

# ANTHROPOLITAN

Issue No. 20 | June 2026: Temporalities Out of Joint



Jodha Bai Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri, Uttar Pradesh. A woman employed at the site rests in the courtyard between duties.

Built in the 1570s for the Rajput wife of Emperor Akbar, Jodha Bai's Palace was a space of female enclosure, part of the Mughal zenana, where women of the court lived largely unseen by official history. Today, the palace draws tourists who move through its sandstone corridors, consuming a curated imperial past.



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# FOREWORD

Dear all,

Delighted to have been asked to write the foreword to this year's edition of the *Anthropologist*. As UCL celebrates its 200th Anniversary, and our department has just reached the grand old age of 80, what a wonderful opportunity to reflect on where we have been and what comes next.

It has been a genuinely impressive – and at times slightly chaotic – year for UCL Anthropology. Across research, teaching, and everything in between, the department has once again managed to cover an extraordinary amount of ground.

On the research front, it's been a particularly strong year for work on health and wellbeing. Projects like the Feminist Miscarriage Project have challenged dominant assumptions around reproductive health, whilst research into vaccines, child health, and mental wellbeing has demonstrated anthropology's unique ability to connect policy, practice, and lived experience. Environmental and urban research has also been in abundance. From new research on climate change in coastal communities to work in Islington exploring how environmental uncertainty affects children's everyday lives, colleagues have shown how global transformations are experienced locally.

It is really exciting to see the growing number of collaborative projects we get involved in – often with community partners and local institutions. These highlight our commitment to engaged anthropology, something underscored by our recently established Ethnographic Insights Lab, which has recently been commissioned to provide ethnographic insight into UCL Timetabling Practice – that's a report I will be excited to get my hands on (I'm not kidding)!

Then there is the departments' work at the intersection of anthropology, technology, and the future of humanity. Through projects engaging with artificial intelligence, digital cultures, and cyborg identity, we continue to explore how social life is evolving and how technology is transforming what it means to be human. Forever pushing boundaries, our research and teaching have become extraterrestrial and moved beyond human-centred perspectives, including studies of multispecies relations and 'more-than-human' environments.

Of course, we continue to engage with broader social and political questions, too. Whether addressing inequality, migration, race, or historical legacies, colleagues and students have contributed to important conversations both within and beyond the university. The willingness to engage thoughtfully and openly with these issues remains, I think, one of our department's defining strengths.

And let's not forget creative practice! In recent years, our department has definitely taken on a creative life of its own where anthropology is not only written, but also performed, experienced, and circulated in ways that have invited engagement, reflection, and debate. Such exciting times! Student and staff have created films, exhibitions, podcasts, and installations that have not just complemented research, but have become central to how it is produced and shared.

This work has reached audiences well beyond academia, bringing anthropological insight into public spaces and media.

Alongside all this, teaching and community life have been thriving. The success in the Education Awards speaks to the care and thought that goes into creating inclusive and engaging learning environments, while student and alumni work continues to remind us that anthropology doesn't stop at coursework – it spills into blogs, publications, writing creatively, and occasionally turning ethnographic attention to unexpected subjects (including, memorably, geese). It's a reminder that anthropology here is very much a shared endeavour and that we continue to invest in community and belonging, whether that be through networks and events, cake or knitting.

As for what comes next, at a time when simplified narratives dominate public debate, our discipline brings a rigorous commitment to complexity. It asks us to look closely, to listen carefully and to challenge assumptions about what appears 'natural', 'obvious', or 'inevitable'. Generating intellectual humility – it allows us to confront our own assumptions and take seriously the perspectives of others, particularly those whose voices are often marginalised or overlooked. Ultimately, our discipline holds open the possibility that the world could be otherwise. Our collective endeavour should be to make sure that the rest of the world understands how important that perspective is. If we do, I am sure we will continue to study and actively shape the conditions of human life in this rapidly changing world.

So, thank you all for the research, the teaching, the conversations, and the energy you've brought to the year. It's been busy, sometimes stressful, but it has been undeniably productive!

Yours,



Professor Caroline Garaway  
Head of Department  
UCL Anthropology

# EDITORIAL NOTES

Anthropologists love a plural, and if we're talking 'temporality', we must really be talking *temporalities*.

There are many ways to keep track of time, from bicentennials to the last-minute editorial scramble; through the specious solidity of monuments, to the raising of your heart rate as you walk past a ruin. Temporality can be thought of abstractly, as a mode of perceiving time.

However, as the works in this issue show so well, temporalities are also often 'out of joint'. They precipitate in the bodies, materials, and spaces we live by. If we want to understand another's relationships to time, or our own, we can first wonder where time is met, caught, sold, held, or made to disappear.

The temporalities passing through the object of this print? For starters, it emerges from a new era of Anthropolitan, a merging with The Creative Collective, whose team now includes an established (and funded!) Student Editorial Committee. We all came together for the first time a couple of months ago to decide on our vision for our 2026 print launch. Today, we are proud to present a collection of work which is the publication's most courageous and creative to date. Now there's a timestamp!

In keeping with the combined Anthropolitan and The Creative Collective remits, we have been delighted to receive so many creative pieces which speak to our vision of expanding what can be considered 'academic' or 'ethnographic' work: from original poetry to creative writing, to manuals on how to be Manchurian. Not to mention the many astonishing photographs, all shortlisted from our 2026 Picture Competition.

Our cover, created by Vanisha Patel, shows that the camera doesn't just capture a moment; it stands within temporalities as they find each other. Our Print Editor, Abira Pathak, shares legacies and futures of anthropology in conversation with Marilyn Strathern, Martin Holbraad, Danny Miller, Katherine Homewood, Philip Burnham and Susanne Kuchler. Our brilliant essay contributors stretch these pasts, presents and futures further into their own disjointed directions: from colonial legacies to contested public histories, from materialities of time to necropolitical futures, from commoning through time to time-in-the-field, and much more.

Now, it's your turn to share a moment with these pages, which show the breadth of imagination and curiosity of our UCL Anthropology community.

We want to give special thanks to our Head of Department Caroline Garaway for the Foreword, as well as to the AnthroShow for hosting our launch event and Picture Competition Exhibit. We are sincerely grateful also to Ruth Harper and the EDI Committee for funding the Student Editorial Committee, and to Miranda Sheild Johansson for helping us find our footing.

This issue is a reflection of our commitment towards inclusion, diversity and equity in all its forms: **a braver and more engaged Anthropolitan that speaks to the challenges of our time.**

But most importantly, we thank all of our contributors. We applaud you for the care, honesty and originality with which you have brought your work together, and we hope we did your work justice!

To this end, **we are also featuring other submitted essays and artworks on the Anthropolitan website to accompany this printed collection.**

And to our dear readers, you're next! Please send your ideas, your writing, and your artworks to [anthro.cc@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:anthro.cc@ucl.ac.uk). Oh, how slowly the clock moves whilst we wait!

**2025-26 Anthropolitan Team**

# When Does a Monument End?

## Colston and the Politics of Time in Bristol

by Lily Wells, BSc Human Sciences

Time does not move cleanly through a city. It accumulates unevenly, settling into buildings, street names, and the habits of everyday life. In Bristol, the afterlife of Edward Colston's statue shows how the past is not simply left behind, but reworked, contested, and carried forward in different forms.

How did Colston's statue shift from a vertical device of elite philanthropy to a dispersed set of counter-monuments (Cole 2023, 156), trailing from The Centre to the harbour and beyond? The Centre, a key transport interchange and cultural site in Bristol, contains the plinth of the former statue. Now marked as 'permanently closed' on Google Maps, it raises the question of whether or not it has ceased to function as a site of remembrance. Edward Colston (1636–1721), Deputy Governor of the Royal African Company (RAC), was central to the trafficking of an estimated 84,000 enslaved people, resulting in approximately 19,000 deaths during the Middle Passage voyages (The Economist 2020; Cole 2023, 160). Yet the bronze statue erected in 1895, 174 years after his death, functioned as a marker of his civic virtue to the city of Bristol, which silenced his role in the slave trade.

The toppling of the statue on 7 June 2020, following the murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, marked a decisive rupture. Through my ethnographic fieldwork from The Centre to the harbour and the museum display, I trace four phases: inherited time, ruptured time, reconfigured time, and suspended time.

### Inherited Time

The erection of the statue in 1895 was promoted by James Arrowsmith of the Anchor Society. It functioned as a defence of Bristol's merchant elite and their philanthropic identity (Von Tunzelmann 2021; Cole 2023, 159). As Osborne argues, such monuments formed part of a 'patriotic landscape' that sought to "subdue complex realities of plurality" (Osborne 2001, 39). The statue operated as both a 'mnemonic device' and a 'spatial coordinate of identity,' embedding elite values into the physical geography of the city (Osborne 2001, 4–8). This selective tradition enabled Bristol to celebrate Colston's philanthropy while the violence of the Royal African Company remained an 'unscripted shadow' (Hall 1999).

The monument's physical form reinforced this hierarchy. Elevated on a limestone plinth, Colston's figure dwarfed the individual citizen, symbolically subsuming them into a broader imperial narrative. Here, heritage operates as a 'discursive practice,' binding certain histories into a national story while silencing others (Hall 1999, 5).

As Forty (1999) argues, material objects can become the 'enemy of memory,' allowing societies to delegate remembrance to things rather than confront the past directly (ibid., 7). In this sense, the statue functioned as an 'agent of forgetting,' displacing the memory burden of Bristol's slave-trading history onto the monument itself.



This inheritance is not only discursive but material. Even in Colston's absence, the bronze reliefs on the plinth continue to perform philanthropic imagery that naturalises inequality. One relief depicts Colston touching a child's head while looking down at the poor, projecting an idea of authority and benevolence. As Macdonald's (2006, 105) concept of 'words in stone' suggests, such imagery produces a direct 'impact on the eye,' affirming a social order through visual form (ibid.; Forty 1999).

### Ruptured Time

The toppling of the statue on 7 June 2020 fractured this inherited order, transforming a symbol of philanthropy into an object of embodied protest. This act formed part of a wider "global uprising against police brutality" following the murder of George Floyd (Choksey 2021). The event unfolded through a distinct collective rhythm. The statue was shrouded, lassoed, and pulled down. Protestors then engaged in performative acts, kneeling and standing on Colston's neck, enacting what Kisuule (2020, cited in Choksey 2021, 80) describes as a "standing ovation on the platform of your neck," a radical reversal of power relations.

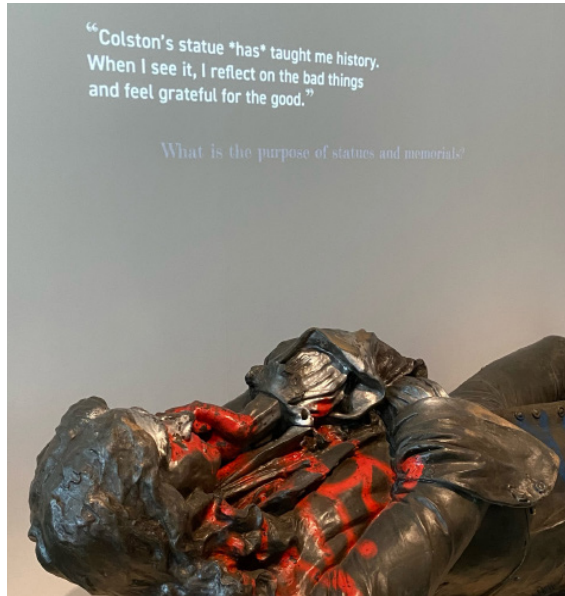
In the aftermath, the plinth has come to embody a paradoxical presence. Situated within the constant movement and noise of The Centre, it is materially central yet often ignored in everyday circulation. However, its chipped edges, paint marks, and inscriptions such as 'MI5 OPERATION FACT' remain as traces of the rupture. The plinth is no longer a neutral base but an artefact of racial reckoning. Even without the statue, it continues to function as an agent of forgetting. It holds the residue of the event while resisting full incorporation into the rhythms of everyday life.



## Reconfigured Time

When protestors pushed the statue into Bristol Harbour, they created a counter-monument that mirrored the drowning of those lost during the Middle Passage. As Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees noted, the act carried powerful symbolism: a man who profited from throwing enslaved people into the water was himself returned to it (Cole 2023, 160).

This relocation was not simply a disposal but a reconfiguration of memory. It disrupted the city's 'rational consensus,' forcing a confrontation with the histories that had been suppressed. The statue's philanthropic narrative had long depended on the silencing of the violence that enabled it. Following its retrieval, the statue was relocated to the M Shed museum, where it is displayed horizontally in its damaged, graffiti-covered state. This marks a shift from what Macdonald describes as 'vertical authority' to a 'horizontal object' (Macdonald 2006, 110). As Barnett (2022) notes, this positioning was partly pragmatic due to structural damage, yet it also produces a significant symbolic reversal. The viewer is no longer required to look up in reverence but down at a broken object. The statue is stripped of its authority and recontextualised as evidence of conflict. The wooden mount, originally functional, further emphasises its transformation from sacred monument to vulnerable artefact (Osborne 2001).



described Colston as 'virtuous and wise,' while the new text acknowledges that his legacy has been 'increasingly challenged' due to his role in enslavement. However, this framing softens the

violence of that history, presenting it as a matter of contested interpretation rather than systemic brutality. This produces a form of suspended time, where the site is no longer anchored in a single narrative but has not yet settled into a new one.

This unresolved condition extends beyond the immediate site. The presence of Colston Avenue, located just 100 metres from The Centre, reveals how deeply his legacy remains embedded in the city. Despite efforts to remove his name from prominent institutions (such as the renaming of Colston Hall to Bristol Beacon), his traces persist. Street names function as 'mnemonic devices' and such inscriptions, like 'words of stone,' continue to exert meaning even in the absence of active attention. The coexistence of removed monuments and enduring names highlights the uneven nature of historical transformation. The work of 'de-Colstonising' the city remains incomplete, raising ongoing questions about memory, power, and responsibility.

Colston's statue has been moved from vertical monument to horizontal object, from The Centre to the harbour, from plinth to digital marker. In doing so, it has exposed the layered and contested nature of Bristol's heritage. The statue's afterlife demonstrates that memory is not fixed but continually reworked through material, spatial, and digital forms.

The events of June 2020 were not a singular rupture but part of an ongoing reconfiguration of how the city remembers and who is permitted to author that memory. Bristol now exists as a "terrain of temporary holding places," where multiple temporalities coexist and compete (Choksey 2021). The question is no longer only how the city remembers, but what kinds of futures its evolving memoscape makes possible and for whom.

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## Suspended Time: The Lingering Enemy

Despite these transformations, the temporal status of the site remains unresolved. The Centre continues to function much as it did before, with the plinth largely ignored in everyday movement. Yet for those who attend to it, the site carries a heightened significance. My own encounters with the statue across different life stages reveal this instability. Having seen it as a child, and now returning as an analytical observer, the same site appears differently across time.

The addition of a new plaque in 2024 further complicates this temporal layering. The original inscription



# Under the Cherry Tree: Entangled Time in Spa Fields

by Rie Kimoto, MSc Anthropology and Professional Practice

*“Dead bodies are buried under the cherry trees! For how can it be believed that cherry blossoms bloom so brilliantly otherwise?”*

*Motojiro Kajii, Under the Cherry Trees (1928)*

After a long, dark winter, spring has finally arrived in London. Observing the cherry blossoms at Spa Fields Park in Farringdon, I was struck by a sense of unease. This essay is a record of the shift in my perception of these trees, which only a year ago I viewed as mere objects of beauty. Through a multispecies ethnography of Spa Field’s cherry trees, I explore how urban parks are not simply aesthetic green spaces of the present, but rather sites where the past, present, and future intertwine.

What, then, has changed since last year? The difference lies in my knowledge regarding this land’s uncomfortable inheritance. In fact, between the 18th and 19th centuries, this park served as a severely overcrowded cemetery.

## Cultural Perception: Deconstructing the Aesthetics of Cherry Blossoms and Death

To pierce through this aesthetic veil and re-evaluate the landscape’s hidden past, the figure who came to my mind was the Japanese writer Motojiro Kajii (1928). His famous opening line “Dead bodies are buried under the cherry trees!” is part of an influential short story that links the imagery of cherry blossoms with death in Japan. Within this narrative, the protagonist feels a profound dread at the uncanny perfection of the blooming flowers, convincing himself by rationalising that such suspiciously brilliant beauty must be actively drawing nourishment from the rotting corpses buried beneath.

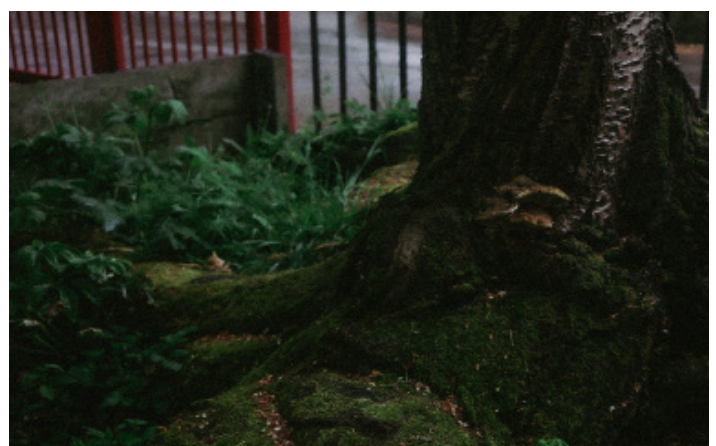
Before learning of its history, the cherry blossoms of Spa Fields were simply beautiful features. But the moment I became aware of the horrific history of the improperly processed remains, my perception was reorganised through this Kajii-esque lens. My internalised cultural template inverted the role of the blossoms. The trees shifted from being entities that severed the present from the history of death to one that actively bound them together. Initially, this felt like a success – a shift from superficial consumption to a multi-layered temporal awareness of the soil’s grim eighteenth-century inheritance.



Approximately 8,000 bodies were interred in a plot with a capacity for only 2,722. Older remains were disturbed, and corpses were illegally incinerated. The resulting smoke and pollution caused severe health hazards until a public exposé in 1845 led to its closure and eventual reorganisation into a community park. Although the remains of the past have presumably merged into the present-day soil, the complete removal of headstones makes it difficult to recognise the site’s former existence as a cemetery.

From the perspective of urban planning, Spa Fields might appear to be a success story, a hazardous cemetery transformed into a clean green space, decoupled from its history of pollution and death. However, as Worpole (2003, 157) warns, modern urban planning has historically sought to thoroughly and irreversibly exclude inconvenient corpses and the memories of the past from the landscape. In doing so, this process creates “cities that deny death and humanity” by severing the historical continuity of dialogue between the living and the dead (ibid., 31). At Spa Fields, manicured lawns and cherry blossoms veil the temporal connection to the site’s history as a cemetery.

However, as my ethnography progressed, it became clear that even this inversion was itself a form of blindness. From the moment the cherry buds began to swell until the brown, shrivelled petals were finally subsumed into the soil, I made repeated visits to a small plot at the foot of a single cherry tree. This was my exercise in what Tsing (2015, 37) terms the ‘arts of noticing,’ a practice of temporarily setting aside human-centred frameworks of meaning to intentionally attune one’s senses to the overlooked details of a reality where humans and non-humans entangle in unexpected ways.







# A Slight Detour Through the Brunswick

by Alessandro Patel, BSc Anthropology

A slight detour through the Brunswick starts below street level,  
where Russell Square keeps people inside the lift a little too long.  
When the doors open, Bernard Street is already busy.  
The Piccadilly line stays with a student for a moment: overheated, the feeling of having left home five minutes too late.

On today's agenda is a 9am lecture on campus.  
The quickest walk would leave coffee behind.  
The Brunswick sits just off that line, close enough to make the risk feel reasonable. So the student turns.

The concourse is already busy.  
Shopfronts run along both sides,  
and people pass through with somewhere else pulling at them.  
Through the bakery window, the queue is even longer than it looked from the concourse. The student checks the time, then stays.

The body has decided before the timetable can object.  
Waiting gives the eyes time to wander.  
Above the shopfronts, windows repeat; balconies look out across the route.  
The student looks up once, then back at the line.

Coffee first.

At the counter, the order is said quickly,  
as if speed might refund some of the minutes already lost.  
The card reader beeps. A few more people are served.  
Then the name they gave is called, and the cup is handed over too hot.

Outside again, the student glances back past the bakery towards the flats above. No revelation.  
Only the small interruption of having noticed them at all.

The coffee is still too hot to drink,  
so the student walks faster, beyond the Brunswick, towards Gordon Square.  
The morning has not been saved. It has been bargained with: a few minutes gone, a little energy promised.

A slight detour through the Brunswick is supposed to be nothing.  
And mostly, it is. Coffee before campus.  
A small delay traded for the feeling of being in control.

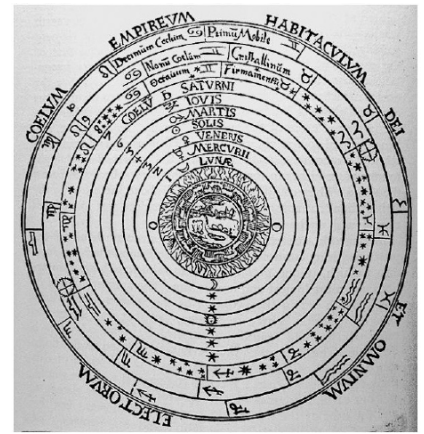
The student does not know who lives above the concourse, and probably never will. What they do know is, their lecture has started.

But at least their coffee is finally cool enough to drink.

*This poem grew out of fieldwork around the Brunswick Centre, where I was exploring how residents experience a building that places domestic life above commercial space. Although the route itself is imagined, my fieldwork made me think about how differently the Brunswick is used from one level to another. Time spent on the residential side changed how I understood the building. The upper walkways felt more exposed than the concourse, especially when the wind moved through them. Sound carried upwards in broken pieces, but quietness was just as important. There were fewer people passing, and the space did not invite the same brief encounters as the commercial level below. The Brunswick began to feel less like one unified architectural object and more like a place divided by use. Its temporality sits in the overlap between the few minutes a passer-by spends below, the time built by people who keep returning to the same building, and its history as a post-war design that sought to bring domestic and commercial life into one structure.*

# Harmonia Mundi, or the Organisation of the Cosmos

by Damian Sabatini, PhD Anthropology



I used to visit a coffee shop a few streets away from Hackney Central Station in London back in March 2025. There were film posters and books neatly arranged on multicoloured shelves, but it was the staff that gave the place a certain warmth; young people likely working temporary jobs, one day leaving behind to pursue ‘something else’. Yet it was precisely that ‘something else’ through the form of a shared passion for music that united them. The young French man behind the counter was a former member of a post-punk band, and the head bartender was an emerging German indie folk-rock artist called SOLA<sup>1</sup>.

In one of the few conversations I had with them, I mentioned that I was conducting research on the anthropology of space and was intrigued by the human relationship with the cosmos. SOLA became interested and mentioned a book that I, too, had once begun: *How Music Works*. In it, David Byrne<sup>2</sup> devotes an entire chapter to something that has fascinated musicians for centuries – something called ‘Harmonia Mundi’,

political character of music, something that Theodor W. Adorno (1990), for example, explored in his analysis of the role of music in establishing specific ideologies. Overall, the idea of Harmonia Mundi is rooted in Byrne’s striking curiosity to understand the pleasurable and passionate attachment humans have to certain sounds. For him, one of the earliest major precedents in this line of thought is Pythagoras, who, driven by an obsession to understand such pleasures, developed an entire mathematical theory capturing how music is present in all things and embedded in the very principles that govern the cosmos.

In strictly musical and mathematical terms, Pythagoras suggested that proportional relationships existed between the different harmonies perceived as pleasant to the ear, and that these relationships were the same ones underlying the order of the cosmos. The conclusions derived from these relationships gave rise to the Pythagorean circle, which, despite numerous modifications, laid the foundations for modern music theory (see Anderson 1990, 36).

has been established between the figure of the musician and that of the magician throughout Western history. For example, the philosopher Boethius was imprisoned on charges of practising magic, among others, being a prominent music theorist and defender of Pythagorean ideas. There are numerous examples throughout Western history of the persistence of these associations. For instance, in its natural revival of Greek culture, the Renaissance established a view of music that conceived it “as an ontological imprint of the divine” (Voss 2019, 1). The figure of the musician came to be that of a magical performer whose acts revealed the inscrutable connections between the human soul and the hidden principles of a divine reality (ibid., 1-4). These associations, which also involved the organisation of the everyday physical world (Voss 2019, 2-3; DeLong and Lebrun 2019, 1), served as a creative impulse for many artists. The architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), for example, designed buildings in strict accordance with those same proportional principles found in music and the universe (see Byrne 2012, 335).

## Music, Mathematics and Magic

It was this expansion of the proportional relationships of sounds to the organisation of the cosmos that came to be known as Harmonia Mundi. According to Pythagoras, the same ‘harmonic’ intervals that govern relationships between sounds would also govern the distances between the planets. As a result, an idea emerged in ancient Greece that listening to these pleasurable sounds was synonymous with achieving a connection to the organising proportions of the cosmos.

It is precisely at the intersection of the triad of music, mathematics, and the cosmos that magic arose. By constituting a channel capable of linking the earthly world with the cosmic order, music came to be conceived as possessing magical qualities. It is therefore no coincidence that an explicit connection

## Disruptions and Continuities of Modernity in Harmonia Mundi

According to De Jong and Lebrun (2019, 1-2), the form of magical empiricism that had been permitted and legitimised in the Renaissance came to be challenged by a rational-scientific worldview in the 16th and 17th centuries. This promoted a modern world stripped of magic as it became associated with irrationality and error, yet the relationship among these categories persists to this day.

The rational-scientific rupture of modernity was crystallised and embodied in the figure of Newton, whose postulates reflected a duality that precisely testified to the transition toward modern science. At the core of his proposal coexisted the universalist impetus of Harmonia Mundi with the notion of “absolute, true, and mathematical time, which, by its

which speaks to the presence of music in all things, and to its role in the organisation of the cosmos. David Byrne’s chapter specifically takes a popular, accessible approach to the complex and historically intertwined relationship between music and culture. It touches on intriguing aspects of this relationship, such as the persuasive and

<sup>1</sup> Names are pseudonymised for this piece

<sup>2</sup> David Byrne is a Scottish-American musician and multidisciplinary artist best known as the lead vocalist and principal creative force of the rock band Talking Heads. Born in 1952, he has also produced notable written work, including books, forewords, and screenplays

own nature, flows uniformly, without being affected by anything external” (Newton 2016 [1687]: 54). This period is also marked by a turn to empirically verifiable experience through the study of tangible phenomena such as “sound waves, light, air, and electricity” (Gouk 2017, cited in De Jong and Lebrun 2019).

Newton came to represent the culmination of a long process that privileged objectivity above all else, a process shaped by the Renaissance obsession with order, measure, and causality (the same process underlying *Harmonia Mundi*). According to Denise Najmanovich (1994: 5), this calculative impulse, found in Descartes’ linear and geometric perspective, is the principal engine of the configuration of space. In temporal terms, it was precisely polyphonic music – its system of notation and its structuring of short intervals – that laid the foundation for the construction of a metrical conception of time, which ultimately formalised the notion of perfect mathematical time. This was also supported by the development of broader technical infrastructure at the time, particularly the emergence of Huygens’ mechanical clock. By Newton’s era, this conception had become intuitive and experienced as part of everyday material reality (ibid.)

However, it was also precisely in this drive toward empiricism that the inconsistency of objectivist positions lay (Najmanovich 1994, 12– 17), insofar as the focus was grounded in a kind of cognitive curtailment: the assumption of the impossibility of answering the question of origins. This, in turn, proved contradictory to the adoption of a priori notions of a unified whole without a rigorous method capable of empirically verifying it. As such, the trajectory that modernity ultimately took, following Einstein, was to move away from this universalist notion of time and instead turn toward specificity – toward the idea of multiple, contextual temporalities.

Despite the abandonment of such a unified whole, the relationship among categories such as ‘the musical,’ ‘the magical,’ ‘the mathematical,’ and ‘the temporal’ remained at the core of Western cosmological thought. Whether as a theoretical attempt to reposition the magical and enable the reintegration of these spheres, as in Carl Jung’s challenge to causal and logical relations through his concept of synchronicity (2013 [1954]); whether through explicit calls in the arts to revitalize the notion of *Harmonia Mundi*, as advocated by

filmmakers such as Walter Murch; whether through initiatives like NASA’s 1989 album *Symphonies of the Planets* (Drake, 2016), which romantically gestures toward the possibility of such a relationship; or even through the strong exclusion and opposition to the magical, for example, through Sigmund Freud’s (1913) view of magic as a form of intellectual laziness aimed at a simplified understanding of the cosmos – the relationship among these terms, albeit in diverse forms, continued to persist throughout the centuries that followed.

### **Reticulations: A Network Perspective on Music of the Spheres**

It is precisely for the above reasons that the musical, the magical, and the mathematical can be conceived not as fully fixed entities or events with static definitions, but rather as meanings, practices, and objects that remain continuously open to reticulation – that is, to networks of diverse natures in which cultural meanings and values become entangled with objects and human practices, giving rise to specific cultural realities from which official interpretations and categories such as ‘magic’ emerge.

Framed within a Simondonian analytical perspective, and following Ludovic Coupaye (2025; 2022; 2018), this approach makes it possible to focus more closely on the preceding processes of reticulation through which phenomena such as sound become entangled with other elements, practices, and objects, while also recognising that these processes are highly susceptible to contextual variation. It is therefore crucial to observe the reality that precedes the analytical act by which these spheres are segmented, situating them instead on a non-differentiated plane of immanence<sup>3</sup> in which such distinctions have not yet fully emerged.

Thus, music would not be understood as something that inherently carries or is intrinsically attached to the cosmos. Rather, what matters is understanding the rearticulation of sonic phenomena with many other elements – both physical and non-physical – within specific vernacular contexts in which those connections may occur in different ways. The aim is to examine how such entanglements configure and bring forth a cultural reality, together with the unique ontology (of categories such as ‘music,’ ‘magic,’ or ‘cosmos’) through which a culture inhabits the world.

This perspective enables a more context-sensitive intercultural analysis, one that moves toward a vernacular understanding of how reticulations occur in concrete historical, communal, and social contexts, without assuming in advance – or treating as inherently embedded in reality – any fixed perception of what is musical, cosmological, magical, or temporal. In this sense, an essentialist position would not be viable, one in which music is understood as something in itself without considering all the relations with other elements on which it depends. Rather, it would be part of a more complex network that both manifests and re/produces a specific cosmology; and which, as a consequence, would involve the mobilisation of a conception of the material world and a field of human behaviours oriented toward the concrete<sup>4</sup>.

This perspective allows us to see how the sonic event is immersed in a field of varied reticulations, openly enabling the interpretation of different cultural and historical contexts. It gives way to the possibility for arguing that *Harmonia Mundi* corresponds to a concrete set of reticulations, and that contemporary responses, such as David Byrne’s, are an attempt to return to it.

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<sup>3</sup> Following the arboreal thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2006 [1980]) in which the relations between them form a continuous relational whole, where the act of naming such categories is posterior to the non-segmented nature through which they reticulate

<sup>4</sup> See Yuk Hui (2017) on the idea of cosmotekhnics

# The 80s won't return my calls

by Joe Painter, PhD Anthropology

Deprived these days of loose change  
and splurged gossip, no longer fat on 20ps  
or strictly necessary calls, here stands  
instead a bygone filled with bubblegummed  
nooks and 2am kebab remnants.

What was once a patriotic crimson kiosk  
has caved to plexiglass and cheap steel;  
what was once an outpost of today  
has been outpaced – fallen out of touch,  
into graffiti fodder, become a pisser  
for the too-far-gone or an advertising  
hoarding for amphetamines and escorts.

Listen, if phone calls ever were romantic,  
it was twirling the cable between fingers  
or sinking coins to keep her on the line;  
it was sharing a booth with Ladykillers  
or Ziggy Stardust beaming down beside.  
Remember rotating a sweaty thumb, all ears  
for a dial tone purr in time with your own  
palpitations? The phone-thudding heart  
of a landline love echoing back to you?  
Head to any Deptford crossroads now –  
you'll see cords steep in silent bungee,  
the gallows jerk of handsets left to hang.

*I was sat on Eel Brook Common and looking towards a worse-for-wear phone box on the corner. Several people in a row walked past while speaking into their own phones and I realised most people around my age had probably never used a phone box. I remember my mum telling me that, when she was a teenager, if you met someone you liked and got their number, you'd try to call the next day – if it didn't work you knew they'd given you a fake number and couldn't be that interested!*

Instructions  
for  
Becoming  
Modern

Eight ways  
to get on with  
your Manchu queue

An Experimental  
Visual Essay

Zichen Yin

MA Material and  
Visual Culture



aug. E. Douart, feuit 1841.

Chin Jung  
taken in Washington  
Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 1841

**I**nstructions for Becoming Modern is a visual essay in the form of a fictional manual built from late Qing and early Republican image archives, including studio portraits, colonial and anthropometric photographs, tabloid illustrations, and newspaper images. The work interrogates the visual politics of Chinese modernity embodied in the Manchu queue, from means of state sovereignty to colonial re-signification and its uneasy afterlives. It actively engages with the queue as a visual and semiotic field where different forms of historical pain converge: conquest, obedience, humiliation, racial typology, bodily discipline, reform, and the uneasy demand-desire to become modern.

One point of departure that has illuminated this work is Timothy Mitchell's metaphor of 'the hall of mirrors' (2004, 452) in discussing orientalism and the exhibitionary order, especially the moment when the 'other' comes across a world reorganised through Western regimes of classification. It evokes a condition in which one encounters oneself through an external ordering system that appears objective while quietly dictating what can count as reality and progress as the 'world picture' (Heidegger 1977) unfolding. In the context of the queue, this offers an analogy for the encounter with the idea of 'modernity' in the turbulent early Republican China, where becoming modern increasingly meant learning to see one's own body through cast visual and political categories that deem certain parts backward, shameful, or excessive.

The work also speaks to the problem of photographic violence. Drawing on Ariella Azoulay's (2008) civil contract and citizenry of photography, I approach these archival images as politically charged scenes of relation structured by power and uneven visibility in the act of 'shooting' and recording. My reworking of these materials attempts to reactivate that relation from within its colonial and political entanglements. The speculative and disjunctive text slows down the image to interrupt its certainty, and I hope it would at the same time activate contemporary imaginations of the multilayered nature of the voices, especially those of the scrutinised subjects often obscured by captions.

Methodologically, the work draws on a few creative ethnographic or artistic approaches, including critical fabulation (Hartman 2008) and ethnographic silhouette (Zeitlyn 2008). The manual form allowed me to compose a fictional narrative across time and space, gathering dispersed fragments into a sequence that is at once historical and speculative. The tone is designed to be playful and ironic, and occasionally uneasy, partly inspired by Hito Steyerl's (2011) use of the tutorial as a form that can carry critique through parodying instruction and deadpan performance. Here, however, the 'instructions' do not offer mastery. They reveal how modernity can arrive as a script written onto the body, and how the queue becomes one of the surfaces on which that script is enforced, displayed, eventually cut away, but continues to haunt the present.

This visual essay therefore does not attempt to resolve the queue into a single meaning or oppose a certain historical narrative. Instead, it follows the queue through a series of image regimes and bodily operations, asking how a hairstyle became a political statement worn on the body, which may partially reveal why its visual afterlife remains so unsettling and difficult to inherit.<sup>1</sup>

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A STATUE FOR OUR HARBOR.

# Post Card



## Step 5. Seek Advice when confused

'When a man with a braid and wearing barbarian clothes loiters about in London, why do all the passerby cry out [in English], "Pig-tail" or "Savage"?... Ah, these queues, these barbarian clothes, these banner gowns [qipao], these peacock feathers, these red hat buttons, these necklaces. Are they the costume of China's cultural tradition, or are they the loathsome dress of the nomadic and thievish Manchus [Manren]?'

## Step 6. Remove it, or have it removed from me



'Through these interpretive dilemmas he senses the complexities of perception, where all is multiple, shifting, spectral, a surge of phantasms in which the actual and the imagined are endlessly blurred and intertwined...The body is a reluctant cyborg.'



Step 7.  
Present my new self and claim citizenry of modernity

## Step 8. Survive its Afterimage

'Maybe what I need to do is simultaneously allow myself to see and be seen, allow myself to direct and consume the performance.'



# Letters to a Young Anthropologist: Conversations

by Abira Pathak, Anthropolitan Print Editor, MSc Anthropology and Professor

To ask a question to scholars who have spent their careers asking them well is a kind of wager. But as anthropologists-in-the-making, we braved up and asked two questions to six of our discipline's most distinguished scholars:

*What has changed and what endures in anthropology?  
And what would you tell young anthropologists today?*

These six people are those who have inspired us to take up the yoke of being anthropologists, who have lived through our discipline's transformations across decades of intellectual life, and who have continued, nonetheless, to ask what it means to study human beings in a world that will not hold still. What follows are honest and carefully considered thoughts, earned through years of fieldwork, rigorous intellectual pursuits, as well as immense care and commitment to the discipline of anthropology.

We offer this piece as inspiration and encouragement to fellow anthropology students who will carry this discipline forward – changed and changeable as it is – into whatever comes next.

Question 1:

*Having witnessed the discipline and its changes across time, what are your insights or observations? What has shifted, and what has remained?*

**Katherine Homewood and  
Philip Burnham**



**Marilyn Strathern**

“ That’s a very broad-ranging and very interesting question. One might start by wondering how many strands move through what anthropologists do. Some people are very adept at gathering strands, and other people prefer to divide and go off in their own ways. Of course, I think I

would put the weight where anybody would put it: that initial tremendous faith was placed in the ability to create anthropological models of systems and structures which would have explanatory power, have comparative power – you can explain things through these models, and so forth.

The models were always, of course, abstractions from practical life. They were never meant to reproduce or imitate practical life. But then you use your abstraction, and people say: “but in real life it’s not like that.” And the model-maker says, of course it’s not – I’m giving you an abstraction. But the presence of the models actually makes people shift their focus to what is not in the model. So they then shift their focus to looking at ethnography, everyday life, and so forth, and that suddenly becomes more interesting. And anthropologies of all subjects or disciplines do this: something comes into focus, and then what is on the periphery becomes more interesting. And then you move, and you create another periphery, and something else becomes more interesting.”

“ From its inception in 1945 under Daryll Forde, UCL Anthropology had been constituted as broadly based, including social anthropology, biological anthropology and material culture. But, in the early years, Daryll’s personal interest in environmental anthropology was not well integrated into the department, and social and biological anthropology enshrined seemingly irreconcilable differences in epistemology and theory. We joined the department in the 1970s and soon found that we shared an interest in pastoralist societies and human ecology more broadly, which led us, at first, to start teaching a course in the ecology of pastoral societies.



As student interest in environmental anthropology grew, we founded the MSc in Anthropology, Ecology and Development (now MSc Anthropology, Environment and Development). We also set up HERG, the Human Ecology Research Group, as an interdisciplinary forum for staff and students interested in the interplay between people and their environments, the impacts of resource policy and management on people’s livelihoods, health and wellbeing, and conversely, the impacts of changing resource use on the environment and biodiversity.

In the early years, research funding for environmental anthropology was very limited which really began to change in 1992 with the UN’s Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the globalisation of environmentalist discourses. Over time, HERG colleagues have supervised and supported scores of PhDs, populating university departments around the UK and overseas. Many other HERG PhDs have gone on to senior positions in government, international agencies, industry and NGOs (especially conservation- and development-related NGOs). The last 45 years have seen UCL Anthropology embrace, integrate and take forward the interdisciplinary study of people and environment in the UK, Europe and around the globe. At a time when climate change and the biodiversity crisis are overwhelming societies, economies and

# ations with Anthropologists Across Time

## onal Practice

ecologies worldwide, HERG's approach and contribution have become mainstream, centrally topical and relevant within UCL, across UK academia, and beyond in policy and practice."

### **Daniel Miller**

"I joined the Department of Anthropology at UCL in 1983. Mary Douglas had recently left, as had the head of department, a Jamaican, M.G. Smith. Almost all staff were avowed Marxists and almost no one spoke to me, as I followed the early (Hegelian) Marxism and they followed the later (Althusserian) Marxism. I have lived through many such theoretical paradigms: Structuralism, Structural-Marxism, Post-Structuralism, Post-Modernism, Actor-Network Theory, and so on. A fine anthropologist, Pierre Bourdieu, explains how young anthropologists need to demonstrate their prowess by repudiating the ideas and moral claims of established anthropologists only to be overthrown in their turn. And yet – every one of these bodies of theory had important things to say and contribute. I feel hugely indebted to what I learnt from Structuralism, which changed forever the way I see the world, as did Socialism.

Associated with these movements have been critiques of anthropology itself, such as decoloniality. When I started, there remained a legacy from the days when it seemed anthropology was largely an US studying THEM. But by the time I came to have my own ERC-funded projects, things had changed. The teams that undertook our research included African, Latin American, Palestinian, Chinese and Indian anthropologists.

The department at UCL always stood apart. Because there was no sociology at UCL, the department taught about Weber, Marx and Durheim. Compared to universities with famous ancestors such as Malinowski, we were less conservative about what was relevant to anthropology. We also had the breadth, because our courses included evolutionary, aesthetic, medical, material culture, as well as the more conventional social anthropological pursuits. I was encouraged by my colleagues when I chose to study topics such as mass consumption, including shopping, cars and clothes, and then later the digital.



***"We are now living in a world where people make havoc with all kinds of issues to do with information and knowledge, not realising how precious the concept of knowledge, for example, is."***

*– Marilyn Strathern*

What has largely remained sacrosanct is the commitment to long-term ethnography. My students usually spend 16 months in the field. This is still

the foundation of our claims to scholarship and desire for our work to reflect the views and experiences of the people we study, rather than our own. But the way we convey our ethnography has changed. Most studies in the 1980s generalised about a 'society' such as The Nuer or The Waghi, but increasingly there has been a desire to bring out and respect the diversity and personality of individuals. Most papers now start with, or include, the stories and experiences of named persons, through which we recognise and respect their humanity. We are also more likely to encounter them through films and other multimodal resources rather than just text.

Reflecting on all this, my conclusion is perhaps surprising. I would suggest that, in almost every respect, anthropology has become a better discipline and has come closer to the original goal of an empathic understanding of the diversity and individuality of people from every part of the world, together with a concern as to how best to convey what we have learnt from our studies through imaginative new forms of education."



### **Martin Holbraad**

"For me, anthropology is an intellectual activity concerned with concepts and life in equal measure. It takes both as far as they will go, without losing the connection between them – which, I think, is its distinctive signature as an intellectual pursuit;

and the history of anthropology can be described along these coordinates: an investment in abstract theory-making – concepts, models, and so on – combined with a deep commitment to lived experience and the people involved in it.

Within that space, anthropologists tend to stake out ground closer to one or the other, and there is often a pendular movement between them. The most compelling anthropology holds both together, even if at times one is more prominent.

At present, it would be fair to say that the commitment to life is more prominent than the commitment to concepts. If you map onto this distinction between concepts and life, you also get a distinction between knowledge and understanding on the one hand, and political and ethical engagement on the other. The current shift towards engagement with life carries with it an increased interest in the political and ethical dimensions of doing anthropology, and that has gained quite a lot of precedence in the past few years. That, I think, is how I would characterise the current moment. But the investment in concepts – understanding, knowledge, model-making, and particularly the radical potential that anthropology has to generate alternative ways of thinking, new windows for the mind to imagine what the world could be like – is always still there. And this is what excites me most."

### **Susanne Kuechler**

The main change I observe in the discipline is its increasing specialisation, with fewer anthropologists working across thematic areas. Regional specialisation has also declined in

importance, with modules directed to the study of a region no longer on the list of courses offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Alongside this change is a drop in explicitly theoretical publications that seek out connections between concepts and issues at a more abstract level. During the 1980s and early 1990s, publications of this type appeared, and knowledge of these texts was assumed among staff of whatever theoretical persuasion, discussed in a series of workshops and seminars, most of which culminated in further publications.”

Question 2:

***Given the present precarity of the discipline and the broader polycrisis we are living through, where futures are often difficult to imagine, what advice would you offer to students today – to future anthropologists?***

### ***Marilyn Strathern***

“ It is a difficult question, because I was very privileged as a student and then as a career anthropologist. I did my work at a time when universities were expanding. I did a lot of my work before the existential climate crisis really got underway.

I grew up in a time that wasn't precarious, but it was a time where one imagined there were all kinds of difficulties. There always were problems – problems to do with women's recruitment into the discipline; problems to do with language, with development; with the realisation that colonialism was an extractive operation. I had been brought up to admire the British Empire – for example, my parents would point out how much of the map was painted red – until one realised, of course, the cost that other people bore to produce that. So although I didn't live in a time of crisis or precarity, we/one created many crises, actually. And I think there is always some kind of envisioning of crisis. Roy Wagner, a Melanesian anthropologist I very much admire, argues that crisis is always the moment one is in. One is never out of a crisis, because that is the nature of the present.

That having been said, there is a particular dimension now, aside from the climate issue – we have not begun to realise what that is going to mean. I think the whole transformation of education is also an issue, and it affects you in a way that it did not affect me. Although there were many people who did not have opportunities – and I have pointed to the question of women and their exclusion – nonetheless the general precepts on which education was based, that information and knowledge could be garnered and would instruct policy-making and so on, were largely unquestioned.

We are now living in a world where people make havoc with all kinds of issues to do with information and knowledge, not realising how precious the concept of knowledge, for example, is. So I think you are living through particularly difficult times, and individually, of course, your own futures. And at this point I start feeling very humble, because it is you people who will carry it. I really worry about what you guys are going to do. That's the way I'd start crying.”

### ***Katherine Homewood & Phil Burnham***

“ Anthropology is grounded in a commitment to participatory research, both as an important career-relevant skill and as a means to engage with the diverse perspectives one encounters in the 'real' world. Anthropology's continuing importance depends on that critical contribution, balancing the dominance of ever more technocratic ways of seeing societies and ecosystems with crucial social, cultural and political ecology dimensions, without which there can be no possibility of understanding people and places.

Precarity of the discipline is one manifestation of global crises in research and higher education, and of socioecological systems (and economies) more generally. For decades, anthropologists have consciously or unconsciously been part of the way soft power operated in the postcolonial world. That soft power landscape, and the opportunities it offered anthropology, have been disrupted by the politics of brute force, and by grotesque levels of accumulation by dispossession. Rather than offer advice, we highlight some decisions that lie ahead in terms of your career prospects and in terms of your ethical choices as a future anthropologist.



First, the mantra used to be: in a recession, get more qualifications. You will need to consider whether that remains true for you in a context of rising change and uncertainty. Second, you may face hard choices between career and your anthropological code of ethics. Will you as a future anthropologist ally with your often marginalised interlocutors, or will you find yourself extracting people's data to feed the very systems driving spiralling inequalities?

For example, within the field of conservation and development: how far will you go to seek and champion understanding of peoples' worlds and priorities for place-based environmental stewardship and resource use, to recognise and resist the forces undermining lifeways and expropriating lands for profit under the aegis of hegemonic, western-conceived neoliberal conservation? It will take courage and commitment to stand up to powerful vested interests. Those interests seek to undermine and negate evidence of adverse effects, and to destroy the professional and personal credibility of researchers showing them up. HERG graduates are likely to call such behaviour out and/or seek to work constructively to mitigate it.”



### ***Susanne Kuechler***

“ Anthropology as a discipline is uniquely placed to investigate the issues impacting on lives and life projects. As lives have become more complex and unstable and life projects uncertain, the work of anthropologists has arguably become more important than ever. My recommendations for the next generation is thus to carry on the work as anthropologists, taking its way of drawing attention to real lives into the personal and professional arena.

## **Daniel Miller**

“ What I would say to anthropology students, is firstly that you made the right choice. In the future, the world will need anthropologists far more than they have in the past. Why? Partly because the world has become more private, indoors, or on screens, which means it is harder to know what people’s lives are actually like. There are no shortcuts to the ethnographic method of building long-term trust and friendship that allows us to have scholarly insights into why people have such different opinions and ideas than our own.

When everyone is fixated on the latest technologies, influencers and AI, anthropology keeps us focused on what matters most of all. Not the technology itself but the consequences for people’s lives. I hope in the future to mainly study Companion AI because I think it’s going to have a major impact on us all. That is precisely because it will become part of private family life, indoors and onscreen. But we will never know its consequences unless we carry out our research.

The main cause of political anxiety is that individuals feel small and marginalised as their awareness of the scale of the world increases. In response to this, we are the discipline that brings together respect for individuals with ideas about the nature of humanity. While other disciplines undertake artificial studies such as questionnaires, focus groups and interviews, we remain the only discipline that studies life as it is being lived. They tend to make universal claims about the impact of digital technologies, we ask whether those claims apply to farmers in India or factory workers in China. True, there have never been enough jobs in anthropology itself to provide direct employment for its students. But then the main jobs being displaced by AI, turn out to be those considered ‘safe’ such as software engineers, rather than those held by people trained in anthropology.

So what about you? There is a book just recently re-published called *Why The World Needs Anthropologists* edited by Dan Podjed and Guerrón Montero. It is aimed at people who will use anthropology in areas such as development, commerce and services. In it you find many good suggestions about how to link your anthropology with other disciplines and occupations. How to retain our openness, scepticism and empathy; how to listen and to observe; how to pay attention to context and to be opportunistic; how to use anthropology to respect people and differences; how to help solve problems and not just critique them; how to remain linked to us anthropologists as an academic body; how to be interested and interesting; how to explain and to doubt one’s explanations. I have been in this discipline for decades and I can honestly say I have met very few people who ever regretted studying anthropology. Few things are more likely to help you grow as a person.”

**“What I would say to anthropology students, is firstly that you made the right choice.”**

**- Daniel Miller**

## **Martin Holbraad**

“ There is much that could be said, but the one thing I would single out is what I have come to think of as the principal malaise of the contemporary moment: a lack of depth.

If you think about the politicians who have become dominant, or the transformative effects – at least as they are claimed – of technology, social media, AI, and so on, one thing they all have in common is a kind of superficiality, a lack of depth. What I find compelling about anthropology is precisely its constitutive investment in depth.

The power of anthropological thinking lies in its capacity to investigate the hidden side of things – the underlying assumptions and logics that are not stated explicitly but operate at a deeper level. If I were inclined towards psychoanalysis, I might call this the unconscious – not of the psyche, but of society and culture. It is these framing assumptions, which motivate the way we operate in the world, that anthropologists are particularly adept at uncovering and attuned to. That investment in depth – the unapologetic embrace of deep thinking – is what anthropology offers. Not exclusively, of course: all intellectual pursuits are, in some sense, oriented towards depth. But anthropology, perhaps, pins its flag there more insistently.

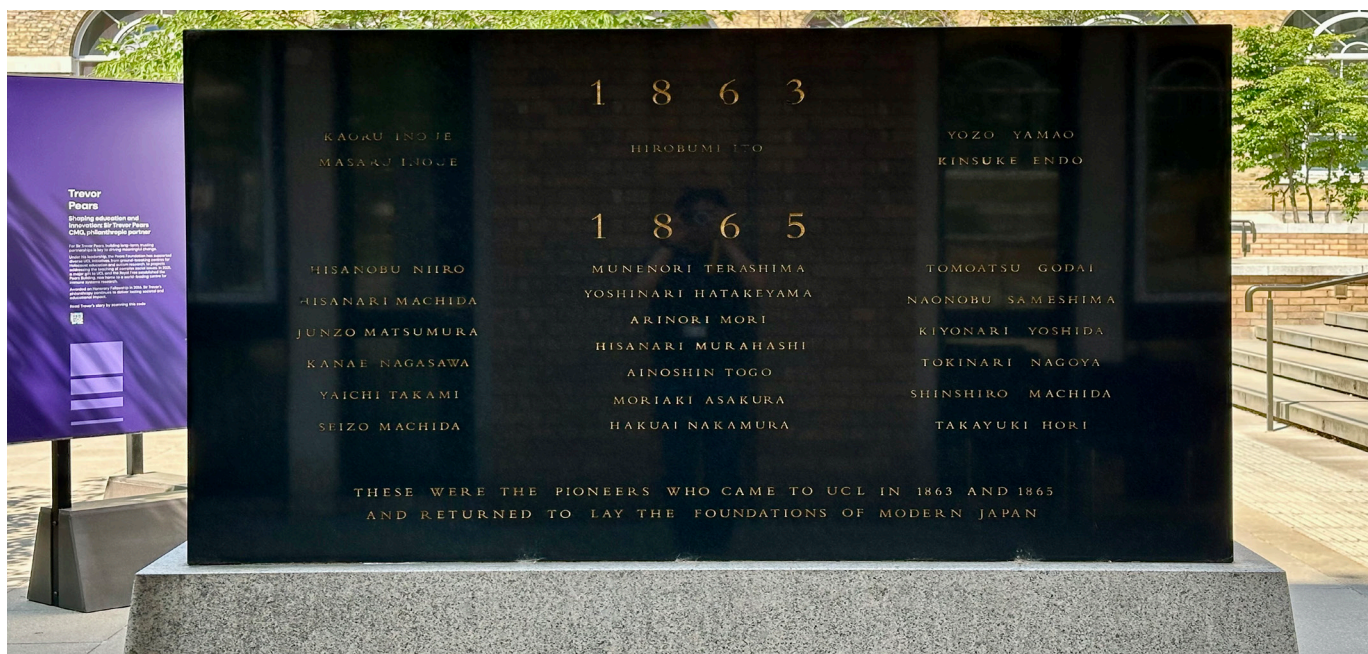
And this is what the world needs most right now: people capable of detecting what lies beyond superficial slop – whether political entertainment or otherwise – and attending to levels of meaning that are not traded on the surface, but found in the depths of people’s experience. That, I think, is what we offer. And it is relevant across the constituencies that will shape the future: politics, art, and the ways people relate to one another socially. In that sense, anthropology, if we take seriously what it has to offer, has a radical – and radically important – contribution to make to the future. “

**“At a time when climate change and the biodiversity crisis are overwhelming societies, economies and ecologies worldwide, HERG’s approach and contribution have become mainstream, centrally topical and relevant within UCL, across UK academia, and beyond in policy and practice.”**

**– Katherine Homewood & Philip Burnham**

# A Lenticular Monument: Selective Remembrance and Colonial Silence in UCL's Japanese Garden

by Jeehwan Cha, MSc Digital Anthropology



My first visit to the UCL campus was on a cloudy day in early September 2025. When I asked whether there was a campus map at the Student Centre, a staff member kindly unfolded one and explained the spaces that students often use. “Wow, this is really useful. Thanks. Is there anywhere nearby I should check out?” “Oh, yes. If you go through that door over there, you’ll find the Japanese Garden. It’s especially lovely in spring, when the cherry blossoms are out.”

As soon as I entered the Japanese Garden, my eyes were drawn to a large monument made of smooth black granite. Near the bottom of the monument, the following sentence was inscribed: “These were the pioneers who came to UCL in 1863 and 1865 and returned to lay the foundations of modern Japan.” Above it, several names were engraved in English. Among the names on the monument, one in particular caught my attention: Hirobumi Ito.

As a Korean, I saw the monument at that moment as something like a lenticular image: it revealed an entirely different picture when viewed from a different angle. Ito played a leading role in the colonisation of the Korean peninsula. In 1906, he was appointed as the first Resident-General of Korea, the highest Japanese authority in Korea under the protectorate system. In this sense, Ito can be understood as a figure

symbolising the beginning of colonial rule, much like Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of British India. The monument also commemorated Kaoru Inoue, who later actively led the colonisation of Korea as a senior diplomat. Yet, without any mention of the roles they later played in Japan’s colonial project, they were remembered as pioneers of modern Japan.

With the end of the Second World War in 1945, Korea was liberated from thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule. Yet even after eighty years, the legacy of that colonialism remains, hidden within the everyday background of UCL’s campus life. I argue that by examining the monument in the Japanese Garden and the memory practices surrounding it, we can see how this persistence is made possible through selective remembrance of the past.

Huyssen’s (2003) approach offers useful insight here. He suggests that memory can be mediated through spaces, architecture, and objects. Here, memory is a practical process performed in the present, and a dynamic relationship between the present and the past. In this sense, spaces and artefacts function as palimpsests, repeatedly overwritten by layers of memory. Therefore, the monument in the Japanese Garden can be examined as a medium of memory that UCL continually invokes in order to construct its present institutional

identity. It is necessary, then, to ask which forms of memory practice unfold around the monument, and what kinds of public memory and narrative have been produced through those practices.

Since the monument was unveiled by the Japanese Ambassador to the United Kingdom in September 1993, it has repeatedly been invoked as a symbolic artefact whenever discourses of collaboration between UCL and Japan have emerged (Embassy of Japan in the UK, 2022; Portico Magazine, 2023; UCL News, 2017; UCL News, 2022). In 2017, the UCL President and Provost and Japan’s Prime Minister both recalled photographs they had taken together beside the monument in the Japanese Garden in 2014. At that meeting, the Provost stated that the Choshu Five, the first five Japanese students at UCL, including Ito and Inoue, embodied UCL’s values of internationalisation and social contribution.

In April 2022, the Japanese Ambassador visited the Japanese Garden and gave a speech beside the monument, referring to the influence that the education received by the Choshu Five at UCL later had on Japan’s modernisation and internationalisation. In 2023, UCL’s official magazine Portico described the dramatic journey through which the Choshu Five left a closed Japan and arrived in London, identifying the monument as a representative object

symbolising the relationship between Japan and UCL.

These examples unfold as a romantic narrative: young men longing for an ideal future risked their lives to leave a closed country, acquired knowledge in a new world, and then returned home to contribute to making their nation more prosperous. Within this public narrative, UCL is positioned as the cradle and foundation that generously welcomed the Choshu Five, taught them modern and rational knowledge, and transformed their worldview (Portico Magazine 2023; UCL News 2017). However, I argue that this narrative is produced through the exclusion of historical facts that unsettle UCL's institutional self-narrative of a progressive educational philosophy. At this point, I turn from the story the monument tells to the histories it leaves unspoken.

First, this narrative either fails to mention or significantly downplays the complex realities produced by Western imperial projects when the Choshu Five studied at UCL. In 1864, less than a year after arriving in London, Ito and Inoue had to return to Japan. This was because the Shimonoseki War had broken out between nationalist forces in the Choshu region of Japan and Western powers led by Britain. Japan was eventually defeated in the war, forced to accept unequal treaties, and made to pay a large war indemnity (Britannica Editors 2026; Cox 2021; Kazuhiro 2014; Japan Centre for Asian Historical Records n.d.).

Most importantly, this narrative entirely omits the ways in which Ito and Inoue later contributed to the expansion of Japanese imperialism and colonialism.



Ito played a leading role in concluding the treaty that deprived Korea of its diplomatic sovereignty in 1905, and later became the first Resident-General, administering Korea under Japan's protectorate system (George 2025; National Institute of Korean History 1987b). Inoue was involved in concluding the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876, which first revealed Japan's colonial ambitions, and later intervened deeply in Korean politics as Japanese Minister in Korea (Kim 2022; National Institute of Korean History 1987a).

Taken together, these histories reveal a more difficult trajectory than UCL's commemorative narrative allows: Ito and Inoue first encountered Western imperial power from a position of vulnerability but later became colonial actors who reproduced imperial violence against neighbouring countries. The monument in the Japanese Garden commemorates the passion attached to both their youth, as students in their twenties, while leaving unspoken the colonial history that connects these two moments. The repeated glorification of this singular narrative reproduces what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) warns about: the danger of a single story. By presenting only one limited perspective, it risks producing a distorted memory that obscures colonial violence and denies dignity to those affected by it.

I argue that if UCL seeks to emphasise how it contributed to Japan's modernisation by broadening the worldview of Ito and Inoue, it must also address the colonial violence in which they were later involved. Here, I do not wish to advance the reductive claim that all practices and material forms associated with colonialism should necessarily be removed because they are morally wrong. Huyssen (2003) criticises the reduction of all memory to trauma, and argues that the reason for remembering the past is to imagine alternatives to the present order and possible futures. From this perspective, the monument in the Japanese Garden should not be removed; rather, it should be preserved as a concrete example of colonial legacies in the present, inviting students to consider how such legacies might be critically addressed.

What is needed here is the repositioning of memory. For example, while explaining that the Choshu Five contributed to Japan's modernisation, UCL could also state clearly that

Ito and Inoue later became deeply involved in Japan's colonial rule over neighbouring countries. Further, UCL could transform the monument in the Japanese Garden into an educational object for discussing how university education, modernisation, and colonialism were entangled with one another. This would not be an act of denying UCL's past. Rather, it would be a way for UCL to practise the tradition of critical intelligence that it claims to uphold.

In conclusion, the monument in the Japanese Garden commemorates UCL's progressive philosophy and the pioneers of modern Japan who studied at UCL, but remains silent about the roles that Ito and Inoue later played, respectively as Resident-General and Japanese Minister to Korea, in colonising Korea and depriving the nation of its sovereignty. This silence is not accidental, but a political effect produced through the organisation of institutional memory in a particular way. Therefore, in order for UCL to practise a more responsible form of remembrance, it must also reveal the history of colonialism that has been excluded from this narrative.

One day in April 2026, I visited the Japanese Garden again. As the information desk staff had told me, the cherry blossoms were in full bloom. To many people, the scene may have appeared as a beautiful moment. Yet to me, just as the monument had shown another image, a lenticular picture, the entire beautiful garden revealed the silence that UCL's proud narrative does not name. If UCL allows the hidden histories to be spoken, the Japanese Garden could become a place for thinking together about the relationships between modernisation and colonialism, education and power, memory and responsibility. If that day comes, I too may be able to look at the garden in a somewhat different way.

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When I visited the British Museum, I happened to chance upon a display of Javanese puppets and models tucked away in one of its many galleries. Had I not read the label carefully, I wouldn't have thought that the puppets were Javanese. Instead, the label focuses on British colonial officer Sir Stamford Raffles, his exploits in the Dutch East Indies and how he 'established' Singapore as a British port. As a Singaporean, this made me think: if our classrooms, museums and textbooks are still centred on colonial exploits, where do we even begin to talk about 'decolonising' anthropology?



**Cymbals, puppets and models (below)**

Thomas Stamford Raffles is known for establishing Singapore as a British port. Having entered the East India Company at age 14 in 1795, he rose to become lieutenant-governor of Java in 1811. He commissioned research and personally worked on Javanese natural history ('next to religion, perhaps the most rational and innocent enjoyment that Mind can possess on Earth'), languages, and cultures. His collection includes full-size and model gamelan instruments (cymbals here and wall cases 119, 122), puppets, masks, model figures (below and wall cases) and Buddhist and Hindu deities (case 19).

Deeply entangled in colonialism, many early collections were often only made possible through imperial networks of expansion and extraction, and the scientific explorations during the Age of Enlightenment. These collections were stored and displayed in wunderkammern, or cabinets of curiosities, curated personally by the explorer/owner and not open to the public. The issue with these predecessors of modern-day museums was that the way they were curated

was a direct reflection of the curator's personal worldview, often impartial and holding significant racial prejudices.

This system of arbitrary classification along the lines of 'racial hierarchy' was inherited by early museums. For example, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford was originally arranged to show the development of material culture from simple to complex, suggesting which items were civilised and which were not. This imposes binary divisions on humanity, categorising people like exhibits in the spirit of unilinear evolution, where racist beliefs are physically materialised in the form of cabinets of curiosities, institutionalising and reinforcing certain worldviews as factual and credible knowledge. This is exacerbated by the private nature of the collections, only accessible to an elite few, reinforcing the divide between the cultured rich and the uncultured poor. Cabinets of curiosities exoticise the Other, treating non-Western cultures as objects to collect instead of genuine realities to be understood.

The contemporary museum has responded to the call to 'decolonise the museum' by decentring colonial narratives and democratising access to knowledge. For example, the Auckland War Memorial Museum displays rocks in two ways: one categorised in the scientific way and one in the Maori way (based on their relationship to the gods and their role in local customs and stories), presenting them as different but equally valid ways of interpretation.

The issue of coloniality is not limited to the space of the museum. In my home country Singapore, I see the colonial legacy bleed into aspects of daily life. Our educational system largely centres our history on the period of British colonisation, on Raffles' establishment of Singapore as a British port as the label suggests, overlooking our rich history as a trading port in the Malaysian archipelago prior to colonisation. Secondary school history and social studies classes discuss that part of our history sparingly, and it is simply not mentioned once you reach the pre-tertiary level.

Sang Nila Utama, the 13th-century Palembang prince who founded Singapore, is described as a mythical, folklorish figure, leading many Singaporeans to regard him as a book character instead of a real part of our history. By promoting the narrative that Singapore was established by Sir Stamford Raffles, legitimising his legacy as the reason for our port city flourishing through the naming of various institutions and roads and siting multiple statues of him around the country, Singapore ties its history to a colonial national narrative.

### **The Potential Damages of Decolonial-washing**

However, focusing on 'decolonising the curriculum' can also lead to several problems.

Firstly, in trying to correct the Eurocentric perspective in museums and higher education, the decolonised curriculum may oversimplify non-Western scholars' perspectives. For example, in *Extractive Relations*, Evan Killick (2020) argues against the assumption that indigenous communities should always live lightly on the land. The concept of *buen vivir*, meaning 'to live well', is typically taken to mean living in harmony with nature over the pursuit of material gain. However, this associates entire indigenous communities with a specific idea of communality and sociality, glossing over the complex needs and desires of indigenous peoples, which may differ from the common perception of *buen vivir*.

Indeed, in Killick's ethnographic piece, the Ashaninka people do express material desires and question why their being indigenous comes with the assumption that they should not have them. The issue of the homogenisation of indigenous identities creates a binary distinction between the indigenous and non-indigenous lived experiences, reinforcing the exoticising and Othering of non-Western perspectives. To develop a more nuanced view of different cultures, perspectivism emphasises that knowledge is always an interpretive act.

# Decolonial-washing? Musings on Decolonisation

by Hayley Soh, BSc Anthropology w/ Year Abroad

Secondly, there is a fear of co-opting 'decolonisation' to mask the lack of meaningful engagement. When institutions hop on the decolonisation bandwagon, making small but visible changes like emphasising EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion) on official websites or removing statues of colonisers, they publicly brand themselves as decolonised while still being embedded in colonial power structures without enacting real change that uplifts marginalised communities: a form of 'decolonial-washing' similar to 'greenwashing'. Furthermore, there is also the concern of institutions absorbing radical thought and subsequently neutralising it such that it is no longer able to challenge institutional power.

Using the concept of a museum as a 'contact zone' (Clifford 1997), where it cannot be taken as a neutral space and must be acknowledged as a space of colonial encounters, where complex legacies of colonial power interact in front of an audience of millions, therein lies the question of how to move forward. Erasure of colonial legacies from museums is entirely out of the question, because these atrocities are undeniably part of peoples' histories and should be acknowledged as such.

For instance, Japan's postwar cultural rebranding and ongoing disputes over historical apologies (think of the South Korean comfort women who have been fighting for an apology for decades) raise the question of what it means to receive 'justice' from those who perpetrated these violations. In Singapore, while some of the older generation still refuse to have anything to do with Japan following the Sook Ching massacre<sup>1</sup>, the younger generation avidly consumes Japanese culture, revealing a seeming disjunction in the collective memory of our colonial past and how we want our futures to be.

### To Singlish or not to Singlish?

Another way colonial baggage seeps into the national consciousness is

through the perception of speech and accents. Singlish is the national dialect in Singapore, but it is largely associated with the lower class because of the government's post-independence efforts to implement a 'universal language' amongst an ethno-linguistically diverse population. This can be understood through Bourdieu's (1984) concept of symbolic violence, which suggests that even after colonial rule, the dominant social group continues to impose its norms on the minority. By reinforcing the perception of Singlish as too colloquial, its linguistic cultural capital diminishes, echoing colonial hierarchies of linguistic prestige. Yet while excessive Singlish is frowned upon, there is still a stigma against going too far the other end and developing an accent that is 'too posh'.

Before flying abroad, I was copiously warned not to return with a British accent, and was sent loads of TikToks making fun of students who go to Europe for a semester and return with one. Dialects and accents are aural markers of social class, such that once you speak, the person you're speaking to almost automatically positions you within the social hierarchy. So, when the international student flies abroad and returns with an accent (not codeswitching back to the local dialect), it can be said that they are shunning their 'Singaporean-ness'— something we are

paradoxically taught to associate with inferiority.

Tensions between history and memory bring me back to the Javanese puppets: I wonder whether rewriting the label to focus more on their cultural significance and removing any mention of Raffles would help. At the end of the day, these puppets are still thousands of kilometres away from their home, stuck in a glass case, having their significance perpetually tied to the coloniser who took a fancy to them one day. I guess the broader question is, is it really possible to do anthropology, otherwise?

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<sup>1</sup> The Sook Ching massacre refers to the mass killings of Chinese in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation to purge 'anti-Japanese sentiments' from February to March 1942

## on as a Postcolonial Student

# Skeletons on the Beach: Fascist Holiday Houses as ‘Difficult Heritage’

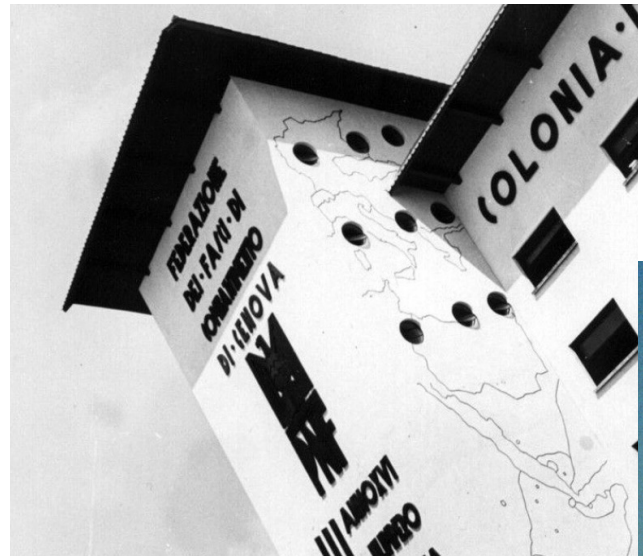
by Gaia Baldi, MSc Digital Anthropology

I cannot remember the first time the abandoned behemoths looming on Romagna’s beaches caught my attention. Their state of extreme disrepair both fascinates and unsettles me and many others, including urban explorers<sup>1</sup> interested in Romagna’s ruins. Their size and location puzzled me as a child, and so did the fact that there are multiple sites of the same kind in each seaside town I’ve ever been to in Romagna. I started asking my family about these mysterious structures, who then explained that they were ‘colonie’, structures that once housed children during the summer, built especially during the Fascist Era (1922-1945)<sup>2</sup>.

Colonie<sup>3</sup> were first conceptualised in Europe in the late nineteenth century as free sanatoria and centres of leisure for children (Pilat and Sanza 2020). Until the mid-twentieth century, colonie were a significant welfare provision for many working-class families. Attending them became significantly rare by the 1970s, as people had started vacationing with their children more, and diseases such as Tuberculosis had waned (ibid.). The very colonie that still operate nowadays are properties of either major corporations or the Catholic Church.

The most famous example is the Colonia Agip, owned by the eponymous Italian oil company<sup>4</sup>. It was a colonia built during Fascism; in fact, it was originally named after one of Mussolini’s nephews (Sanza 2023, 157). Under Fascism, the construction of holiday houses for children was particularly intense and took on associated characteristics. State officials had devised colonie as a primary site of indoctrination for children, which was considered fundamental to sustaining the regime. In this context, colonie were not necessarily pleasant places; they were structures where children were strictly disciplined and their daily lives regulated following the guidelines contained in the Regolamento delle Colonie Climatiche by the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL)<sup>5</sup> (ibid., 151).

Architectural historian Arne Winkelmann (2024) writes that the originally ‘humanitarian’ character of children’s holiday camps was fundamentally transformed by Mussolini’s regime. The typical colonia became a site for national paramilitary youth organisations as an attempt to shape a ‘strong’ new generation. Winkelmann (ibid.) points out that Fascist colonie are examples of Razionalismo, Mussolini’s preferred architectural current. They fuelled the dictator’s cult of personality through names celebrating him or his family members and inscriptions that bore his quotes. Decorators added Fascist symbols onto the buildings and integrated them into murals. Structures and art celebrated imperialism and militarism through iconography, barracked sleeping and strict hierarchies. The summer programme required having “conversations on Fascist culture” and “readings on Fascist culture and patriotic topics” every day (Pilat and Sanza 2020, 114).



I was writing this piece on April 25th, the Anniversary of the Liberation of Italy from Nazism and Fascism. For a long time, certain political actors have attempted to diminish this antifascist national holiday and treat it as ‘contentious’. Similarly, the topic of what to do with Fascist architecture tends to generate extreme debates. I say that the cumbersome remains of colonie may be regarded as akin to a physical manifestation of these tensions, of a ‘difficult’ Fascist inheritance that remains indisputably present. Colonie occupy a peculiar position in debates on Fascism’s legacy, often forgotten as part of its institutions – how can they be situated in the discourse, if at all?

In her works on negotiations with the material legacy of the Nazis in Nuremberg, anthropologist Sharon Macdonald (2009) uses the term ‘difficult heritage’ to refer to “a past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity” (ibid., 1). Anthropologist Paolo Heywood (2025) recently pointed to sites of Fascist pilgrimage, such as Mussolini’s hometown (also in Romagna), as manifestations of this ‘difficult’ heritage at the centre of complex struggles over what to remember and what to forget. Yet these debates cannot be reduced to a



1 See for instance the urbex website Ascosi Lasciti <https://ascosilasciti.com/it/tag/colonie-abbandonate/>

2 The Fascist Era is a period of Italian history in which the country was ruled as a totalitarian dictatorship by Benito Mussolini of the National Fascist Party, beginning with a coup in 1922 and lasting until 1943 (or 1945 in parts of the nation)

3 Plural of the word colonia which literally translate to ‘colony’, colonie were part of a process of construction of new settlements under Fascism

4 AGIP was a petroleum retailer founded by the Mussolini government. It recently merged with ENI, one of the ‘supermajor’ oil companies partly owned and controlled by the government of Italy to this day. Their colonia still hosts children of employees every summer

5 The [Climatic] Colonie Regulations by the Italian Youth of the Lictor by the GL. The GIL is the collective youth organisations of the Fascist Party

binary choice between remembrance and erasure. As Heywood argues, it is important to remember that neofascists are also “just as likely as anyone else to think that ‘remembering freely’ is ethical, and that forgetfulness is a sin” (ibid., 125).

While reading Macdonald’s (2006) article *Words in Stone* for the module *Art in the Public Sphere*, I constantly thought of *colonie*. In the article, Macdonald points out that Nazi regime architects had indeed envisioned a future where their buildings would become compelling ‘elegant ruins’, which is something I partly see happening with *colonie*. The strategy that was adopted in Nuremberg was to keep the Nazi buildings in a state of ‘semi-disrepair’ (ibid., 120). Macdonald does not consider it a particularly effective strategy, but it still made me wonder whether the *colonie* operate on the same logic. What about those built postwar, for example? Whilst they lacked

explicit Fascist rituals or symbols, they may have carried pieces of this legacy regardless, given the depth of the mark that the regime had left on this kind of institution.

Macdonald’s article also shows how buildings have agency. Totalitarian regimes of the 20th century have used architecture to transmit their ideology and influence their subjects. The same can be said of *colonie*; in addition to its explicitly Fascist elements, Mussolini also wanted *colonie* to be noticeable and striking even from afar (Sanza 2023, 155). It is worth noting that they were disproportionately large for adults, let alone children, who would have been completely engulfed by them. I felt most perturbed by these buildings as a child – they made me feel smaller and more powerless than I already felt. I did not need to know their full history or everything about Fascism to assume that they once housed something sinister. Their language has lasted through the decades, sending a message that, above all, commemorates overpowering others. Being on Adriatic beaches where people gather for leisure, they tend not to be regarded as a place where ‘history was made’. Yet they furthered a certain idea of public health and childhood while also being sites of bombings, Mussolini speeches, and Allied encampments (after 1943). Today, homeless people seek shelter in these abandoned buildings, becoming part of their histories too.

My point is not to give a definitive answer on what should be done with the *colonie*. In fact, I believe the public has to further recognise their relevance before engaging in discussion. There should be more education about them and efforts to increase awareness of their historical significance. Winkelmann (2024, 110) suggests that in seaside towns like Cesenatico or Riccione where *colonie* are aplenty, there should be didactic interventions that address the historical objectives of the camps. I would have appreciated an initiative that answered the many questions I had (and still have) about them. While my family supported my curiosity, we could hardly find any publicly accessible information about them that was reflexive or that went beyond superficial accounts. It is not that there is no information about them at all, or that no scholar has studied them. What I mean is that this information largely remains concealed from visitors to Romagna, unlike the very visible *colonie* – a difficult history I attempt to give justice to through my writing.



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# the house of loss

by Sagarika Raje Wadiyar, MA Material and Visual Culture

every day, everywhere  
we stand in a house of loss

residing under a shelter of pain  
of grief  
of heartbreak  
of shame  
in the (dis)comforts of one's tears  
that glide down a face,  
carved so carefully  
by the gods and goddesses of sorrow themselves

these tears fall on tiled floors,  
the footprints of the past still visible –  
like paw prints engraved in wet  
cement.

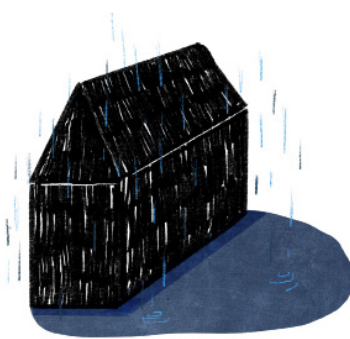
in cupboards creaking,  
the crevices of golden brushed wood  
emanate fabric scents  
some sweat-lingered, still unwashed  
it is too soon –  
a whiff of memory that is old, special,  
and familiar  
to be replaced by a fragrance soapy,  
fresh, new.  
it is too soon, it can wait.  
by the window,  
a visit by feline friends awaiting  
their companion –  
a homebody; shy and lazy, and  
uniquely mischievous  
through sun-tinted window cracks,  
the insides of this house reveal  
toys, trees, food and water bowls  
empty –  
an absence that fills the living room.  
couches and pillows dusted with calico hair –  
a pillow cover of its own, one that is woven with remnants of a  
lost love  
these feline friends leave with questions perhaps unanswered –  
their final visit marked.

silhouettes in circular mirrors, two anchored to the bedroom  
walls  
the stare of a numb, yet indifferent guise,  
with ears adorned but,  
by an incomplete pairing –  
with one hole naked, from the other hangs an earring; diamond-  
shaped, a mirror attached.

sun rays bounce off mirrored surfaces,  
the trials and tribulations of finding the lost earring permeate  
through a hole in the heart of the figure who has lost.  
this 'lost' earring is, perhaps  
buried under the rubble of dismantled shelves –

a clutter, uncleaned, with flying dust.  
the presence of safety once felt remains broken by bedroom  
corners.  
yet, to escape from these enclosures of painful memory is a  
change  
too difficult –  
there is an unexplained, strange comfort in this chaos.

the kitchen walls show framed illustrations of food –  
always cooked with love and care.  
the lit stove fires remember and remind –  
the souls of happiness that put together recipes of  
warmth and delight.  
the cabinets converse with fridge  
magnets.  
tired of unfinished meals delivered,  
they remain witness to the gradual  
deterioration of pans and pots–  
once carrying purpose, now en-  
gulfed in mahogany dust.



adjacent,  
floral-draped shower curtains con-  
ceal a waterlogged bathtub.  
drains clogged by falling hair,  
the water marbled.  
stagnant like the days,  
the water is symbolic of unpleasant-  
ries  
too weighty to let go of.  
this washroom,  
ivory-tiled and lavender-scented  
completes the house of loss.  
its pillars hold the weight of change  
of hurt, of isolation

this house of loss envelops all,  
in the heaviest of moments  
and the lightest  
it carries memories  
and feelings  
and souls  
embodied by mere tangibles –  
no more does this feel like a home,  
but a house that is collectively resided in –  
an emotion – universal– that brings together 'residents' of a  
feeling so disorienting  
a feeling which,  
placed under sheltering ceilings,  
still promises healing.

*In anthropology, the house is never just a shelter. It is memory made spatial, the domestic as archive where presence lingers. Time lives in objects, like the scent of unwashed fabric, in hair left on a pillow, or a missing earring. The house of loss moves through a house, room by room, tracing the material residue of grief and the way past and present coexist rather uncomfortably after a loss. It sits with the kind of inheritance that lingers, and is too painful to wash away, for grief to lift, for time to move, and for what remains to simply be.*

# On Commoning and Perambulation

by Sam Wilkins, BAsc Arts and Sciences

15th November 2025

Today, Knighton Woods is alight with orange and yellow leaves, raining down from the trees and carpeting the paths.

But, I see streaks of summer green still lingering, and tucked away buds on bushes and trees promise a regeneration in spring.

On the rhododendron bushes, the buds are teardrop-shaped, layers of dusty pink petals with milky green tips, and have a faint fuzz that blankets them.

They huddle like knots at the meeting of the bushes' long, waxy leaves; sleeping, they wait for the gentle kissing nudge of spring to wake them. I think back to the unrolling of the ferns and the flowering of snowdrops that came last springtime, and look forward to their eternal return.

Change commands the woods but does not neglect the former self.

Dear to my heart is the ancient Epping Forest, which I have had the luxury of growing up beside. There is an inexhaustible host of memories from my time there. I would run wild through the rambling paths of the forest, building dens out of fallen branches for other strollers to build upon, jumping in piles of fallen leaves. I remember muddy boots from muddy puddles, countless picnics, countless daisy chains. Epping Forest is a sacred site of memory for all those who live around it; draped along the northeastern border of London, it is hard to believe that, mere miles away, London's concrete and urban mania hums. Further along the Woodford New Road lives my mother, in a small town in Essex called Buckhurst Hill. It isn't far from where I grew up, and the woodland there is familiar and precious to me. To my family, the woods are ritual: they are where my mother walks the dog daily, where we walk on Christmas Days, on Birthdays, on Sundays. The area of woodland by my mother, cut off from the rest of Epping Forest, is named the Lord's Bushes and Knighton Woods, a stretch of woodland, pastureland, and bushland that I frequently get lost in, with its many sunny paths and shaded corridors.

Monkham's Lane, a historical bridleway, acts as a boundary line between the Lord's Bushes and Knighton Woods. Another north-to-south path cuts through the bushland, about a kilometre east of Monkham's Lane. These wooded avenues and their bifurcations burst forth sporadically, zig-zagging across the span of the woods, looping back upon themselves, leading you down one way and then curving back through one another. A direct route is not possible, and it would be infuriating to try. The paths of the woods are rambling and entangled; yet, there is a system to it that is almost arterial.

This wood is known for its collection of ancient oaks and hornbeams, the most conspicuous being the Pulpit Oak. Situated at the top of Monkham's Lane, it announces the wood and its rich history: it is estimated to be over 400 years old, and has a trunk that exceeds 4.5 metres in girth. Because of the cavernous hollow of the tree, it was the site of sermons; preachers would stand in the hollow and preach to crowds, hence its name. Its splendour is somewhat diminished nowadays; the gnarly and coarse trunk dwindles and does not climb very high, tapering off eventually into nothing.

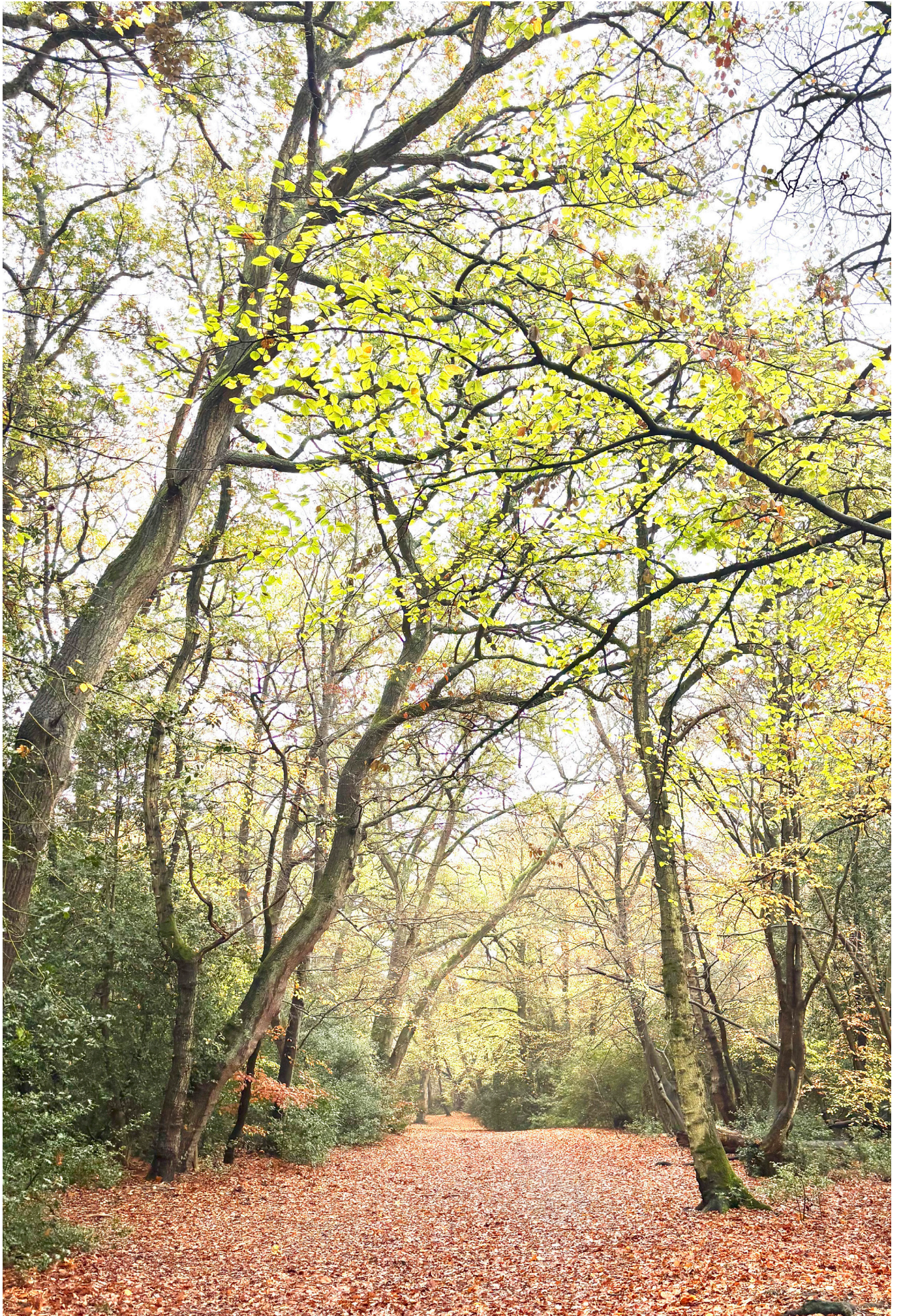
I spent a season at the end of last year working in Knighton Woods with the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers, a group of common people working to sustain the complex and

singular habitat of the forest; common people, serving the common land for the good of the public. Many regeneration projects since the early 2000s have identified this area of the woods as a target for regeneration, as an influx of new growth has encroached upon older veteran trees.

The City of London have woven public trails into the woodland, which stroll through both the Lord's Bushes and Knighton Wood. They help to interconnect small glades and plains in the woods that would otherwise be inaccessible to the public. This is helping to nurture the growth of older and more fragile plants and species, which have been withering under the shade of young trees and more precocious scrub. I worked with the conservation team to cut back holly and other dominating species, in order to make way for a rare heather that had been ushered away into the retreated nooks of the forest floor. After an afternoon spent lopping adolescent oaks and battling with domineering and cruelly spiked holly trees, I unearthed my reward: soft and bristly heather, deft and shy in its dusty colouring. Despite my satisfaction at warding off the so-called invaders of the woodland, I was left sweaty and curious and wondering: what wildlife deserves a place in the woodland?

After all, this intervention of the conservationists is egoistical to an extent: what right do they have to decide what oak tree stays and what holly bush goes? Ought not nature take its own course?

A fire following a drought several centuries ago devastated many of the trees in the bushland. Remarkably – and quite literally – from the ashes came nutrients that stirred dormant seeds of sedge and rush, which promptly erupted from the new, almost volcanic mud. A new ecosystem emerging from destruction, mechanised by the biology of the woods and motored by the elements. So, who holds the right to take a chainsaw to an oak, deemed invasive, situated in a wood that is so temporary and moving? How do you pin it down? The Conservation Volunteers certainly go to lengths to follow nature's path, allowing their projects for regeneration to be informed by the wood's natural progression over time. Its constitution has been pruned, cutting away decaying and diseased limbs and nurturing back new, healthier growth, fresher but nonetheless informed by what was there before. I find it cathartic to walk through and identify the old and the new, the natural and the fashioned.



One of the most notable assets of the woodland is the marvellous and enormous rhododendron bushes that promenade down the length of Monkham's lane. These bushes, standing well over two metres high and stretching down the path three to five metres apiece, bear, in the springtime, the most fixating and delicious purple flowers, and for the spring to early summer period, not much else can be noticed for the hypnotism of their resplendent grandeur. The striking, bright purple inflorescences completely cover the plants, and though not all rhododendron ponticum are scented, it is not uncommon to enjoy a gentle, spiced fragrance hanging intoxicatingly in the air, smelling like something between camphor and honeysuckle.

The rhododendrons hold an elevated status as icons of Epping Forest, having been regarded as jewels of the woods for a long time. I discovered an old issue of *The Woodford Times*, from 1904, in which they remark on how, "this delightful wood has been open to the public, and many have availed themselves of the opportunity of inspecting the magnificent rhododendrons which are to be seen here in great profusion and variety". The establishing of the rhododendron as a plant of the Lord's Bushes and Knighton Woods calls back into question who has the right to a sense of belonging in the woods. Rhododendrons are native to Eastern Asian and Himalayan regions; these exotic, foreign jewels were likely introduced into the woods sometime after it was disafforested. They are an invasive species, and likely suffocated other native plants as they encroached upon Monkham's lane; the sedge and rush shirk back into reclusion from view, and it is hard to see other plants behind the rhododendrons, as they can grow anywhere from one to four metres deep. Edward North Buxton, in his travelogue of Epping Forest, remarks, "[The rhododendrons] have appeared to find a congenial home, and, though I am opposed on principle to the introduction of exotics, these have established their right to the soil." Beauty and prowess have granted these arresting plants permanent residency, and I certainly believe them to be part of the woods of my memories. Who decides whether all plants must be native to be authentic? Who decides, equally, to pare back the holly, the sedge, the heather, to make way for exotica?

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When I need to disengage myself from the efficiency of London, to perambulate and be led along by the woods, I can count on these woods to smooth my mind's rigidity, slow down my clock and deepen my breathing. This feeling of disrobing from my mind's urban apparel is not new, nor original, but in fact a privilege permitted me by campaigners and conservation groups in the late 1800s. They championed for commoners' rights legislation in an attempt to parry off the ever-proliferating grey of a newly industrialising London. The Epping Forest Mass Trespass of July 1871 saw thousands of protesting activists de-fence the enclosed areas of Epping Forest that had been cordoned off from the public and left for the indulgence of the wealthy. Defended by the City of London Corporation, these commoners wielded their right to intercommoning, and the trespass accelerated activist action against the privatisation of London's green spaces. They rallied at the Pulpit Oak, repurposing the preacher's pulpit as a stage for political activism. When I come back to my mother's, I stop at the old tree to reflect. I listen out for the cries of the preachers and the shouts of the common people. It is because of the members of those conservation groups 150 years ago that I might amble and perambulate amongst the fine familiar oaks.

Even whilst I perambulate, I think of the word's historical meaning. Perambulation originally referred to the act of officials marking out the boundaries of a woodland. Now that perambulation is used to describe my aimless wandering around the woods, I think to what degree ownership is entitled to those afforded the pleasure of making their way to and fro through the woodland's bordered geography. There is no fence to stop my venturing into the denser folds of shrub and tree, but nonetheless the now-public paths demarcate a fixed pattern that echoes the old foregone perimeter of the Knighton Estate.

The boundary lines of the wider Epping Forest and its constituent parts have had a trepidatious history of privatisation, enclosure and disafforestation. Epping Forest was, for many years, the hunting grounds of the royal family. Populations of deer were introduced, and paths were cleared out of the dense and diverse woodlands, shrublands and pastures of the forest to make way for the Royals' playground. Then, sold off to the wealthy, the forest was further divided into private gardens and farmland. This inevitably siloed the forest from loppers, tradespeople and farmers without land that needed the forest to allow their cattle to graze – the common people. By the end of the 19th Century, Epping Forest had become a crucial site in the history of the right of common. The Metropolitan Commons Act of 1878, enabled by the efforts of common people and radical landowners alike, saw the prevention of any further public land in and around London being made saleable and therefore enclosed from the public, and pushed back against the building upon green land to support the rapid expansion of London.

Edward North Buxton bought the Knighton Estate in 1836, which he in time donated to the common people. Buxton campaigned for the rights of common people to roam in what he considered public land. He and his brother were founding members of the Commons Preservation Society, a group that campaigned and fought for the eventual passing of the 1878 Act. Buxton was also appointed Verderer of Epping Forest, a role that granted him the privilege of protecting Epping Forest with the interest of the people in mind. His writings on walking trails in Epping Forest strike a deep resonance within me, and I see his observations echoed in my own diary. It builds on this incredibly spiritual and atmospheric feeling of history that runs through me as I walk the woodland, and I can feel his spirit within me as I observe the old spear beeches that he used to walk past.

Land is for all who will engage with it, who hold it as a site of memory or ritual. Epping Forest is enmeshed with the history of those who shaped it. The rhododendrons and the manmade pond in the Lord's Bushes and Knighton Woods remind us that the landscape has been fashioned, but the heather reminds us that nature endures. The Pulpit Oak stands as a beacon of common people, a threshold upon which we must look back and see the moments from the past that give us our freedom to roam. Looking back over time, in my diary, in photographs, I see how closely my memory is mapped onto the geography of Epping Forest, how my catharsis relies on therapeutic walking through land remembered, touching and reconnecting with flora and fauna that is ever-changing and yet immovable. No one owns the land, but all belong to it.

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# Thoughts from the Field: On Becoming an Ecologist (an

by Dr. Gabriella Santini, PhD Anthropology

“Interdisciplinary research is the key to addressing global challenges,” they say. So why did I feel like I was swimming against the current on my own interdisciplinary research journey?

I am a PhD anthropology student working at the intersection of biodiversity conservation and animal behaviour. My doctoral research examines how human-nonhuman interactions are shifting due to wildlife conservation initiatives, employing tools from both anthropology and ethology. Consequently, I've found myself working extensively with ecologists and biologists, both during fieldwork and within higher education spaces, such as conferences and workshops. Initially, I did not anticipate that it would be difficult, given anthropology's inherently interdisciplinary nature. After all, our discipline blends methods and theories from the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Furthermore, anthropologists champion 'knowledge co-production', purportedly fostering openness and adaptability when venturing beyond their comfort zone. As such, the discipline has many geographers, biologists and natural scientists-turned-anthropologists.

Yet I'm consistently struck by my encounters with colleagues on the science side. Given that conservation has, for some time, been integrating social sciences into its framework, I was surprised to discover that we often seem not only to speak different languages but also to perceive the world through fundamentally distinct lenses. But this is not the issue, really. I appreciate that interdisciplinary research, as Daniel et al. (2022, 2) articulate, entails integrating “research methods, knowledge, assumptions, and frameworks from separate disciplines to address a shared research question.” Inevitably, there will be some communication issues that hinder



collaboration, and we try to work past that.

What I mostly took issue with are the hierarchies of knowledge that still seem to permeate various academic disciplines – something also noted by Elixhauser et al. (2024). I often felt like my findings were considered 'less valid' than measurable, quantifiable data that can be neatly displayed on a graph.

I was at a conservation conference in April 2025 attended by students from various fields across the globe, yet conservation social scientists were few and far between. I was the only anthropologist. The feedback I received from the conference judges on my presented project was: “Results feel a little qualitative/anecdotal.”

Reading those words, I was incensed. Despite the conference organisers' professed openness to conservation social scientists, this comment felt remarkably tone-deaf. It displayed a profound insensitivity to the methods, evidence, and dissemination strategies central to the very scholars they claimed to welcome. I mean, social scientists produce exactly that: qualitative data. Not to mention that, as an anthropology student, I spent considerably more time in the field than most other students

at the conference, learned two local languages, and forewent the comfort of a conservation base camp.

What's particularly frustrating is that this isn't an isolated incident. Throughout my four-year journey straddling social and natural sciences, I've encountered variations of these kinds of comments repeatedly: “Oh, you're what? An anthropologist?” “Your data probably won't be publishable in a 'real' scientific journal.” “You aren't getting enough data points for your work to be meaningful.” And the list goes on.

This often fuelled self-doubt, making me question my ability to conduct my research correctly. I wondered whether conservationists took me seriously. Could they sense my lack of confidence? Would the fact that I am not a 'real scientist' bar me from accessing certain spaces, perhaps even my own field site? I am even afraid to commit these thoughts to paper, worried that the colleagues I made on the science side might read this and discredit my work.

Indeed, academia seems to be moving beyond disciplinary silos, with growing enthusiasm for projects that break out of traditional boxes. In fact, aspirations to increase interdisciplinarity feature prominently in UCL's Strategic Plan

## and Feeling Like an Imposter)

2022– 27. Yet, as an anthropologist who ventured into conservation biology, I can't help but feel that this excitement is often more lip service than reality. Crossing disciplinary boundaries sounds great in theory, but in practice, it can be fraught with practical, ontological and epistemological challenges.

First, there are the awkward moments when you try to explain your project. Each time I attempted to articulate my work, I was met with puzzled looks – anthropologists questioning my methods and conservationists doubting my expertise. This made doing the PhD an even more isolating experience.

Second – and closely tied to the first point – is the struggle to secure funding. Interdisciplinary projects often fall between the cracks of established funding categories (Bromham et al. 2016; Daniel et al. 2022). Funders seem wary of proposals that don't fit neatly into a single discipline, making it harder for researchers like me to access resources for innovative work. As a result, the relentless pursuit of funding can hamstring interdisciplinary researchers like myself, diverting time and energy away from actual research and inevitably impacting the quality and quantity of our scholarly contributions.

Third, there are loads of academic barriers, including the timeframe given to complete your project. Interdisciplinary projects take more time: "Time is needed to find interested collaborators, generate a shared language and goal, and read unfamiliar literature" (Daniel et al. 2022, 3). I still had to undertake a year of ethnographic fieldwork on top of the four months of ethological fieldwork with lions I had to conduct. Because of the lack of funding and time, I was under extreme pressure in my field site and struggled with my mental health. Not to mention the difficulty of finding outlets for publication: journals tend to be discipline-specific, which leads to fewer citations for interdisciplinary work (ibid.). Once we do get published, we are expected to be familiar with and adapt to different writing styles and evidence standards.

Finally, there's the imposter syndrome. It's that persistent voice inside your head that undermines you as you're struggling with the practical realities of points one, two, and three. I had constant doubts about my capability to do things right. As Borden et al. (2011)

note, what constitutes 'knowledge' and 'evidence' is a cultural construct determined by discipline; each field has developed its own standards for what constitutes high-quality work. I feared I'd give myself away if I didn't meet those standards or know how to speak their jargon.

In the end, I made it work. I completed my fieldwork, though much later than my colleagues, and have submitted and defended my thesis on time. I am proud of the network I've built for myself, and the project that emerged from



collaborations with Maasai communities and conservation practitioners. However, feeling like I was constantly fighting time and funding, I haven't been able to participate in as many conferences, seminars and workshops as my peers. I truly believe that undertaking an interdisciplinary project has set me back professionally, rather than bolstering my career, though only time will tell.

If the very institutions (e.g., universities, funders, workshop and conference convenors) that champion interdisciplinary collaboration simultaneously perpetuate disciplinary silos, what future awaits anthropologists who dare to explore other disciplines, theories, and methodologies? And what about researchers from outside anthropology who wish to adopt our ways of thinking without feeling like they're, in the words of Chua et al. (2020), 'co-opting' social sciences? Interdisciplinary research needs more than just enthusiastic rhetoric. It requires structural support. Funding bodies must recognise the value of boundary-crossing work and offer targeted grants for interdisciplinary

projects at every level, whereby reviewers must actually be open to creativity and unorthodoxy as opposed to applying the standards of their own discipline (Daniel et al. 2022). Moreover, academic institutions should give researchers undertaking unconventional or interdisciplinary work more time to complete their projects, including getting published and attending conferences. They should also foster environments where researchers feel encouraged, not alienated, to step outside their comfort zones.

For me, becoming an anthropologist-turned-ecologist was not just about learning new methods. It was about embracing uncertainty and finding ways to connect across epistemological divides. It was messy and uncomfortable at times, but it also opened doors to collaborations that enriched my perspective on conservation, science and anthropology. Most importantly, my project resonated with the Maasai communities I worked alongside, because it was designed with them in the end. And to me, that's the partnership that matters the most.

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# Poems on Ageing Well

By Lara Scott–Rule, BSc Anthropology w/ Year Abroad

I've always said, if you didn't look in the mirror, you don't feel any different.  
It's just, you look at yourself and you think, who are you? Where did you come from? You're my mum.  
I now have daughters that are 51 and 50.  
I've got grandchildren, I don't think they particularly view me as old.  
sometimes you think, why am I tired? Then I think, you're 76.  
I think I can remember thinking people like 50 were old.  
I'd like to slow it.

I mean my dad died when he was 69.  
My mum was 85.  
I suppose they seemed old; sort of old in their –  
in some of their – ways,  
The way they dressed, the way they thought.  
I mean even now, you look at some older people, and you think,  
“When did you get to the age when you thought you had to wear, like, old lady shoes?”  
I still wear my jeans and my jumpers.  
I never saw my mum in a pair of jeans, ever.

I find walking difficult, but I've always loved swimming,  
I swim practically every day,  
I didn't ever have swimming lessons or anything like that.  
I used to go to the beach as a child, and my dad taught us all to swim in the sea.  
I've always just loved that; I couldn't do other things.  
I like it because of the exercise, but there's also the social side of it.  
I do crosswords, a bit of reading.  
I think it's just trying to keep yourself as fit and healthy as you can really.

I do look online, I've got my iPad,  
I can't say I've got a great deal of dissatisfaction; the only thing is I think I haven't a clue who my doctor is.  
I don't like social media,  
I'm not on Facebook,  
I've never been on Facebook.  
I worry for my grandchildren.  
I do worry.

I suppose I feel oldest if I'm feeling under the weather.  
I don't very often feel old, to be honest, at the moment.  
As I say, it's only when I look in the mirror sometimes,  
I think, oh, my mum's looking back at me.  
Youngest, when I'm having a really good laugh and a chat with my grandchildren.

–Penelope, 76, leisure centre in Hampshire



*These I-poems are taken from my dissertation on the concept of 'ageing well'. Created from interview transcripts, I-poems are formed by selecting participants' uses of 'I' and arranging them into poems (Gilligan et al., 2003). My research compared experiences of ageing in a suburban town in Hampshire and a coastal village in Cornwall. 'Ageing well' was a deeply relational and embodied process for the thematic analysis and presentation of data*



I swim here  
I swim all over.  
I've always swum.  
I think it's a combined love of being in the sea.  
I lived here nearly 50 years, and I've always swum in the sea.  
I'm 72; I was brought up in southeast London; I moved down here when I was  
25.

I don't think you're going to have anything more magical.  
You'd swim out and look at everybody's windows and everything;  
You can't do anything when you're swimming in the sea, except be swimming in  
the sea.

I think the saddest change is for farmers.  
On Women's Hour, do you ever hear about farming?  
I think that's the thing, is that communities are not represented really.  
I know it's very easy to centre on cities,  
but I think that people just get on with it here.

I've got three sons, three daughters— in— law,  
grandchildren.  
But it's being independent, and it's them seeing you  
independent.  
I think as a woman... I shouldn't say that.  
I think it's very easy to start relying on people.  
I'm adopted,  
I think in the adoption, because my mother wanted  
specifically to have a girl,  
I think I got stuck in a position of what's expected of  
me.

If you live in a city, your horizon's there.  
But if you live by the sea, your horizon's there.  
It's a different horizon.  
And it's a distance, and it's...just incredible to sit  
out, and to see.

—Francesca, 72, community café in Cornwall



# Temporality and Transgender Love: An Autoethnographic Account

by Martha Hancock, BSc Anthropology Alumna

Content Warning: mention of death

*“Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality...  
that can be distilled from the past and used  
to imagine a future.  
The future is queerness’s domain.”*

José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 2009

**M**y fiancée is a transgender woman, and I am a cisgender woman. This essay is a short reflection on how our love has temporarily impacted us. How it has taken form in feelings of hope, despair, rage, and most of all, motion sickness. It hopefully provides a window into how loving someone can change your whole temporal outlook, how time is not only an ethnographic concept but a felt dimension of our lives. It is personal and raw; a cathartic ramble of things I have felt while reading queer theory and ethnography over the entirety of my education. But it is not a deeply academic treatise, nor does it try to be. This article presents my experience, and my experience alone, as a white cis-gender educated woman, who, despite the death which stalks our community, can insulate myself in safety (*‘The Shocking Rise of Deaths among Young Trans People’* 2024).

I have begun to think deeply about how our love unseats us in time. It thrusts us backwards and forwards, unable to find footing in the now. If queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (2009) wishes us to gaze at the queer horizon, we cannot see it due to motion sickness; when the person you love is threatened with the deep power of necropolitics (Mbembe 2019), when the state slowly kills their siblings. It is hard to do ethnography there when you see people you love hurting, dying. You are too busy locked in a state of fear. Time becomes a visceral space instead of a passive ethnographic category.

As a queer person, especially those deeply embedded within the trans community, one is constantly having to prove their history: ‘queer has always been here’ is a common refrain. One mourns those who they have lost, even those they did not know. Killed by bigots and waitlists alike (*‘All-Cause and Cause-Specific Mortality by Sexual Orientation, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics’* 2026). While their history burns (Hartemann 2021), one must live it and try to keep it alive as hard as they can.

One, however, must stay with the trouble, the fight, and the fight is here and now.

One must attend to their body, which the world abhors, queer and different, they have failed the test (Halberstam 2011). Their body stays with them in the phenomenology of the moment as they touch their lover, which the world cannot love.

They caress her face, and for a moment, they are locked in time.

Yet they also feel the weight of their love, the history of their people, and those who lived and died away from their lovers, in silence.

Yet one longs for the future, a different self, more able to ‘pass’, where they can be accepted as a ‘cis passing’ couple and avoid the death which stalks them.

This is not the dream, but it is survival. One fears the future when they go out alone. *What if the death which stalks trans women finds her? How will you survive the world without her?*

This anxiety is not helpful, but it is also realistic.

The future is not only a promise, but it is a threat.

Sometimes, just sometimes, something else gleams in the corner of your eye. This is the queer horizon Muñoz (2009) describes – the ‘warm illumination’ like a mirage appearing to a thirsty man in the desert. This futurity hurts, “hope is on intimate terms with despair” (Mattingly 2010, 16). It shows us what we cannot have in the here and now. However, it also gives us something to move towards. I would still very much like to feel the warmth on my skin, and on the best days, surrounded by my queer friends, it is all I feel. The horizon, while hard to see, is a real place we can try to move towards. For this reason, I cannot give in to despair.

I often think of Jo Cook’s call to joy (2025) and its ability to anthropologically attune us to the affect of the moment. Perhaps this is a solution.

Yet then I think about Susan Stryker’s (1994, 248) *Words to Victor Frankenstein*:

**“Rage  
throws me back at last  
into this mundane reality  
in this transfigured flesh  
that aligns me with the power of my  
Being.”**

To avoid despair, I often feel anger, as I cannot yet feel joy. Stryker taught me that. This attunes me to the fight. So perhaps the answer is not hope or despair to combat feelings of motion sickness, but instead the clarity of rage. The green-eyed monster can be a tool, as I jealously rage against hetero and cis normativity and their ease of time. The embodied experience of feeling righteous indignation. Perhaps, we all need to find the most helpful feeling which pushes us forward, but hope and rage animate the most clarity I feel surrounding our temporal haze.

Ethnography expects us to be neutral observers locked into an arbitrary location (Candea 2007). This feels oppositional to the rage and temporal uncertainty of queer life. It expects us to become co-temporal with interlocutors, entering their ontological worlds with the radical promise of understanding.

You must move to the rhythms of the field site. What do you do then, when your life does not let you stand still? When your temporality is shunted back and forth like a boat in a storm, how do you stay in the same location? When time feels short, running away from you, how do you spend a moment, let alone a year? The questions I ask myself are not ethnographic; they are questions of survival. This makes asking the questions of the site and interlocutors all the more difficult. Yet this does not mean we should not try.

If I must leave you with a message from my ramble, it is this. Temporality is not ethnographic alone; it is alive within oneself. One cannot hide from time – a cheesy adage, but a truthful one. It is violent and kind all at once. When someone you love is unseated in time, you often go with them. One cannot choose, even as an anthropologist who should be able to attune to the site.

Thus, to return to my clunky music metaphor: ethnographers, instead of ignoring one song or the other, perhaps we could listen to both and see if the melodies match.

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# Meet the Team

# ANTHROPOLITAN

2025 - 2026  
Student Editorial Committee



**Abira Pathak**  
*Anthropolitian Print Editor*

Abira is an MSc student in Anthropology and Professional Practice. She sees print's materiality as space for anthropological ideas to linger – intimate, deliberate, and archived in the unhurried.



**Ewan Martin-Kane**  
*Anthropolitian Blog Editor*

Ewan is an MSc student of Social and Cultural Anthropology. It's his job to give your anth-brain a space to take off its shoes, uncork its spirits, and find company to speak with. Mail him!



**Shruti Muruganandan**  
*Communications and Social Media*

Shruti is an MSc student in Digital Anthropology. With faith, trust and a little bit of pixie dust, she hopes to elevate the diverse voices of Anthropolitian both in the department and beyond.



**Gabriella Santini**  
*The Creative Collective Editor*

Gabriella recently completed her PhD in Anthropology at UCL. She co-founded The Creative Collective in 2023 out of a commitment to showcase the unconventional and experimental work of anthropology students.



**Janine Patricia Santos**  
*Anthropolitian Staff Editor*

Janine is a Lecturer in Material Culture and Digital Anthropology. As a migrant artist, she finds solace in music, writing & artistic expressions, and translates that passion into supporting the Student Editorial Committee.

Cover photos 'La Double Absence' by Vanisha Patel, MRes Anthropology

La Double Absence: the disconnection migrants feel to both where they migrated from and where they migrated to. Neither here, nor there. Suspended. There is now an imaginary, stuck in time at the moment of departure. And here, is inaccessible, just out of reach, a different kind of imaginary, elusive. Resting somewhere between nostalgia and hope, time moving through me, I don't know if I can keep up.

