mere withholder or representation of power.

The aim of this article is thus to examine spatial changes at Littlemore hospital between 1846 and 1956, from the time of its foundation as a public asylum until the very last years before an organisational reform was implemented. I credit part of my approach to Elisabeth Hsu’s work (2005) on how time is inscribed in space, which means that the spaces discussed in this article are not only representational and socially produced, but also co-productive with social processes.² In addition, I am also inspired by the papers of Kathryn Cassidy, Jong-Min Jeong, and Paola Juan presented at the 2020 RAI annual conference (also Jeong 2020; Cassidy et al. 2020). Their work shows how research on mental-health institutions can go beyond the power discourse to focus on other important themes, such as care, materiality, memory, imagination, intimacy, and alterity. A newly published paper by Natassia Brenman

² Here Hsu elaborates on Gell (1992).

(2020) on how precarity is ‘placed’ in immigrants’ access and transition in a London mental-health charity is also relevant, as we share the same aim of seeing a health landscape, with its own materiality, as shifting and as altering dynamically through time.

This is not to say, however, that this article is not concerned about issues related to power: these dominant themes remain unavoidable. Rather, my attempt is to emphasise residents’ bodily well-being and experiences by adding another two dimensions – the cost of architectural constructions and residents’ comfort – to my research into a Victorian asylum in Oxford. I argue that, by including these aspects, spaces in this public mental-health institution can be seen as more dynamic and changeable.

Methodologically, I have worked with archival images displayed on the Picture Oxon website created by Oxfordshire County Council in collaboration with the Oxfordshire Health Archives, the Oxfordshire History Centre, and others. By browsing with the keyword ‘Littlemore’ (the site of the asylum and later hospital) with decades selected between 1840-1999 on the website, I have been able to examine 68 photographs that are available online. The themes of these photographs are very intriguing and diverse, including a diet sheet from 1854, a case book from 1852, an admissions certificate for a patient called George from 1880, and aerial views of the hospital in different years. However, my focus here emphasises Littlemore’s spatial and architectural details. Apart from the archival images from Picture Oxon, the websites ‘Asylum Projects’ and ‘County Asylums’ have also been extremely helpful because they provide many factual details about asylum architecture in the UK in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As Sarah Pink (2001) notes, when looking at archival photographs, my own gaze as an ‘interviewer’ of images informs my anthropological inquiry into spatial changes. I am aware that visual images, when produced, will intrinsically bear the perspectives of the photographers and that they are selected to be stored in different types of archive (e.g., a health archive, a regional archive). For some of the images mentioned in this article, my gaze may divert from the gazes of photographers, reflecting a

suggestion in the anthropology of archives that subversive analysis of materials from the past may disclose novel insights for present and future research (Zeitlyn 2012). Specifically, my analysis of archival photographs is based on picture-reading methods introduced by Marcus Banks and David Zeitlyn (2015). This means that I will not only look at the contents of photographs, but will also analyse the supplementary information about them, such as titles, years of production and descriptions. This side information often indicates the ‘orthodox’ themes focused on by photographers and archivists, which my gaze may not always follow. Being aware of these ‘orthodox’ themes, I will also pay attention to the marginalized items which contain key information about spatial changes.

Sensitivity to comfort: from radial layout to corridor plan

Originally known as the Oxford County Pauper Lunatic Asylum, Littlemore Hospital was constructed in 1841 and opened on 1 August 1846. As mentioned in the Oxfordshire Health Archives,³ it was one of the earliest public asylums to be constructed after the 1845 Lunacy Act, the legal document which gave local authorities the responsibility for creating suitable institutions for people living with mental illness.⁴

When the Commissioners in Lunacy⁵ gathered to work out the guidelines for local authorities to build their own county asylums after the 1845 Lunacy Act, they picked up the proposal made by the Quaker mental-health reformer Samuel Tuke (1784-1857) for the Retreat at York to keep public asylums small in size, with no more than three hundred beds. They also emphasised the provision of airy and healthy living environments for residents in purpose-built public asylums (Taylor 1991: 134). This concern for asylum residents’ living experiences in the early nineteenth century was enacted through the emergence and spread of ‘moral treatment’, a series of

³ See link: https://www.oxfordshirehealtharchives.nhs.uk/hospitals/littlemore_hospital/ (last accessed 15 January 2021, as for the links below).

⁴ Jeremy Taylor describes seventeen county asylums established in England between 1808 and 1846. Wynn's Act of 1808 permitted counties and boroughs to build asylums, while the 1845 Lunacy Act made it a legal obligation for them to do so (Taylor 1991: 134).

⁵ The Commissioners in Lunacy is a public body established by the 1845 Lunacy Act for the welfare of asylum residents.

therapeutic reforms initiated from the last decades of the eighteenth century by Philippe Pinel, Samuel Tuke, and other activists for the alleviation of physical restraints and the provision of humane treatments in asylums (Bynum 1981).

While researching the birth of asylums in *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault read Tuke's book and described how the moral treatment used at The Retreat transferred the terrors of madness from prison-like physical constraints to the 'seals' of conscience (Foucault [1961] 2001: 234-5). Apart from his distinction between reason and madness, Tuke's argument for the superiority of moral over medical treatments is also seen by medical sociologists and historians as a 'rather damning attack on the medical profession's ability to deal with mental illness' in the late eighteenth century (Bynum 1981: 43). Resting on psycho-social interventions, the reforms of 'moral treatment' challenged late eighteenth-century physicians who just became interested in the world of the insane. This world was considered to be originally dominated by the Hellenic humoral tradition, but was joined by late eighteenth-century physicians who adopted a Cartesian framework asserting an entire somatic basis for mental disease (Scull 1981: 7-8).

Despite the challenge to their professions, the significance of Tuke's moral treatments was recognized by many pragmatic physicians in the nineteenth century, although they did not abandon their own medical treatments, despite accepting the theories and practices of the moral treatment (Bynum 1981: 44). Apart from these theories and practices, the architectural layout of the Retreat at York was also advocated by many early nineteenth-century psychiatrists and asylum architects as a prototypical 'moral architecture' for purpose-built public asylums (Scull 1989). The prototypical architectural layout of The Retreat was known as the 'corridor plan', and it was adopted by the Oxford county asylum (Littlemore hospital), Nottingham asylum, Lancaster asylum, Wakefield asylum, London Hanwell asylum, and others (Taylor 1991). Potentially following the advice of Tuke and the Commissioners of Lunacy on the proper size of an asylum, the Nottingham architect Robert N. Clark limited the size of Littlemore to 120 beds (Yorston and Haw 2005).

Floorplans of The Retreat are displayed on pages 95 and 102 of Samuel Tuke's

book, published in 1813. Patient bedrooms were situated along a long corridor, at the centre of which were communal areas and staff bedrooms. There was a clear separation of the sexes: the ground floor had bedrooms for male patients only, while the bedrooms on the floor above were mainly for females, except for one gallery at the east end. The large area in front of the building for outdoor activities was also divided into male courts and female courts by a long central pathway. Apparently, The Retreat had a very small corridor plan: by the time Tuke wrote his book, it had only 24 male and 38 female patients (Tuke 1813: 96).

John Conolly (1847), a psychiatrist at London Hanwell Asylum,⁶ embraced the corridor plan in his book with pieces of advice for purpose-built public asylums after the 1845 Lunacy Act. Opened in 1831 with three hundred beds, the Hanwell Asylum was designed by a Quaker architect, William Anderson, who claimed to have been influenced by Tuke (Taylor 1991: 134). The asylum therefore adopted a similar layout to that of The Retreat, and was seen as one of the earliest corridor-plan public asylums. Besides advantages for medical supervision from the centre of a corridor, Conolly argued that the plan also made asylum life more comfortable because the long and narrow building had better ventilation and more natural light. As he vividly noted:

It is evident that a building of this shape, long and narrow, consisting of a succession of galleries or corridors, with bedrooms on one side only, may be moderately perflated by every wind that blows – an advantage extremely salutary to those who pass their whole time in it. The want of proper ventilation is chiefly incidental to the angles of the building, and to the centre, and should be carefully provided against. In hot climates, exposure to sun is a frequent cause of cerebral excitement, and many of our patients persist in exposing their bare heads to the sun in the hottest weather, until it is scarcely possible to touch their heads with one's hand. But in this country the hot season is of short duration, and it is especially necessary to consider that no gallery within the house, and no airing-ground exterior to it, should be deprived of some shares of sunshine in the winter, as well as of free access of air, and some shade in summer. Quadrangular buildings, (unless the quadrangle is very large, and the buildings are very low,) and circular buildings, and central towers or crescents with radiating wings in three or more directions, are open to great objections on every account. (Conolly 1847: 12-13)

Conolly recommended the corridor layout to deal with two environmental factors:

⁶ See link for more details about the London Hanwell Asylum:
<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/st-bernards/>

wind and sunlight. Wind that ventilates could easily blow through the long and narrow building, and there was also sufficient sunlight to generate heat and light. As an advocate of moral treatment and moral architecture, but one whose medical training was still somewhat influenced by the humoral tradition, Conolly's proposal for better ventilation and natural light is reasonable. However, as a sensory medical anthropologist I find his account intriguing in another way: as an asylum psychiatrist, Conolly observed how the residents enjoy sunbathing, and felt their excitement and joy. He might have genuinely touched some patients' heads to feel the heat, an observation perhaps leading to some real physical interactions. Through his account, the imaginative reader may feel somewhat brought back to the place herself. And as Constance Classen (2017) shows in her multisensory historical accounts of how people engaged with museum objects in the past, the reader may tend to experience the fresh air and heat that Victorian asylum residents experienced through a psychiatrist writing in 1847.

Conolly also compared different asylum layouts. As he argued in the last sentence in the extract above, he strongly opposed quadrangular, circular, and radial layouts, which no doubt would have been read at the time as a critique of Jeremy Bentham. The radial plan was believed to have its roots in Bentham's panopticon prison of 1791, and it was adopted in Glasgow, Cornwall (Bodmin), Gloucester and Devonshire.⁷ The nineteenth-century asylum architect Charles Fowler commented that, in a radial plan asylum, 'the whole and every part and every person is continually under the eye of the Governor or his assistant' (Fowler, quoted in Taylor 1991: 137). Jeremy Taylor also notes in his book that cost and supervisory efficiency alone made the radial plan popular before 1845. He therefore sees the proposal for a corridor plan made by early nineteenth-century psychiatrists, commissioners, and asylum architects as a 'humane' turn in the history of asylum architecture (Taylor 1991: 135).

⁷ See the following links for more information:

<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/horton-road-gloucester/> (Gloucester Asylum)

<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/glasgow-city/> (Glasgow Asylum)

<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/st-lawrences-bodmin/> (Cornwall Asylum)

<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/exminster-exeter/> and

http://www.asylumprojects.org/index.php/Exminster_Hospital (Devonshire County Asylum)

To better compare the living conditions in asylums built with corridor and radial layouts respectively, I will now look specifically at the building plans for the Oxfordshire county asylum (Littlemore hospital) and Devonshire county asylum (Exminster hospital, near Exeter). While Littlemore adopted the corridor plan, Exminster's plan was radial.

Like the Retreat at York and London Hanwell, the main building at Littlemore was long and narrow. A three-storey central administrative block was placed between two flanking octagonal supervisory hubs, each hub overlooking three building blocks with patient dormitories. These hubs indicated that supervisory efficiency remained one of the asylum architects' initial concerns. Moreover, the panoptical form of control was retained in the corridor layout, although the latter was seen as a humane turn to improve the living conditions of the asylum's residents.⁸ In addition, the sexes were separated, as at The Retreat: female dormitories were arranged in the south of the administrative block, the male ones in the north. There were only 120 beds when the asylum was opened in 1846 (Lobel 1957).

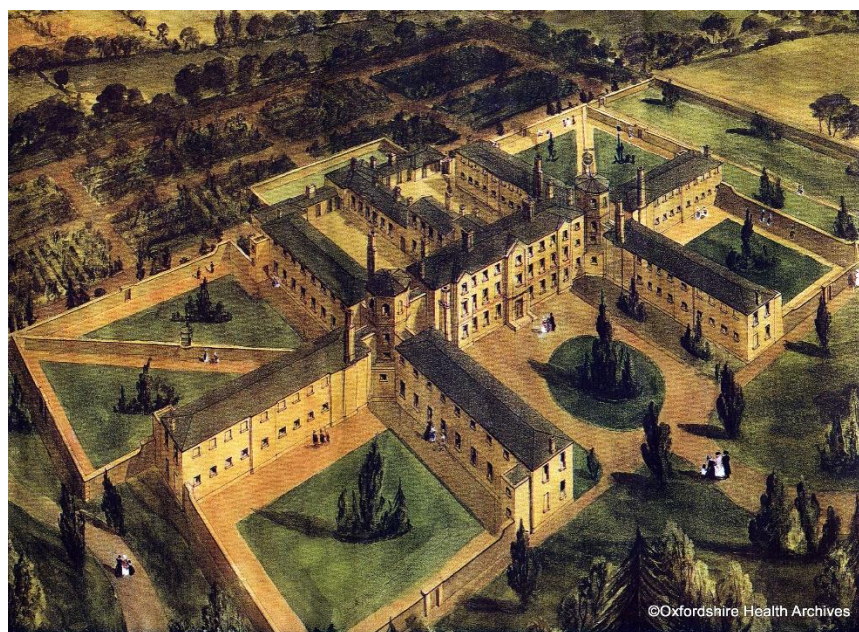


Fig. 1. Painting of Littlemore hospital in 1845, Oxfordshire Health Archives. Used with permission.

⁸ There is even a subtype called the 'panoptican corridor plan', with very large and complex supervisory towers. See West Riding Asylum (Stanley Royd Hospital) as an example: <https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/stanley-royd-wakefield/>

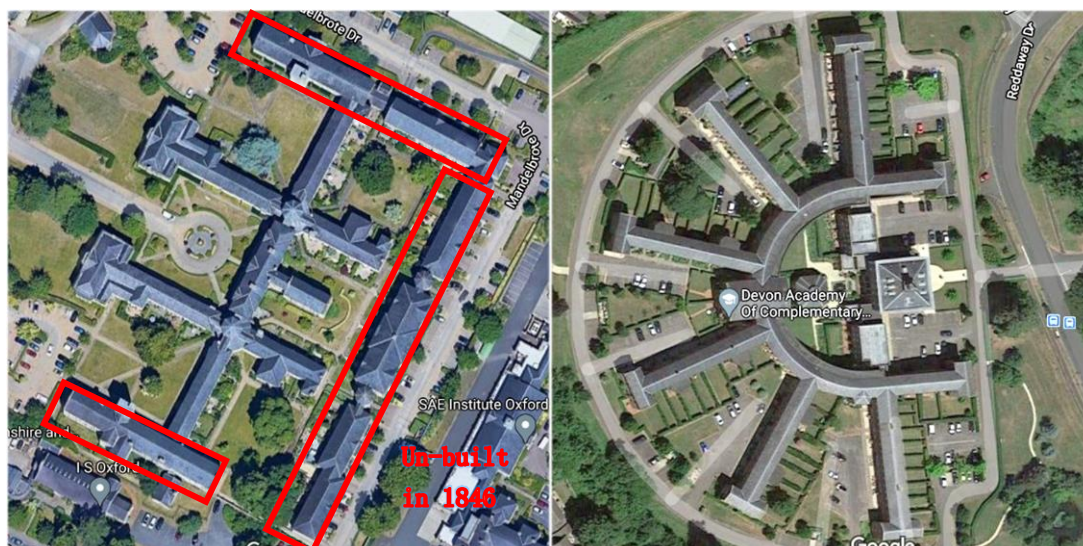
The Exminster Asylum designed by Charles Fowler,⁹ on the other hand, was opened in 1845 with 450 beds (Taylor 1991). It had its administrative hub in the centre of a semi-circular three-storey ‘range’, a term used by architectural historians to describe a long building or row of buildings. The residents’ dormitories were arranged on six radiated blocks around the range. As noted by Fowler, these blocks were allocated respectively for patients from different classes (see Taylor 1991: 137). The sexes also seem to be separated, as the Asylum Projects website¹⁰ records that the service area or day room at the end of each block was arranged ‘by gender’.

Taylor (1991) notes that the Exminster asylum was an improved version of the classic radial plan because the old circular and enclosed design was cut into a semi-circular shape with a long building stationed between the central administrative hub and the radiating blocks. This change facilitated deliveries of food and medical supplies while preserving the essential idea of Bentham’s panopticon prisons (Taylor 1991: 137). However, the residents’ well-being and experiences with regard to allowing ventilation and transparency of natural light remained unimproved, and the asylum was criticised by the Commissioners in Lunacy in their 1844 report as not so different from the classic radial plan (ibid.).

Following Conolly’s emphasis on ventilation and natural light as influencing the residents’ well-being and experiences of the asylum, I have taken screenshots on Google Maps of the old sites of the two asylums today to further demonstrate the differences. The shots have been taken on the same computer on the same day with the same zooming scale (twenty metres before fitting to this page). Littlemore in its original layout did not contain the buildings coloured red in Fig. 2, while Exminster today, depicted in Fig. 3, remains almost the same as its original (see painting referenced in footnote 9).

⁹ See painting of Exminster in 1845:
https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Devon-County-Lunatic-Asylum-1845_fig1_251234376

¹⁰ See link for more details about the Exminster Asylum:
<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/exminster-exeter/>



Figs. 2 & 3. Littlemore (left) and Exminster (right) on Google Maps, taken 19 October 2020

At first sight, the sunlight should reach more blocks at Littlemore because they are arranged in a line, while the semi-circular range and the densely built buildings of Exminster would each block out the light of the other. Ventilation must have been somewhat similarly affected: Littlemore, with its long, thin, vertical layout, should have been better ventilated than the round-shaped Exminster. Moreover, fewer blocks at Littlemore left more green spaces. The vista from the windows of most Littlemore blocks should also be wider than that provided by the dense blocks of Exminster.

A comparison aided by the online maps, allowing one to speculate how people in the past sensed the place, may also contain the potential for anthropological research. Although textual materials are often helpful, as used by Classen (2017) in her research on use of the senses in museums, here I propose another method which relies on certain environmental factors that have lasted long enough to be considered continuous from the past to the present. The climatic conditions of wind and sunlight in the UK, for instance, may not have changed very much from Victorian times. Likewise, the building blocks of Littlemore and Exminster have been preserved and are available for an aerial view. Combining the two environmental factors (i.e., wind and sunlight) with preserved historical sites may therefore help a sensory medical anthropologist compare the degrees of comfort experienced by asylum residents in the nineteenth century.

In summary, the initial design of Littlemore, together with that of many other public asylums established between 1808 and 1845, adopted the corridor plan layout, which provided a more comfortable living environment. In contrast, the efficiency and supervision-centred radial layout based on the panopticon prison was disfavoured by many Victorian psychiatrists and architects like Conolly and Taylor. Although surveillance and panoptical control can still be found on the supervisory hubs of most corridor-plan asylums, the proposal for such ‘moral architecture’ still marks a humane turn in the history of public asylums.

Spatial changes in extensions: increasing consideration of the cost

Ever since its establishment in 1846, Littlemore had been faced with increasing pressure to accommodate more residents. Despite the 1845 Lunacy Act, not all counties in England were able to build their own public asylums. For example, Berkshire contracted with Oxfordshire to accommodate its residents living with mental illness at Littlemore in order to meet the legal requirement. A new building programme was then commenced in 1848 to enlarge the asylum. As recorded on the website of County Asylums,¹¹ this new project was initiated by Oxford architect Henry Jones Underwood in 1848 and finished by John Chessell Buckler in 1852. A three-storey block and a tower with a water tank were added to the northern and southern extremities respectively of the original corridor-plan building, built in 1846.

Although only one block was added on each side of the end of the corridor in this extension, the benefits of ventilation and natural lighting in the original layout were reduced because new buildings at the two extremities would block some wind and sunlight that formally would have reached the old blocks from the side.

At the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, the pressure on Littlemore to be enlarged to accommodate more residents increased severely because the country had entered an age of the mass institutionalization of people living with mental illness. Andrew Scull sees in this shift from domestic towards institutional

¹¹ See link for more details about Littlemore Hospital on County Asylums: <https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/littlemore-oxford/>

modes of management a ‘quasi-automatic response to the realities of life in an urban-industrial society’, an indication that the problems accompanying the Industrial Revolution could no longer be handled within a household- and community-based relief system (Scull 1981: 216). Eventually, public asylums constructed and enlarged in the late nineteenth century turned into long-term accommodation of those who could not afford private health care for their mental illness (Taylor 1991: 142).

Between 1849 and 1909, the number of borough and county asylums in England and Wales jumped from 21 to 97, and the total number of inpatients increased from 350,000 to 1,008,000 (Taylor 1991: 155). As a result, public asylums with fewer than three hundred beds, originally following the advice of Samuel Tuke, were no longer large enough. Since the 1860s, new architectural layouts with at least a thousand beds were designed, such as the pavilion plan and echelon plan.¹²

In comparison to the new county asylums, built with more than a thousand beds in the late nineteenth century, Littlemore and other corridor-plan asylums, such as London Hanwell, were faced with pressure to enlarge their patient numbers. Between 1848-1900, residents at Littlemore only increased from 200 to 543 (Lobel 1957), which was far less than the new public asylums constructed after 1960. Another extension programme was thus initiated to enlarge the space at Littlemore even more.

On this occasion, the extension programme lasted from 1898 to 1902 and was led by the Oxford architect Henry James Tollit [1835–1904]. As shown in a manuscript¹³ drawn by Tollit, a few auxiliary sheds, two single-sex pavilion blocks and a recreation hall were added on the southeast of the original buildings. The County Asylum website (see link in footnote 11) notes that the land for this extension was originally a burial ground but was purchased and filled in.

¹² The pavilion plan asylums were built from 1865. A standard pavilion plan is shaped like a corridor plan but with more building blocks added vertically to the corridor, as at the Royal Herbert Military Hospital, London St. Thomas’s Hospital and Leavesden Asylum in Hertfordshire. The echelon plan asylums were built from 1880 with arrow-shaped building blocks, as at Coney Hill Hospital in Gloucester. See links for more information:

https://www.asylumprojects.org/index.php/Pavilion_Plan_Institutions (pavilion plan)

https://www.asylumprojects.org/index.php/Echelon_Plan_Institutions (echelon plan)

¹³ See link for the manuscript (Picture Oxon reference: POX0071253):

https://pictureoxon.com/frontend.php?keywords=Ref_No_increment;EQUALS;POX0071253&pos=22&action=zoom&id=71253

The 1898-1902 extension further reduced the advantages of the corridor plan in respect of ventilation and natural lighting because the southeast side of the old blocks were attached to the many new buildings in the new extension. In some areas, buildings started to form squares and semi-squares, contrary to Conolly's original opposition to rectangular layouts. The air in these areas would be therefore become stuck within the enclosed spaces, and the buildings would block each other's sunlight. When the project was finished in 1902, another two hundred beds were added, enabling Littlemore asylum to house more than eight hundred residents (Lobel 1957).

It can be concluded that the two projects to increase patient numbers at Littlemore no longer emphasised residents' comfort as much as the original corridor plan did when the asylum was established. Rather, consideration of the cost was increasingly emphasised. For local authorities in the era of institutionalization, the budget would be one key issue to be considered. This is reflected in the change of building materials during the extensions at Littlemore. While the 1848-1852 project used the same 'squared coursed limestone' as the original corridor-plan building,¹⁴ the 1898-1902 extension turned to cheaper alternatives: the pavilion blocks on the burial ground were built from yellow bricks, as recorded in the County Asylum.¹⁵

Increasing consideration of the cost is also reflected in a post-fire refurbishment. After a destructive fire in 1895, the original roofs on the female blocks of the old corridor-plan building were completely removed, and the refurbishment abandoned the old design for a simpler alternative.¹⁶ This difference can be found on the old site of Littlemore hospital today: while the overhanging eaves can still be seen on the shallow-pitched Welsh slate roofs on the male blocks in the north, the refurbished

¹⁴ See link to British Listed Buildings:

<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101369195-littlemore-hospital-littlemore#.X40RE9AzY2x>

¹⁵ See photos on County Asylums:

[supervisory hub of the original corridor-plan blocks](https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/0837.jpg) (squared coursed limestones)

<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/0837.jpg>

[pavilion blocks built in second extension](https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/0982.jpg) (yellow bricks)

<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/0982.jpg>

¹⁶ Photos of buildings after the fire:

https://pictureoxon.com/frontend.php?keywords=Ref_No_increment:EQUALS;POX0112738&pos=45&action=zoom&id=112738 (Picture Oxon reference: POX0112738)

https://pictureoxon.com/frontend.php?keywords=Ref_No_increment:EQUALS;POX0112739&pos=44&action=zoom&id=112739 (Picture Oxon reference: POX0112739)

female blocks on the other side no longer have the same characteristic decoration.¹⁷

In summary, between 1848 and 1902, two building projects were initiated to enlarge Littlemore asylum so it could take more residents. However, these projects no longer emphasised people's well-being and comfort as much as the original corridor-plan layout did. Rather, the concern for cost increased, as was reflected in the changes to building materials and designs during the asylum's extension and refurbishment.

Entanglements and the paradox of the windows

The first section above showed how public asylum residents' well-being and experiences were emphasised in the corridor-plan layout newly proposed in the early 19th century, as opposed to the prison-alike radial prototype. The second section then described how cost considerations compromised the original advantages of the corridor-plan layout in the mid- and late 19th century by intermingling the good quality structures with new building blocks of cheaper materials and simpler design.

While spatial changes to the building structures above have been presented in chronological order by means of identifiable examples highlighting the relations between cost, comfort, and control, the aim of this third and final section is to discuss one single but rather complex case where the three dimensions find expression in the shape and size of different windows in Littlemore's building blocks.

In this section, I will look at the windows in Littlemore buildings that were put in in different years and discuss how the three dimensions I emphasise – cost, comfort, and control – are paradoxically related to the differences between these windows. Specifically, I will compare windows in the Victorian building blocks constructed before 1902 with those in the new wards built in the 1950s. While the social and architectural histories of the Victorian blocks have been discussed in the sections above, the latter's buildings may need an introduction.

¹⁷ Female South wing in the website of County Asylums:
<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/04116.jpg>
Male North wing in the website of County Asylums:
<https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/0769.jpg>

Since the early twentieth century, massive county public asylums were found to have severe problems of overcrowding and bad care provision (Fakhoury and Priebe 2007). The term ‘asylum’ was no longer favoured, as it suggested old ways of management that used physical violence, constraints now being conceived as inappropriate for mental health care. Littlemore Asylum therefore changed its name to Littlemore Hospital from 1922.

In the Survey Committee’s 1937 report on mental-health services in Oxford City, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire, the number of patients at Littlemore is given as 880. There was also a superintendent, three medical officers, 92 female nurses, and 65 male nurses (Pinsent 1937: 24). The Oxfordshire Health Archives notes that the large number of inpatients had made individually tailored treatment difficult (Oxfordshire Health Archives; see link in footnote 3). Moreover, the 1937 report and some witness seminar materials on the history of Littlemore¹⁸ all mention complaints that the old asylum buildings were no longer suitable for proper mental health care (e.g., high ceilings producing echoey sounds and voices, hard furnishings, and linoleum floors).

Potentially due to these complaints, the County Asylum website records a third major construction of new building blocks in the 1950s. The project this time included a new admissions and treatment centre, a few more facilities and accommodation for the staff, and a small new site on the other side of the Sandford road opposite the old blocks built in the asylum era. Thanks to a digitalization project initiated by Oxfordshire County Council, Picture Oxon, many photographs of the wards in these new blocks, together with some of the dormitories in the old Victorian building, can be viewed online for a comparison. I therefore arrange the photographs into two groups.

The first group contains two photos of the old Victorian blocks. Fig. 4 below is entitled ‘Male patients and staff’ in Picture Oxon and recorded as having been taken in 1870 outside the original corridor-plan building. It is a group portrait, as its title

¹⁸ The witness seminars on the history of Littlemore Hospital were organized by the Oxford Project with participation by some former members of staff who had worked at the hospital between 1950 and 1980. These materials are archived by the Mulberry Bush Organisation in Oxford.

indicates. In the centre of the image are eleven people. Three, all standing, are in dark staff uniforms. Eight are wearing inmates' uniforms, some standing, some sitting, and one lying on the ground. These human figures, together with the two cats held by patients sitting on the bench, are mentioned in the description for this photo in the archive.



Fig. 4. 'Male patients and staff', 1870, Oxfordshire Health Archives. Used with permission.

However, my gaze goes to the windows on the old blocks in the background. These windows are Victorian in style: narrow, multi-paned, with frames painted in white. Some windows are open, with very narrow gaps from the upper sash, which indicates the level of ventilation in the dormitories.

The second photograph is recorded as having been taken in 1924, so it should be either within the corridor-plan building or in one of the pavilion blocks (no further residential blocks for inpatients were found to have been built between 1902 and 1956). This photo is entitled 'Ward pre-1930', with no further description. In its centre are five beds, at least two of which are occupied by patients. Vases containing floral ornaments and a picture can be seen on the wall, while a pot of flowers is by the window. A bright light is hanging from the ceiling. None of the windows in this photo appear to be open, but they are similar in style to those in Fig. 4: narrow and

multi-paned with white frames.

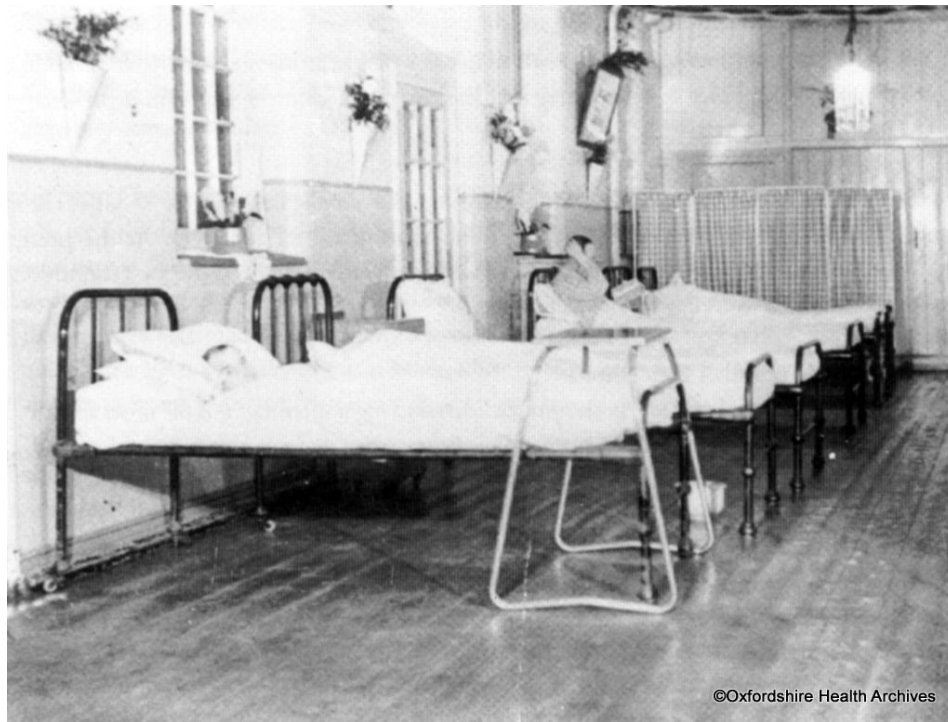


Fig. 5. 'Ward 1924', Oxfordshire Health Archives. Used with permission.

The narrow, multi-paned windows are often found in Victorian architecture on public institutions, commercial buildings (e.g. pubs) and private residential housing. Materials for the window frames vary from timber to cast iron. However, when it comes to the design of asylums, security, the control of destructive behaviour, and the prevention of patients escaping were aspects to be considered. Leonard Smith finds that, in nineteenth-century public asylums, windows were often built small and high in cast-iron frames and sometimes protected by iron bars and shutters (Smith 1999: 160-1). John Conolly, in his introduction to the London Hanwell asylum, also mentions cast-iron windows with wire guards. He believes that windows as such ensure no patient can escape. However, he also points out that excessively secured windows may be a hinderance to residents if they have to evacuate the building in a fire, as they would have to wait for the gallery doors to be opened, instead of escaping through the windows (Conolly 1847: 20). The photos above indicate that Littlemore had a similar narrow and multi-paned design in its time as an asylum. The limited

opening gap of the windows shown in the photos above also indicates a concern with security and the control of patients.

The information about these Victorian windows may inform an argument made by Leonard Smith (1999), namely that although a more humane impression was generated by the exterior layout, considerations of security and control could still be found in the building's architectural details. These small and narrow windows on the old blocks of Littlemore hospital again limited the ventilation and natural lighting of the wards, which might be one of the reasons for them to be complained about and considered unsuitable for proper mental healthcare in the 1950s.

In contrast to the windows in the old blocks, the second group of photos show the new wards built in the 1950s. This group of photos is recorded as having been taken by John William Thomas for the *Oxford Mail and Times* in June 1956.¹⁹ The collection includes photos of the newly built reception, wards, corridors, toilets, recreation rooms, canteen, and kitchen in the new blocks. A few photos²⁰ of the new wards share the same title and description: 'Caption as transcribed by Thomas Photos Project, from Thomas's ledgers: Interior view of a ward at Littlemore Hospital'. Unlike the photos in the first group, no human figures are depicted. Instead, there are beds, lockers, lights, tables, chairs, and windows, which can all be seen as essential items in a ward.

Noticeably, the windows of these new blocks appear to be very different from the Victorian ones. The window panes appear to be fewer but much larger and wider. There are no iron bars, shutters, or other earlier forms of protection. Although the degree of ventilation is uncertain, the ward appears to be well lit by sunlight due to the size of the window panes. In one of the photos mentioned in footnote 20 (Picture

¹⁹ For more details about the photographer, see link:

<https://www.pictureoxon.com/2-0-1-c-thomas.php>

²⁰ For photos of the wards, see links:

https://pictureoxon.com/frontend.php?keywords=Ref_No_increment;EQUALS;POX0267791&pos=34&action=zoom&id=1247535 (Picture Oxon reference: POX0267791)

https://pictureoxon.com/frontend.php?keywords=Ref_No_increment;EQUALS;POX0267786&pos=38&action=zoom&id=1247530 (Picture Oxon reference: POX0267786)

https://pictureoxon.com/frontend.php?keywords=Ref_No_increment;EQUALS;POX0267782&pos=42&action=zoom&id=1247526 (Picture Oxon reference: POX0267782)

https://pictureoxon.com/frontend.php?keywords=Ref_No_increment;EQUALS;POX0267785&pos=39&action=zoom&id=1247529 (Picture Oxon reference: POX0267785)

Oxon reference: POX0267785), a beautiful landscape of a field and farmhouses can be seen from inside the wards, which may be another improvement compared to the limited vista obtained from the narrow, multi-paned windows in the old Victorian blocks.

Although the wards are better lit thanks to the large windowpanes, this radical change of window design should not simply be seen as an improvement compared to the former hospital architecture. It would therefore be a simplification to say that the mental hospital buildings of the 1950s, compared to blocks constructed during the late Victorian era, place a greater emphasis on the residents' well-being and comfort by changing the design of the ward windows.

Throughout the history of the asylum, windows have been linked to residents' destructive behaviour and attempts to escape. Objects being thrown to break windows are recorded in both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature on public asylums and mental hospitals (Conolly 1897, Mandelbrote 1964). Having windows built high and narrow and with protection is a visible measure to deal with these attempts and behaviour. If, in the 1950s, these protective measurements were removed from the windows, there must have been other ways of keeping such behaviour under control.

I propose one reason that enabled the change of window design, namely the development of the first generation of antipsychotic medication. Chlorpromazine, the first-ever antipsychotic medication, was synthesized in 1950 and marked the beginning of the era of medication. While regarded as a treatment miracle, these first-generation antipsychotics have also been reflected upon by anthropologists in the last century with respect to how they transformed the physical constraints into biomedical control over the body, at the cost of affecting the quality of one's life (Estroff 1981). In other words, the dimension of control over one's body remained, but was moved from the building to the medicine. The degree of comfort experienced by an inpatient in the 1950s thus became more difficult to evaluate, and there would be the additional impacts of medication, which were hard to visualise. The change of windows should therefore not be seen merely as another humane turn made in mental health institutions.

Moreover, the change of windows, together with the overall changes in building construction, entail a paradox in relation to the cost. While the old Victorian building blocks were intensively criticized in the mid-twentieth century as unsuitable for proper mental healthcare, eventually leading to the evacuation of residents from the hospital, the private residential housing into which these blocks were converted in 1998 became high-end, luxurious properties.²¹

Conclusion

Seeing asylum and mental hospital spaces from the past as bodily sensed, this article has examined spatial changes at Littlemore between 1846 and 1956. While the good ventilation and natural lighting of Littlemore's original corridor-plan building, completed in 1846, was compromised by the cost-saving extensions of 1848-1852 and 1898-1902, physical control of the residents remained strong throughout the whole period. These aspects of control were initially found in the supervisory hubs in the corridor-plan buildings and the separation of sexes into different dormitories. Since the mid-twentieth century, when the first-generation of anti-psychotic medications were developed, control of residents' bodies enacted within the buildings moved to medication, making the social impacts of and on hospital spaces more complex and ambiguous.

Specifically, in this article I emphasise the changes in asylum and subsequently in hospital residents' experiences over time. I see people in the past with their perceptions of the places they lived in. Some of these perceptions can be reflected in the writings of a few Victorian psychiatrists and architects (e.g., John Conolly), who observed asylum inmates empathetically. Some, on the other hand, can be re-experienced with the help of a number of environmental factors (e.g., sunlight and wind) at the same architectural phenomena that have been preserved until today.

²¹ See links for details: a house in the limestone blocks:

<https://www.rightmove.co.uk/properties/67282821#/>

a house in the yellow brick blocks:

<https://www.rightmove.co.uk/properties/85568677#/media?id=media3>

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THE FRAGILITY OF MARRIAGE IN MATRILINEAL SOCIETIES

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Abstract

Matrilineal descent and the societies that have it have long been seen as being more in need of explanation than patrilineal descent, which tends to be treated as humanity's default when discussing descent. There is a long history of theories of matrilineal exceptionalism in anthropology, dating from the theory of an evolutionary priority for 'mother right' in the nineteenth century to its contemporary revival through what has become known as the 'grandmother' hypothesis, positing female coalitions as prior in evolutionary terms, with a grandmother looking after her daughter's children so the latter can go gathering. Along the way matriliney has been explained with reference to horticulture, increased women's rights and the so-called 'matrilineal puzzle'. However, it is also reasonable to suggest that matrilineal systems are not simply mirror images of patrilineal ones and that they potentially have characteristics of their own such as the 'visiting husband' phenomenon and the more frequent tendency generally for the marriage bond to be weak and unimportant. The article explores these latter aspects further.

Introduction

My aim in this article is to take thinking about matriliney forward by concentrating on two specific features occasionally found with it, though by no means invariably. The first is the existence of a specifically matrilineal form of family organization based on a brother-sister tie rather than a husband-wife tie; there are very few examples of this in the literature, though its distinctiveness is obvious. The second, rather more common, though also an aspect of the matrilineal family, is a weakness in the marriage bond² in a situation in which husbands do not live with their wives during the day, but simply visit the latter at night. This is the phenomenon of all the men in a village moving between households twice a day, to stay with their wives at night, but return to their sisters in the morning, where they may work and more generally have their main economic interests. Kathleen Gough suggested the term 'duolocal' for this practice as a form of post-marital residence (1961a: 335), while admitting its rarity (1961b: 561). Given its distinctiveness, it is relatively familiar to those specializing in the study of kinship in anthropology, more so than its rarity would suggest.

I am therefore not suggesting that all societies with matrilineal descent have these features, as that is clearly not the case. Indeed, as Rodney Needham pointed out many years ago (1971: 11), it is rarely appropriate to characterize whole societies with reference to modes of descent, that is, as patrilineal, matrilineal or cognatic (or bilateral), because there is

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² Some time ago, Lucy Mair stated that 'it is generally accepted that divorce is more common in matrilineal than in patrilineal societies' (1971: 183).

frequently a tendency to transmit different things through different modes. However, in the case of societies with matrilineal family organization discussed below, which exhibit matriliney in what might be called an extreme form, a definition as ‘matrilineal’ seems more appropriate, as it tends to indicate use of the matrilineal principle more comprehensively.

The basic principles underlying matrilineal descent are well known. Descent in this case, whatever it transmits, goes through women, at its most basic and literal from mother to daughter, and forms chains of mother-daughter links down the generations. However, it also links men not only *to* women but also *through* women. The classic male to male tie with matriliney is that between mother’s brother and sister’s son, which goes not directly between men, as with father to son ties in the case of patriliney, but indirectly, through a woman who is the sister of the former and the mother of the latter. As Nongbri points out (2010: 160), this means that, unlike with patriliney, where descent typically goes directly through males who have greater social power than women, with matriliney the locus of power (mother’s brother) and the channel of descent (mother to daughter) are different.

This should be distinguished from the notion of relationships that are *matrilateral*, a word used in anthropology for relatives through the mother generally, who may or may not also be matrilineal. Thus ego’s mother’s brother’s children are relatives of ego’s through ego’s mother and therefore matrilateral, but they are not matrilineally related to ego, since, even where matrilineal descent exists, and assuming exogamy of the matriline, they will be in a different matriline or matrilineage. This gives them a different status from that of ego’s MB, who is in ego’s own matriline with matriliney, i.e. is both a matrilineal and a patrilineal relative. With patrilineal descent, conversely, mother’s brother is rather a matrilateral relative of ego’s in a different patriline.³

Certain other features associated with matriliney might also be mentioned briefly here. First of all, there is a tendency towards geographical clustering, that is, for certain regions of the world to be marked by the existence and even the predominance of societies with matrilineal descent. A major example is central Africa, where there are a large number of such societies (e.g. Ndembu, Bemba, Lele, Plateau Tonga), but other areas include parts of West Africa (Ashanti and other Akan-speakers), the US southwest (e.g. Hopi, Navaho), the northwest coast of the US-Canada continuum (e.g. Tsimshian, Kwakiutl), parts of central Brazil (some Gê-speakers), the state of Meghalaya in northeast India (Khasi, Garo), the

³ This is admittedly to take a somewhat ‘descent theory’ view of the matter. An alliance theorist would stress instead MB’s status as ego’s father’s WB and therefore as ego’s affine. This hardly applies to societies with matrilineal descent very much, very few of them being found among alliance theorists’ case studies.

south-central Vietnamese Highlands (Cham, Jarai, Rhadé), certain islands in the north-west Pacific (e.g. Truk, Yap, other Micronesia), parts of Indonesia and the adjacent Malay Peninsula (e.g. Minangkabau), and some castes in southern India (e.g., though historically, the Nayar). Thanks to Malinowski, the most famous matrilineal society is probably the Trobriand Islands, which are not part of such a cluster, though the Nayar case runs them a close second.

Secondly, there is the question of change, especially from matrilineal to patrilineal descent. This was originally something of an academic myth dating from the nineteenth century, when matrilineal descent (so-called ‘mother right’) was seen as prior to patrilineal descent in evolutionary terms and therefore as more primitive. A theory associated, among others, with Lewis Henry Morgan, it was heavily criticized by the Boasians, who thereby forced it into the intellectual undergrowth, where it has tended to remain, though resurfacing on occasion. The main problem with this hypothesis has frequently been a lack of proof, which has led to speculative arguments and pure assertions about change and the supposedly matrilineal pasts of now patrilineal peoples (e.g. Murphy 1967: 69, on the Tuareg of Niger).

Nonetheless it has been tempting to see matrilineal systems as fundamentally unstable and therefore subject to change due to the notion of the matrilineal puzzle, initially associated with Audrey Richards (1950: 246). This draws attention to one of the tensions in matrilineal systems, namely that arising out of the operation of exogamy. In her own words,

...by the rule of exogamy a woman who has to produce children for her matrikin must marry a man from another group. If she leaves her own group to join that of her husband her matrikin have to contrive ... to keep control of the children, who are legally identified with them. [...] If, on the other hand, the woman remains with her parents and her husband joins her there, she and her children remain under the control of her family, but her brothers are lost to the group since they marry brides elsewhere and they are separated from the village where they have rights of succession.

Richards does not mention a third possibility, described below in talking about the Nayar, of the family (Nayar *taravad*) being constituted wholly matrilineally, that is, being based on a brother-sister tie, not a husband-wife tie, like both of Richard’s examples (which are only distinguished by rule of residence). In the Nayar case, the impregnators of Nayar women, whether they be considered husbands or not, are excluded from residence in the *taravad* and pay these women only brief visits to have intercourse with them.

A connected point aspect of the matrilineal puzzle is that societies with matrilineal descent are frequently caught between matrilineal rules of inheritance favouring sister’s sons and

fathers' 'natural' desires to benefit their own sons, which has an adverse impact on matriliney by diverting property away from male ego's sister's sons to his own sons. This process has often been supported by modern legal changes in colonial and post-colonial states (e.g. among the Fanti of West Africa; Kronenfeld 2009: 49, 313 ff.) and/or the influence of missionaries and other would-be reformers of native societies (e.g. among the Choctaw and some related Native Americans; Eggan 1937). Similarly, we know for certain that the extremely matrilineal Nayar of south India exchanged their matriliney for a more bilateral mode of descent and inheritance in the British period, encouraged by British legal changes.⁴ Moreover, Turner (1967) long ago showed us another source of tension, and therefore another potential source of change, in a society like the Ndembu, who combine matrilineal descent with patrilocal residence. That is, those who are related by descent are residentially dispersed. This approximates to the first of Richards' alternatives in the quote from her paper above.⁵

A corollary of this, hinted at by Mary Douglas some time ago (1969: 121 ff.), is the unlikelihood of any society becoming matrilineal at the present day, as this would not suit our contemporary neoliberal, capitalist, industrialized and globalized societies. Nonetheless, where matriliney exists it can prove surprisingly resilient, as Apte remarks of a refugee camp at Kala in Zambia, home to thousands of 'matrilineal' refugees from the fighting in the neighbouring Congo. Though with difficulty and imperfectly, these refugees have recreated matrilineal forms of family organization in the camp, despite the disruption to their lives caused by the fighting and their flight from it (Apte 2012). One key aspect here for Apte is the continuation of witchcraft accusations in the camp environment, which are premised at least partly on rivalries between matrilineally connected kin, which they also act to perpetuate. Earlier too, Mair (1974, Ch. 7) described the persistence of matrilineal ideas among the Plateau Tonga of Zambia, despite challenges to the system from increased prosperity. Holy too, noting the decline of matriliney among the Toka of Zambia in the operational sense, remarked that it was still surviving as a significant idea (1986). Even when

⁴ For a recent review of the literature on the Nayar, see Parkin 2020: 135-9.

⁵ Most of the cases discussed by Richards for central Africa (1950) have this combination in some form, and it is also found among the Ohaffia Ibo in southeast Nigeria, without the author mentioning it as a cause of tension (Nsugbe 1974: 73), though divorce is said to be relatively easy here (*ibid.*: 82). Goody and Buckley remark that 'most matrilineal societies in Africa do practise virilocal residence; the woman cultivates land to which her children are not entitled' (Goody and Buckley 1973: 118), land that will devolve to her husband's sister's son. This situation was problematized by Murdock (1949) and is an example of Lévi-Strauss's 'disharmonic regime' (1949). See also Kopytoff 1977 for a more positive view of this combination and its sustainability.

the large Nayar *taravads* were broken up by British legal changes, for a while men attempted to start matrilineages of their own through their sisters or wives.

However, one example of a society becoming increasingly matrilineal in modern times is located on the Miskitu coast in eastern Nicaragua (Herlihy 2007). The main economic activity here is deep-sea lobster-fishing, which the men dominate, while the women remain onshore. Residence is also matrilocal, as is not unusual in fishing communities worldwide, where the women may even own domestic property.⁶ In Nicaragua, Herlihy speaks of an intensification in fishing in modern times, as lobster fishing becomes a global industry: ‘therefore, matrilocal residence, matrifocal families, and increasingly matrilineal kinship practices co-occur in Kuri to create an intensely female-centred society’ (ibid.: 145).

Conversely, Perry speculated (1989: 36) that proto-Athabaskans in North America, though mostly bilateral today, were originally matrilineal and matrilocal (but not duolocal), as men were often away on hunting expeditions, leaving the women at home in more permanent base camps. This is the ‘male absence’ argument, which is also another aspect of arguments regarding fishing communities and which we will meet again. Perry himself pointed out later, however (ibid.: 43), that these absences also occur among the Ainu of Hokkaido, who have patrilineal descent groups.

Another suggested reason for a society being or becoming matrilineal that was strongly favoured at one time and that appears to have originated with David Aberle (1961) is that matrilineal societies tend to rely on horticulture as their chief mode of livelihood – that is, working small-scale gardens for food purposes rather than pursuing either larger-scale farming, possibly on several fields, or pastoralism, with its frequent mobility requirements. This hypothesis, which may reflect a bias in the ethnography of North America, is discussed at length by Mary Douglas (1969), partly critically, partly sympathetically. She points out that horticulture is not a very likely generator of significant prosperity and wealth, unlike farming or pastoralism in the right circumstances, both of which tend to occur only with patrilineal or cognatic descent. This therefore associates matriliney with relative poverty, encouraging the old view of it as primitive and backward. This can be linked to Douglas’s further observation, already mentioned, that matriliney is unlikely to accompany modern, industrial societies. In fact there is no exact correlation between matriliney and horticulture, as not all matrilineal societies are horticulturalists, while many patrilineal societies – in Papua New Guinea, for example – are (admittedly often pursued by the women in the society). A

⁶ One other example of this is Brøgger’s study of the coastal village of Nazaré, central Portugal (1992).

related point has been made by Lucy Mair (1974: 92), namely that, with matriliney, the wealth a man accumulates in his lifetime will be dispersed among his matrilineal relatives and will not devolve to an agnatic heir as in the case of patrilineal inheritance. In this view, in other words, matrilineal societies are a drag on the accumulation of wealth by particular individuals who might use it to invest further in wealth-creating activities but who with matriliney remain poor. However, Douglas herself discusses examples where matrilineal descent has been associated with, and perhaps even been crucial to, significant wealth creation (1969: 123-4, 131-3), especially Polly Hill's well-known studies of cocoa farmers in southern Ghana (Hill 1963). Douglas also suggests that in central Africa matriliney is a response to labour shortages, as women are used to attract husbands to one's matrilineage to supply the shortage (1969: 130; also the Kalapo and other matrilocal but not necessarily matrilineal groups in the Amazon). There is also the fact that some state systems have been matrilineal historically, including the Cham kingdom of south-central Vietnam – hub of an accretion of matrilineal peoples like the Jarai and Rhadé – the princely state of Negri Sembilan on the Malay peninsula and Sumatra, and Akan-speaking kingdoms in West Africa. Similarly, many of the matrilineal peoples of central Africa described by Richards (1950) have polities with chiefs at the apex. This does not suggest low levels of prosperity as an essential matrilineal feature: seventy years ago, Richards referred to the Cewa and Ila of central Africa as matrilineal cattle-raising populations (Richards 1950: 231, 236).

The question of wealth also appears in a different form in recent perspectives from evolutionary anthropology (e.g. Fortunato 2012; Holden et al. 2003; Mattison 2011). The main focus here is on hypothesizing the evolutionary advantage, adaptation and inclusive fitness of favouring matrikin in inheritance in some circumstances. As in other areas of the study of kinship by evolutionary anthropologists, this approach tends to rely on notions of individual interest rather than social regulation, although that does not necessarily imply that people in these situations act on the basis of conscious choice (Laura Fortunato, personal communication). I will not review the bulk of these hypotheses here, limiting myself instead to noting what some evolutionary anthropologists have identified as incipient matrilineal systems in multigenerational 'female coalitions' combining active, sexually mature women with their mothers. The latter, in this view, are no longer sexually active but act as carers for their grandchildren while their daughters go about their daily work. This 'grandmother' hypothesis relies on the observation that, unlike other primates, human females survive the loss of their fertility through the menopause sufficiently to take on roles like carers in post-menopausal life (Opie and Power 2008). While a reasonable enough hypothesis in itself, it

would be difficult to prove that it existed among prehistoric human populations or that it should be accorded a priority over other forms of descent in evolutionary terms. Did all such populations have this feature, given the likelihood of variation among them? There is also the issue of gender: in contemporary societies grandfathers may well remain at home too while their children are at work and are often charged with looking after their grandchildren just as much as grandmothers. One might even conceive of ‘male coalitions’ supporting patriliney in these circumstances, in which grandfathers expect to devolve property to their sons after their deaths. There is no particularly obvious reason why this regime of inheritance and property should come later in evolution than the matrilineal form.

Matrilineal families and marriage

As already announced above, another main aim of this article is to suggest a new approach to the basic ethos underlying matrilineal descent by focusing on those societies whose use of it extends to a matrilineal form of family organization based not on a husband-wife tie but on the alternative opposite-sex tie in ego’s genealogical level, that between brother and sister. Attested but rare, even where matriliney exists in the world, such examples nonetheless offer a different perspective on the reasons for matriliney existing at all, one that sees matrilineal descent as arising from this form of the family, rather than the family being an expression of matrilineal descent, which seems to be the usual assumption. At the same time, there are also indications that in such cases descent is emphasized more than marriage, as the marriage bond in such societies is often reported as being weak and divorce as relatively easy. This can be compared with societies with patrilineal descent, in many of which divorce is disliked and even disallowed, and marriage is expected to entail a life-long commitment to one’s spouse (e.g. the Nambudiri Brahmans of Tamilnadu, south India; Gough 1959, and upper and middle castes in India generally).⁷ A further corollary of this ‘extreme’ form of matrilineal descent is the fact that in some cases, first, the men of the society are absent from home for long periods for purposes of trading or warfare, and secondly, the society concerned is surrounded by patrilineal neighbours. In these circumstances, the argument goes, a society divided into matrilineal families comes into being as a way of excluding alien males, such as husbands, from its affairs. This does not explain why matrilineal societies have advantages in this respect over patrilineal ones, nor why only a minority of societies adopt this form of family organization and others do not. At best, the explanation can only be local.

⁷ For a graphic account of the fate of widows in such castes, see Lamb 1999.

All these features were found historically in the case of the Nayar of south India, one of the most famous matrilineal societies in anthropology, one which in addition raises the question of just who occupied the status of 'husband' among the Nayar, and by extension whether they really had marriage at all. As Louis Dumont showed (1983), although they seem to be a radical exception to pan-Indian marriage norms, in fact they can be aligned with those norms without difficulty, not least because some of their supposedly exceptional features have precedents elsewhere in India (see Parkin 1997).

The Nayar case has frequently been described in the anthropological literature, not least by myself (Parkin 2001: 132-4, 207-9; Parkin 2020: 135-9; also Gough 1959, 1961a, 1961b; Fuller 1976; Moore 1985), so I will just keep to the essentials here. Based on matrilineal extended families called *taravads*, with memberships ranging from several dozen to a handful, until relatively recently the Nayar were a matrilineal caste surrounded by patrilineal neighbours. Before pacification of the area by the British there was frequent warfare here, necessitating the absence of Nayar men for long periods of time – hence the argument that the matrilineal arrangements were designed to give the *taravad* greater protection from male outsiders, especially affines. The *taravads* were under the control of the senior male or *karanavan*, who was related, at least in principle, to all the members of the *taravad* matrilineally as the senior maternal uncle of the junior males. Husbands in the conventional sense were therefore absent, but the problem for the anthropologist has been identifying them at all. Young girls and women went through a ceremony with a high-caste male Nambudiri Brahman which gave them the status of married women, but which the Brahmans, out of fear for their own status within their caste, rejected as marriage for themselves, the Nayar being of lower status to them within the caste system.⁸ However, this ceremony freed the Nayar woman to have sexual relations with both Nayar men from different matrilineages and younger Nambudiri males, who, unlike the eldest brothers in their families, were not permitted to marry. These subsequent relations were known as *sambandham*. It is difficult to see them as marriages, though they were not at all casual but had their own rituals, both to set them up in the first place and to acknowledge the paternity of any child born of them (by paying the midwife) – an important issue even in this predominantly matrilineal environment, as Moore makes clear (1985). Indeed, it was through these so-called *sambandham* relationships that the Nayar physically reproduced themselves and their castes, although the

⁸ In any case, those Brahmans who performed this service *ipso facto* lost status in the eyes of their fellow Brahmans.

relationships were not expected to be permanent, and a woman might have many of them simultaneously. They were also, of course, a variant on the ‘visiting husband’ phenomenon, with the difference that the male lover-cum-husbands did not spend the night with the woman but simply placed their swords outside her door to signal to her other lovers that she was currently busy and then left again after the visit was over. As far as is known, this particular arrangement is unique, even in matrilineal societies, as it reduces the institution of marriage to its bedrock fundamentals.

As already noted, the situation just described is now historical, as the Nayar system of descent became bilateral during the period of British rule partly because of legal changes allowing individual property ownership, which tended to break up the *taravads*, and partly because of campaigns of moral regeneration by Nayar activists to end what the latter saw as the sexual exploitation of Nayar women by Brahman men.⁹

Broadly similar are the Mosuo of Yunnan in southern China (Nongbri 2010), a matrilineal population neighbouring the patrilineal Naxi, of which the Mosuo are considered a subgroup in the official Chinese classification, as well as by other patrilineal populations, including immigrant Chinese Han. Despite the misleading official classification, the Mosuo are characterized by what Nongbri calls ‘large sibling-based households’ (presumably matrilineal families based on opposite-sex sibling ties) and ‘walking marriage’ (*se se* or *axia*, ‘lover’), a form of the visiting husband phenomenon (ibid.: 158). As for marriage, Nongbri says that this is ‘a tenuous affair’ that ‘has little to do with the family’ and ‘neither binds the couple in rights and obligations nor confers any responsibility on the progenitor (father) towards the offspring’ (ibid.: 160). The child’s matrikin are solely responsible for its care and upbringing, and the place of the father in reproduction is minimized. Nongbri also emphasizes that, despite the centrality of women to the descent system and their freedom in matters of sex and marriage, they are no freer from domestic duties than women in patrilineal societies and that the men of the lineage have far greater freedom and power (ibid.: 162 ff.). In addition, it is male activities that are accorded high status, whether expressed in ‘religious devotion and service [specifically Buddhist Lamaism] ... horsemanship or simply ... socialising’ (ibid.: 171), and traditional political leadership was entirely in the hands of men. Nonetheless, women are important and central to the domestic sphere, which the men of the family hardly engage in. Indeed, as with the Nayar, historically men were often absent, here

⁹ For an alternative interpretation of the Nayar *taravad*, emphasizing it as a residential rather than a strictly matrilineal institution, see Moore 1985. This author also speculates that the Nayar only became matrilineal in the tenth century AD, on the basis of dynastic histories and other contemporary documents (ibid.: 526).

because of their participation in trading caravans. The major source of outside wealth today, however, is tourism, through which Mosuo women have acquired the reputation of being sexually easy and available, and the Mosuo as an ethnic group have been endowed with romanticism and exoticism for their unusual social arrangements. The Mosuo have also faced official opposition from the Communist Party, especially in the Maoist era, and must frequently compromise their living arrangements due to specific circumstances, but despite these factors the picture Nongbri gives us is one of the resilience of the traditional matrilineal arrangements in this case.¹⁰

Other societies reported as having matrilineal descent and ease of divorce and/or weak marriage ties, though not the visiting husband phenomenon, include the island of Yap in Micronesia (Schneider 1953: 218; possibly contradicted by Labby 1976: 38-44), the Pende of Kasai province, Congo (de Souseberge 1955), and the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski, in Young 1979: 133, 142). In fact, the first and last of these cases are examples of the combination of matrilineal descent and patrilocal residence mentioned earlier. Among the Hopi, Eggan describes their matrilineal descent, norm of uxorilocal residence (though without the visiting husband phenomenon) and ease of both divorce and remarriage, although he also says that the risk of divorce diminishes in a marriage over time (1950: 30, 56, 113-14). Eggan attributes matrilineal descent here to what he calls ‘a strong lineage principle’, an idea reflective of Radcliffe-Brown’s doctrine of lineage solidarity, and he adds that among the Hopi ‘wives usually side with their house or lineage mates in disputes involving their husbands’ (ibid.: 113). This may mean no more than that in domestic disputes wives resort to their own lineages for support. Fischer’s account of the Minangkabau of Sumatra (1964) depicts them too as having frequent divorce (1964: 102) and uxorilocal residence without the visiting husband phenomenon. He disputes the existence of the latter here with earlier writers, in opposition to de Josselin de Jong (1952, 1975). A more recent author confirms that Minangkabau society still has a strong social system of matrilineal descent with uxorilocal marriage in modern bungalows as well as in the remaining traditional dwellings and that this system is managing to survive pressures to become patrilineal from Islam in particular (Stark 2013: 2), though he makes no mention of ease of divorce. The Huron of North America also

¹⁰ Nongbri’s article compares the Mosuo case with that of the Khasi of Meghalaya, north-east India, a matrilineal society where residence is normatively uxorilocal, i.e. the husband lives with his wife in her own house day and night, not at night alone. As many examples from the Amazon especially show, uxorilocal or matrilocal residence can exist regularly with bilateral descent, and even with patrilineal descent, though in the latter case usually as a low-status, exceptional arrangement followed by poor men.

combine matrilineal descent with ease of divorce but without duolocal residence (Dannin 1982: 104), as do the Marshallese (Spoehr 1949: 111) and Ndembu (Chock 1967: 74).

Although dealt with in passing in numerous ethnographies, divorce has rarely been problematized or made the focus of a specific study of its causes and consequences. One early example is a paper by Gluckman (1950) connecting the ease of divorce with low bridewealth payments among the Lozi and Zulu of southern Africa, and arguing that divorce seems to be rarer where there are higher payments and/or patrilineal descent: this led to a series of exchanges with Leach, who was typically more sceptical of these correlations (see Leach 1961: Ch. 5). More recently, Simpson (e.g. 1998 and references therein) has examined divorce and remarriage specifically in the UK, which at least in part presumably reflects the ease of divorce legally speaking and the modern, post-Victorian decline in seeing anything particularly sacred, and therefore sacrosanct, about the institution of marriage, especially from the 1960s. The strength of descent ties with matrilineal descent is matched by the strength descent in many patrilineal societies. However, the residential arrangements and inheritance provisions of matrilineal systems, as well as the frequent strength of opposite-sex sibling ties, have a greater potential for undermining the marriage bond due to what both informants and their ethnographers regard as matriliney's inherent contradictions. This is therefore another context in which divorce might be studied more extensively cross-culturally.

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BOOK REVIEW

ANDERS BLOK, IGNACIO FARIAS and CELIA ROBERTS (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Actor-Network Theory*, 2019. London and New York: Routledge. ISBN 9781138084728

Twenty years since *Actor-Network Theory and After*, the editors of this new companion, Anders Blok, Ignacio Farias and Celia Roberts, are interested not in ‘current ANT-inspired research [but rather in] a collective exploration into what it takes and entails to think “near ANT”’ (p. xxii). Being ‘near ANT’ signifies that ANT has become both an intellectual pole with and against which to wrestle, and a white cane for empirical enquiry. To put it briefly: ANT is here to stay, so let us make the most use of it as a companion. For the authors, ANT is not understood as a set of fixed principles. Rather, in resonance with the initial intents of ANT, they want to destabilize its received meaning and recover its open-endedness. In doing so, they follow Annemarie Mol’s characterization of ANT as ‘a rich array of explorative and experimental ways of attuning to the world’ rather than a theory or fixed method. If ANT is this open-ended particular attunement, then what ‘this volume sets out to explore is what ANT entails as an intellectual practice or, perhaps, as a group of companionate intellectual practices’ (p. xiv).

The book is divided into six sections and thirty-nine essays. After a short but thorough introduction to the volume, the contributors tackle issues at the core of ANT: methodological agnosticism, the value of its concepts and infra-language, its relationship with anthropology, performativity and critique. A full section of seven essays deals with some ANT companions such as Donna Haraway, Gilles Deleuze and Isabelle Stengers, as well as semiotics and pragmatism. The next three sections discuss more contemporary issues of ANT, its prospects beyond science and technology, and the issues of location and scale. The closing section, which the editors call ‘inspiring, even exhilarating’, deals with the public and professional uses of ANT.

Although pleasing to read, the volume sometimes lacked pace and dynamism. Although many of the essays were enjoyable, I found some of them redundant, with similar points being made in the respective introductions to different articles. Such redundancies hinder the possibility to engage with potential future contributions of ANT. The volume has other limits that the authors readily acknowledge: some intellectual companions are missing, such as Michel Serres and Michel Foucault, and diversity is limited by the absence of African scholars or of Africa-related topics, despite all other continents being represented. Other limits might include

the dominating themes. Unsurprisingly, considering the editors' research themes, issues relating to the city and urban spaces, design, parliamentary politics, health and care, and the environment are central; yet I felt science and technology were missing. Hybrids have not stopped proliferating, and artificial intelligence, big data, space exploration, biotechnology and geoengineering promise to be important issues in the years to come, if they are not already. Overall, I recommend reading the general introduction and those written by the editors for each section before picking the chapters that spike one's interest. In fact, I will follow just that advice and point to some of the chapters that most interested me.

The first chapter of the volume, 'What if ANT wouldn't pursue agnosticism but care?', written by Daniel López-Gómez, touches on the agnostic position the inquirer is supposed to inhabit in ANT. For the author, studying a telecare service-provider, 'the downside [of ANT] was that the agnostic repertoire [...] seemed to make me quite insensitive towards the "violence" of the aforementioned frictions, to its uneven distribution and consequences for the actors at stake' (p. 7). The violence of translation and the 'poor' semiotic repertoire of ANT that is often identified as a strength of the approach can also desensitize. The author defends his position by arguing that inventing a care repertoire will allow not taking over 'agnosticism' but helping it by attuning the ethnographer to the qualities of the relations at play.

In their chapter 'What about race?', Amade M'charek and Irene van Oorschot note that ANT is presentist when viewed through the lens of traditional case studies. The authors propose that we look at history and different temporalities in order to unveil the broader dynamics. In treating of race, and more generally of power and domination, this chapter addresses one of the criticisms that is often used to reject ANT.

Carolyn Gerlitz and Esther Weltevrede emphasize some issues regarding the application of ANT to an online world that is increasingly mediated by artificially intelligent non-human agents. 'Following the actor' becomes difficult, as algorithmic actants might not comply as easily to let human inquirers follow them. Non-humans did have agency, albeit not reflexive, but this is no longer the case. The authors push us to ask: what is ANT in a cognitively enhanced more-than-human world? Reworking some ANT dictum, they conclude that 'methodological alignment may require to work against some actors and biases, whilst allowing in others' (p. 355).

By describing his difficult time running a modern public hospital in Chile using ANT, Yuri Carvajal Bañados gifts us with a fantastic example of how ANT can productively be put to use from a position of power. Despite such issues, the author provides us with brilliant descriptions,

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reflexivity and ANT maxims that we might want to take with us, such as: ‘ANT is an important un-ANThropogenic force’ and ‘ANT worked [...] as a valuable enzyme.’

Having read this interesting volume, I am convinced that ANT has a bright future and that anthropologists should keep engaging with it, as it is very much an ‘attunement to the world’ that emerged from ethnography. Following Kristin Asdal, ‘one lesson when it comes to ANT ought to be like the one ANT scholars used to apply on [agents they studied] alike: Do not listen to what the classic ANT scholars say about [the world]. Follow their practices and the methods they used in their laboratory studies and let these inspire [us]’ (p. 343).

I want to be ‘near ANT,’ making the book a success in my view.

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