Chapter 5

Walking

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Image 5.1: Community chessboard and park.

Public space as an invitation to dwell and to meet others: a community-created park with benches, a bulletin board, a free library, and giant pieces for playing chess and checkers, Vancouver, Canada.

Credit: Cristina Moretti, 2016.

Read this chapter on the bus. Or on a park bench. Or while waiting for a street performer, a protest rally, or a festival to begin. What do you notice around you? Who is in this place with you, and why do you think they are there? Would you call this a "public space," and why? If you are sitting on a bench, your questions can even start from this ordinary, everyday piece of street furniture. Who is welcome to use it, and who is discouraged from lingering here? Is your bench divided into sections, to prevent people from sleeping on it at

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night? Giulio Iacchetti, an Italian designer, provocatively created a "day and night bench" which can be turned upside down at the end of the day to provide a shelter.[1] Iacchetti's multipurpose object is an indirect critique: If public space is supposed to belong to everyone, why are people not allowed to sleep and loiter in parks, and why are the homeless among the most marginalized, medicalized, and controlled city inhabitants (Lyon-Callo 2008)?

Another provocation comes in the form of "Pay and Sit," an installation by German photographer Fabian Brunsing.[2] A video of the installation shows a bench that works like a meter: its sharp retractable teeth lower into their grooves once a coin is inserted, but rise up again when the purchased time has elapsed, making it impossible to continue sitting. Brunsing imagines a possible future in which only the wealthy will be able to enjoy sitting in a park. What if this were the case now? Would you be sitting here or somewhere else? Brunsing focuses on a single element—the bench—but his critique refers to public space more broadly. How are plazas and parks increasingly geared toward the affluent? In which ways has public space already been seized, commodified, and privatized, as Low and Smith (2006) decry? And what are the consequences if public space is increasingly understood as a good available only to those who can afford it?

Although observing who uses, inhabits, and claims certain spaces helps illuminate social relations in both cities and rural environments, urban public spaces have received particular attention by contemporary scholars. For one, the density and heterogeneity of urban life renders plazas, streets, and parks into arenas of conflicts, negotiations, and actions toward social change. For the other, central urban plazas and streets are often invested with symbolic and representational power, thus embodying authority and allowing for its questioning by regular inhabitants. For these reasons, anthropologists have been interested in how public space can help foster political, cultural, and social engagement. Thinking along those lines, several individuals and groups have proposed benches that encourage interaction between strangers. For example, a swinging bench showcased by the organization Esterni[3] during its 2009 Public Design Festival in Milan, Italy, features a round base that accommodates up to six people. Its occupants face each other and can make the bench swing by coordinating the movement of their bodies, playfully suggesting that public space can and should encourage conversations and collaborations between city dwellers.

These diverse kinds of benches—and many more could be added—harness our imagination in order for us to question the social relations in the communities we live in. Similarly, in what follows, I encourage you to use public space as a location, a starting point, a question, and an idea—shared as well as contested—to imagine what our society could be like and to attend to other inhabitants' imaginative practices. These include the stories, movements, and performances through which residents relate to each other, create a sense of place, and engage with public space as a site of belonging, identity, difference, and/or conflict.

In this chapter, I suggest possible directions and questions for research, starting from the ordinary activity of walking as an ethnographic strategy. Leave the actual or metaphorical park bench where you have been sitting, and begin walking in your community. What will you notice and who will you meet? How are your routes, the way you move (see, for example, Truitt 2008), and your encounters shaped by your social position and identities? How does the very act of journeying help you claim a place in the larger society or in your community? How do you, through your itinerary, become part of the landscape, a strand in the spider web of bodies, sounds, and daily performances? As a way of inhabiting, researching, and representing everyday realities, walking is an imaginative practice. It helps us learn to see, imagine, and understand public spaces and other rural/suburban/urban locales from the particular perspectives and social positions of those we journey with. This means not just moving through existent spaces and realities but also following what different inhabitants imagine and remember (Irving 2010), what they miss and strive for (Schielke 2012), and the critical connections they draw between people, places, and stories.

I am using an expanded concept of public space in this chapter. I think of it as a rather unstable category, both an idea and a set of actual places that acquire meaning as people use, narrate, journey through, and comment on them. To say it simply, public space likely means something different to you than it does to other people. Do public schools and libraries count as public spaces? What about subways and buses? Are women's centers or alternative, politically active associations public spaces? Or perhaps public space is less a particular site than a momentary position, from which people, as critical agents, can comment on and attempt to change society? Instead of assuming that public space is a shared and easily defined category with obvious functions, it is much more productive to research the relations and practices through which people understand

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something as public space, and through which they actively create particular kinds of places and identities (Moretti 2015; see also Butler 2011). I understand public space as both an object of research and a dynamic, embodied site of inquiry, interaction, imagination, and engagement. Rather than assume that any meaning of public space is fixed, my research process takes unforeseen connections, detours, and interruptions as a source of insights. All of these can be opportunities for engaging with the imaginative practices involved in thinking about, constructing, using, and inhabiting the communities we live in.

In suggesting these paths for research, I take inspiration from urban anthropologists' work, as well as from the ideas of ethnographers who have studied walking as a research strategy, a practice of learning, and a way of being in place. Urban scholars' interest in public space emerges in large part from a concern that contemporary cities are becoming more unequal and fragmented. They ask, Could accessible, lively, and welcoming public spaces help create communities that are more just and conducive to an active and critical participatory democracy? How, on the contrary, are everyday engagements with public space part of processes of marginalization and discrimination?

To this end, inhabitants, activists, and scholars have been interested in both the idea and everyday lives of urban public spaces. Plazas, streets, and parks can be used for a variety of purposes by many different "publics"; this flexibility emphasizes "ideals of openness and accessibility both in the city space and in the polity" (Caldeira 2000, 298). The notion of public space as open and accessible to everyone, irrespective of gender, race, class, citizenship, age, sexuality, ability, and more, is an important mobilizing idea for groups and individuals seeking to gain recognition (Mitchell 1995). Public spaces, as material and symbolic locations, allow groups to be seen and to claim a place in society, and potentially, to trouble existing ideas and relations. The Occupy movement in various cities (see, for example, Juris and Razsa 2011), and the 2011 events in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, are good examples of how public space can create visibility for a group or an idea. If you have ever participated in a demonstration, you can probably relate to this aspect firsthand.

While all of this speaks to the positive, even ideal, roles of public spaces, anthropologists are concerned with how urban streets, plazas, and parks can also be sites of discrimination, exclusion, and control. Lower-income residents, Indigenous people, visible minority inhabitants, and immigrants are among those who are often stopped by police or prevented in subtle and not-so-subtle ways from using and congregating in public spaces (Holston and Appadurai 1999). They are often seen as belonging to other areas of the city (Razack 2000), as threatening the decor or historical identity of a neighborhood (Dines 2002), or as presenting a danger to public security. Gender and sexuality are other important axes of exclusion in contemporary cities (Guano 2007; Pratt 1988). Because of these complex problems and possibilities, doing research on and in public space can be a productive way to examine inequality and shifting social relations and to trace how individuals and groups resist oppression, propose new ideas, and negotiate their roles in their communities. While urban anthropologists have focused such questions on the cityscape, we can ask similar questions of the public spaces located in rural contexts, whether they are national parks or children's playgrounds.

Studying public space is also interesting because it opens wider questions on how to examine performative engagements in social space (Fikes 2009; Guano 2002). Appearing and circulating in public spaces entails negotiating one's identity and place in the world. As an embodied, social, and imaginary practice, walking can be a way of telling, commenting on, performing, and creating both stories and places. This requires us to pay attention to imagination as it helps generate understandings, connections, and questions. To make matters more complicated, Vigh reminds us that when people move, they often do so in a space that is itself constantly shifting (see also Archambault 2013). Walking is then more akin to "navigating": "moving within a moving environment" that is "always emergent and unfolding" (Vigh 2009, 424, 425). Walking in public spaces thus involves multiple dimensions; it means engaging with the social space as it is, as it might be, and as it could be. Using Vigh's words, we need to be "constantly attuned both to the way we move in the here and now as well as to the way we move in relation to social goals and prospective positions. In this manner, navigation is, importantly, related to movement through both the socially *immediate* and the socially *imagined*. It designates the complex of actions and interpretations that enable one to act in the here and now, gain an idea of the possible routes and courses that emerge from the present and direct one's movement expediently toward possible futures" (Vigh 2009, 425–26).

While in this chapter I focus on walking in and researching cities, the ideas and methods suggested can be

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useful in rural or remote contexts as well. Tuck-Po (2008), for example, emphasizes the links between stories and walking itineraries in the forests of Malaysia. Moving with Batek hunter-gatherers enables Tuck-Po to reflect on the ethnographer's position and on walking as a way of negotiating social connections. Walking is also a way to connect the past and the present to validate and re-establish relations to ancestors or past events (Walsh 2012; Legat 2008; Lund 2008; Basso 1996). In any setting—a remote forest, deserted seashore, suburban cul-de-sac, or metropolitan streetscape—walking with others can help us appreciate people's senses of place while urging us to reflect on the social relations that shape them.

Walking Itineraries

During my fieldwork in Milan, Italy, I decided that I would start learning about the role of public space by asking different inhabitants to guide me, on foot, through their city. I chose this method because I wanted a research practice that was open-ended enough for me to follow my guides' ideas, memories, and explanatory frameworks and that took into consideration people's embodied, sensual participation in city life (see also Pink 2008). Walking meant following the perfume of freshly baked bread and roasting chestnuts, responding to bitterly cold mornings with childhood memories of icicles, and entering shops to leaf through old books. As de Certeau (1984) described, moreover, the improvisational character of walking helps us attend to people's itineraries as a lived relationship with a city, a connection that continually changes.

Following people's itineraries as a research method has received increasing attention in the past few years (see, for example, Irving 2010; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Pink 2008; and Guano 2003). Walking tours are particularly interesting for the ethnographer because they do much more than reveal a series of places, memories, and relations that are simply and already "there." They open a performative space: a time and place for inhabitants to take on, bend, and respond to the many histories, questions, and meanings that might be associated to particular locales. When I started my fieldwork in Milan, for example, I assumed that the most important insight I could gain through this methodology would be which public spaces my interlocutors valued and used. Without realizing it, I expected that my guides would point me to existing plazas, streets, or buildings, and "explain" them to me. Soon, however, I found myself bewildered and inspired by their responses. For one, several interlocutors situated themselves along discordant borders between cultures, times, or social realities. They showed me both how they belonged to the city (e.g., by claiming that they knew intimately the history of a particular place) and, at the same time, how they felt they were treading its margins (e.g., by criticizing recent changes or by struggling to find places, people, and stories that spoke to their experience). Many of my guides also talked about what was not there, speaking instead about what they imagined, remembered, suspected, or wished were there. An example of this was the water: Milan does not have a lake, coast, or significant river, and many of its Navigli canals were covered by streets in the 1930s. The missing water, surprisingly, became part of many discussions on Milan's public spaces. Some respondents wondered what Milan would be like if it had a beach. One middle-aged woman talked about the possibility of water rising and submerging parts of the city—not just because there have been a few instances of the rising water table affecting the subway and underground garages, but more importantly as a powerful metaphor of how Milan's industrial past may come to haunt the post-industrial city.

These complicated responses were about much more than public space, spurring me to follow the intricate connections and disconnections that my interlocutors saw operating in their city. They were also political: the people I met talked about public space to criticize inequality, neoliberalism, the marginalization of immigrants, and the difficulty of obtaining affordable housing (Moretti 2015). The guided walks were both thematic and experiential, as public space was not only something that we could talk about but also something we could experience together: an embodied, shared, and collaboratively constructed reality where our journey took place. As such, the walks directed my attention not just to the object but also to the process of research. How did my guides and I construct an itinerary together? What kind of audience was I for them, and how did this shape our conversations? What did I learn from their ways of understanding, interpreting, and representing the spaces they inhabit, and how would this shape my ethnographic practices? What kind of knowledge were we creating together, and for which purpose?

If you intend to use guided walking tours in your research, the following are some suggestions to get you started.

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Think of Guided Walks as a Shared Performative Practice

Walking, as Liisa Malkki (2007, 178) says about ethnography, is “a way of being in the world.” When we go for a walk, our directions, journeys, and encounters are shaped by what we can do and who we can be on those streets (Pratt 1988). In turn, being and moving through space helps us construct our identities for ourselves and for others, and to claim, literally and metaphorically, a space in the world. As Maggie O’Neill and Phil Hubbard (2010, 56) point out, “walking is itself never simply about traversing a route from one place to another: the journey itself is performative, an act of place-making and an active engagement with the environment.” During ethnographic walks, you and your guide will not only visit certain landmarks together; you will perform certain itineraries, modes of listening and seeing, as well as ways of relating to each other and to the spaces around you. This, moreover, will take place in a wider context, where complex performative negotiations are often central to processes of exclusion and belonging (Goldstein 2010; Partridge 2008; Fikes 2009; Fleetwood 2004). You may want to ask, How do my guides and I enact being an inhabitant of this space at this time and place? Which practices might inform this walk? What knowledge of the city are my guides showing and/or relying upon, and how is this constituted? How does this speak to other ways of being and moving in the city? What else could my guides show me, and why were these paths chosen?

For all my interlocutors, guiding me through the city involved acting as a knowledgeable inhabitant, yet it differed greatly in how this knowledge and their linkages to the city were defined, how they were expressed, and how they shaped our walk and our movements through the streets. Whereas one of my guides directed my gaze to particular landmarks and showed her familiarity with Milan through her way of seeing and apprehending the landscape, others led me through the city as if it were a maze, urging me to notice the underlying connections between people, spaces, and stories. An elderly Italian-born woman met me in the center of town because this is where she worked when she was younger, and she introduced me a store that was an important resource for seamstresses of her generation, thus showing her connection to practices and identities that are now largely displaced by the current fashion industry. Another one of my guides brought me to a historical palace to explain how it belonged to her family in the past and thus to trace her linkages to some of the oldest Milanese families.

For some of my interlocutors who had recently migrated to Milan from other countries, acting as a knowledgeable guide was a way to show that they belonged to the city. Two migrant women who worked as nannies and caretakers, for example, brought me to see some of Milan’s art to affirm that they did actively participate in the cultural and social life of the city, even if many Italian-born inhabitants refuted that claim. For all of these guides, what they could tell me about Milan was a way of showing me what kinds of inhabitants they were and how they positioned themselves within a community. Their stories, moreover, were not just a commentary; they were moving, situational, social engagements with place.

Because you and your interlocutors will create a dynamic, embodied, and, at least to a certain extent, improvisational itinerary together, it is crucial that you think carefully about how you will negotiate your roles, the purpose of the project, and its end results. Who will you ask to lead you? Why and how will they want to be involved? How will ethics, accountability, and responsibility inform your journeys? You might want to consider, for example, using Dara Culhane’s three-part consent process, in which research participants agree to be involved in a project one phase at a time, and decide during the research process rather than beforehand what the product of their meetings will look like (for a full description of this method, see Culhane 2011).[4]

Another thing to consider when planning your walking tours is how you will record your itinerary (the routes, commentaries, movements through the city, and engagements with people and places that your guides will lead you through) and how this will affect your journey (see Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier’s chapter, “Recording and Editing,” in this volume). An interesting difference among the city walks was my guides’ involvement in photographing the tour. Some of them took a very active role, instructing me where and how to take pictures and video recordings of the places they were showing me. This affirmed their role as teachers and mine as learner or apprentice. Other guides, however, took pictures or videos themselves, because they wanted to document their city. Following their practices with my camera—and noticing what they photographed or recorded, how, and why—helped me to see the city through their eyes. Lastly, another guide

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was pleased that I had a camera with me and could take photographs of the city for her to send to her family and friends. These were not just different ways of documenting an itinerary; they reflected and shaped the different meanings that my interlocutors gave to the walks and the reasons they decided to guide me.

But you can also record your walks by focusing on sounds. Andrew Irving focuses not on visual recordings but on recording dialogues and inner reverie (our thoughts made public by talking out loud) in his New York Stories project[5] (Irving 2015). Attention to listening and recording what you hear while walking could work in any number of spaces. What soundscapes do you hear in your rural, urban, suburban spaces? Consider creating a sonic ethnography recording of your walking tour using a digital recorder, smartphone, or a combined visual–audio recorder. What do you hear listening to the recording that you missed while walking? Do you hear the train, a plane overhead, Canada geese cries, a distant horn, the wind blowing, a child humming, a busker performing, a street-corner sermon, or your own voice? Also ask yourself what sounds you do not hear as you walk. Perhaps your cityscape prevents you from hearing the birds chirp or the rivers flow; or your rural landscape lacks the bangs, shouts, and sirens of the city. As an example, see Steven Feld's "Voices of the Rainforest," which blends together the sounds of everyday life with the music of the Kaluli people in Papua New Guinea to represent the overlapping and layered effects of soundscapes (Feld 1990). You can hear the grass being cut, birdsongs by the creek, insects in the air, and the voices in community dialogues.

Think of Guided Walks as a Practice of Co-Imagining

Walking tours are exercises in the imagination. The latter is integral to ethnography, because it helps us envision different explanations and points of view and because through ethnography we are called to respond to the imaginative practices of the people we work with (see, for example, Schielke 2013 and Navaro-Yashin 2009).

Asking people to be our walking guides means to invite local residents to imagine their routes and, in turn, for us to respond to their imagined spaces. Imagining here refers not to a detachment from reality, but rather to a complex engagement with it (Appadurai 1996). Imagining can be a way of inhabiting the landscape, thinking of the past and the future, or engaging in collective projects. Imagination is also central to living with hopeful possibilities of a more just society (Dolan 2005). During my research, for example, my guides often imagined the lives of other inhabitants, asking, "How do people other than me live in Milan?" Some key questions in this respect are, How do particular ideas and imaginative practices reinforce or maintain structures of domination and oppression? How do they challenge and reframe hegemonic structures and power relations? How do memories and longing get attached to particular places in ways that are simultaneously ephemeral, situated, and always connected to other stories?

One afternoon, I met a group of youth who were dancing on the platform of a subway station. During our conversation, they asked me to take a picture of them, instructing me very precisely as to how I should photograph them to capture the right shape and combination of their moves. Their insistence that I look at their group and movements in a very particular way struck me. I realized that I was asked to imagine with them that this was a dance floor rather than a subway station. This was important for them, because as Latin American youth in Milan they were often singled out as "different" and criticized as those who made "wrong" or "unconventional" uses of city spaces—like holding dances in the subway (Moretti 2015). But if this were a dance floor, what could be peculiar about their gathering and dancing there?

Walking tours help us to attune to how inhabitants imagine in and through city spaces. More to the point, following our interlocutors to locations that are significant to them can be understood as a practice of co-imagining. As in the example above, we are not only listening to our guides' stories or comments; we are asked to participate in particular ways of inhabiting and understanding the city. When an elderly guide walked me along the buildings from which, as a child, she would collect icicles on the way to school, she was inviting me to imagine holding those glistening treasures with her and to imagine what it felt like to grow up in a working-class neighborhood, among hardships and promises, just after World War II.

"Co-imagining" thus means to follow not just your guides' footsteps but their ideas, memories, and strategies for understanding. How do they theorize the city? What will your research and arguments look like if you follow their local theories and explanatory frameworks (Tsing 1993, 31)? What are the stakes? What

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are the consequences of their critiques? What other possibilities for living and learning are you invited to imagine together with your interlocutors? This is more than simply witnessing or listening to the suggestions, stories, or explanations of the people we walk with,[6] as their ways of imagining the city invite us to both question and reframe what we want to know, why we want to know it, and what the effects of that knowledge may be. Through the shared, embodied practice of walking we are called to re-imagine our ethnographic work and insights, starting from our interlocutors' ways of interrogating and apprehending. The embodied, reflexive practice of walking with our interlocutors becomes a methodology: as Tsing writes (1993, 225), their "situated," "critical . . . ethnography makes [ours] possible."

During my research, for example, there were different ways to understand what public space was. Some of the people I met criticized the very use of the term: oppositional, independent social centers suggested that public space is a fiction, because all space is appropriated by powerful interests—only actively claimed and "liberated" spaces that are conducive to political action are to be called or considered public spaces (Moretti 2015). This perspective challenged the very ways I was thinking about the city and its spaces, suggesting that ethnography "bend" or even deconstruct the definition of public space to problematize who is included and excluded in the societies where we work and live. And their practices of "squatting" (illegally occupying and using) abandoned buildings to convert them into community centers proposed that public spaces are those that meddle with the very distinctions between public and private, questioning the very way ownership, belonging, and power are organized and distributed in an urban community. This also made me think about the places where knowledge is constructed and shared. If, as many of my interlocutors claimed, learning and understanding are best done while walking on the city's streets, and while other lives touch ours through chance encounters and everyday movements, would a performed, walking ethnography be better suited to representing a city than a written document?

Think of Guided Walks as an Ethnographic Method Enabled by Interruptions

Walking tours are often filled with interruptions: there might be surprise encounters and dialogues along the way, detours to be taken; street performers, birdsongs, and children's cries to listen to; decaying and rotting smells to avoid; and speeding bicycle carriers, street cars, or wild bears to run from (for a walking tour based on sound, and offering surprises, see Rosenblum 2013). Your guides might spend time looking for a particular site that is difficult to find, getting lost on the way, or discovering places they had not anticipated seeing. While we can cast aside interruptions and surprises, focusing only on what we intend to see, explain, or learn about, such interruptions and detours can offer crucial insights. It is exactly the ephemeral, improvisational practice of inhabiting space, which involves being confronted with unanticipated ideas and relations, that is so vital to public space and everyday life. More to the point, interruptions and surprises are not an unavoidable by-product but rather a key advantage in ethnographic research (Malkki 2007, 174): they allow us to move beyond received paradigms, to confront assumptions, and to gain new experiences and understandings. These help us become attuned to the lived perspectives of our interlocutors and rethink the social realities we encounter.

Lastly, Think of Research Itself as a Walking Tour

Ethnography is an embodied practice of learning in the presence of others. It is always partial, as we choose routes through our spaces and specific questions to guide us. Our itinerary allows us to perceive and experience connections between particular realities, ideas, and groups of people, which are often best seen from the streets, dirt roads, or abandoned paths and in the everyday life of inhabitants. Reflecting on why we see these linkages and from which standpoints can help us pay attention to how particular realities and systems leave traces in the city and other landscapes, and how different inhabitants come across them, in particular, situated, embodied ways. In Kalimantan, Indonesia, Tsing (2005, 176–77) relates learning about the difficulty of distinguishing "between familiar categories of 'cultivated' and 'wild'" by sitting in people's homes, eating fruits, and tossing "the seeds out the door." Harms (2010, 89), researching urbanization in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City, describes learning about the city's edges while traveling from one urban district to another while sitting on the back of a motorcycle, "amid the rumbling thunder of passing trucks,

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the sounding of air horns on the half-finished highway, and the whipping wind of our own motion across the landscape." Where will you be sitting, standing, or moving when you build your insights and encounter new ideas? What will you miss and which unique perspectives will you encounter?

Imagining Traces and Absences

The water was not the only thing whose absence was felt during my research in Milan. Consider this incident from my field notes:

> Today I met an older woman on the bus. After commenting on some of the changes in Milan in the past decades, the woman explained that she used to be a seamstress. "We seamstresses are like white flies, you know?" she said. "White flies?" I asked. "Yes, there are no more of us!" she answered. I replied, smiling: "All the seamstresses I meet are telling me that they are all gone, but I keep meeting them!" In fact, the woman on the bus is the third "white fly" I have encountered by chance in the last ten days! (28 May 2011)

Conversations and encounters like this one yield small, oblique commentaries. Yet they might be less irrelevant than they seem. A few days before the bus conversation, I had met another seamstress, Renata, who similarly said that people like her did not exist anymore—yet there we were, walking and talking along streets and piazzas. Why did Renata and the woman on the bus position themselves as those who were no longer there? In our conversation, Renata told me about living on a limited income in a social housing complex where conditions were poor. Her explanation about the network of tailors and seamstresses that disappeared was also a reflection on inequality, and on the sweeping social changes she has experienced as an inhabitant of Milan. Just a week earlier, I had walked through the city with another elderly seamstress as my guide. Stopping in front of a field left vacant by deindustrialization, she described how "the hems—of skirts, of all clothing—are now terribly made." What was I to do with those rough edges, the fabric of spaces, lives, and stories that were coming undone? How was I to write about them? My interlocutors' responses voiced some of the disjunctures they felt as low-income women in the city: being people "no longer there" reflected a more widespread sense of changing place (see Moretti 2015, 2011).

If you are carrying out research in public space, you might stumble upon similar uncertain traces, oblique comments, and jarring associations. You could call them, as Avery Gordon (1997) does, "ghostly matters"—those people, objects, places, and connections that are supposedly no longer there, and, because of this, "haunt" social reality. Gordon's ghosts are akin to ruins, zones of disrepair, invisible places, or interstices (Chu 2014; Navaro-Yashin 2009; Tonnelat 2008), as they all can unsettle categories or emerge as ambivalent, contradictory locations. Sometimes these ghostly spaces can be seen as a particular kind of public space, though maybe often not recognized as such, because they are marginal, in flux, or at the edge of things. But as sites on the edge, in flux, or at the margins, they may provide room for conversations, engagement, or interrogations, because they can offer different associations or points of view than the ones we are used to. In this way, they can help us to critically reevaluate our very ways of knowing.

Gordon's (1997, 17) call to notice "how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence" is not intended to distract us from the systemic injustices and practices of exclusion taking place in the city. It is not the same as starting a research project without particular questions, theoretical orientations, or concerns in mind, just hoping to find something curious and unusual. On the contrary, because systems of oppression are often so pervasive, subtle, and contradictory, and can work by generating consensus rather than coercion, it becomes all the more important to listen for discordant voices, alternative visions of reality, or moments that suggest that things could be otherwise.

Intervening

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Image 5.2: “We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

Writing on the sidewalk during an Earth Day climate justice demonstration and festival, Vancouver, Canada.

Credit: Cristina Moretti, 2013.

Public space is a dynamic site of interventions. Public art, community projects, festivals, and political rallies all use public space as an avenue for cultural production, social commentary, and critical engagement. (We might subscribe to some of these projects, while being completely opposed to others.) Here I am thinking primarily of temporary installations, performances, or spaces, such as the mapping project El Tejido Urbano[7] and Park(ing) Day,[8] an annual international event during which metered parking spaces are temporarily transformed into installations or sites for social interaction.

One way to start a research project on public space—or to use public space to research particular topics or issues—is to follow, participate in, and respond to interventions and initiatives that you encounter in your urban community. What are the goals of these projects? Who participates and why? What role does public space play in these actions or installations? How do the aims and visions of these groups align with or depart from scholarly work? As these questions suggest, engaging ethnographically with interventions in public space can mean much more than studying an event, a movement, or a group. It can lead you to become a critical participant in one of these projects, involved in carefully thinking about the kinds of collaborations and alliances possible between anthropologists, activists, and artists (for examples, see Pink et al. 2010).

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Doing so can be an opportunity to investigate different models for thinking, learning, representing, and participating in city life. Which orientations for research and action do these projects provide? How do they suggest we look at the city? What would or could happen if we incorporated these formats, styles, and modes of understanding and inquiring into ethnographic research and representation? These wide-ranging questions cause us to examine the relation between ethnography as a practice of learning and relating to the world and the site where it takes place (Moretti 2011). To what extent can ethnography be a kind of intervention, a "political process of knowledge recirculation" (Culhane 2011, 261)? If it can, what are its goals, and what is at stake? Which kinds of knowledges, ethical commitments, resources, and relations are required?

If you are interested in experimenting with these questions and ideas, you might want to try to design a project that takes place in public space. An inspiring example is the "re-speaking" initiative described by Julie Wyman (2009), which involves passersby reciting and performing historical speeches in Chicago parks. If you plan on creating or researching ethnographic interventions in your city, it is crucial that you think carefully about ethical implications: Who will you talk to and why? How will you take seriously their interests and concerns, and which relations will you establish? Who could be your allies? How will you seek collaborations with individuals, groups, organizations, or movements, and what role could you play in their projects? How will you ensure ethical relations with the people you will encounter? Think about the reasons why you would start the project: What are the social conditions, stories, or events you wish to understand and/or critique? What is at stake? What are some differences between such a project and an ethnography aimed at producing a paper or an article, and how will this inform the process and your relations with the people you work with?

Student Exercises

1. Walking Tours

Create a walking tour addressing a particular issue, topic, or phenomenon. Possible topics might include gentrification, public art and public space, activism, gendered spaces, poverty, cosmopolitanism, mobility, neoliberalism, and health and illness. You could also create a walking tour focused on a particular sense, such as smell, taste, or sound.

- Select five stations for your tour. For each station, include a photograph and explain at each of these stops what you would say as a guide. Which comments would you offer at this location to the person you would be guiding? What would you like her or him to appreciate, understand, or consider about this place and your presence there?
- Draft a conclusion that summarizes your reflections on the tour as a whole. Which aspects are easy to explore through a walking tour, and which ones might be more difficult to notice or address?

If you wish to extend this assignment, these are two possibilities:

- While this exercise can take the form of a paper, you can experiment leading this tour for different people in your class. What happens? Do the conversations change? How does your understanding of the places you visit change?
- Think of ways to present this tour to your class, experimenting with different formats. Ideas can include a series of photographs, a video, a poster, a performance, or a double-faced paper quilt (with each square presenting a location, and each side of the square offering different comments or interpretation of this place).

2. Noticing

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- Use a journal (include four to seven entries) or a photo essay to document particular objects, inscriptions, or events in public spaces that you find surprising, unruly, or inspiring, or that raise questions for you. Why do they catch your attention? What do they suggest about public space, urban life, or social inequality?
- Make a list of public spaces that you use in your everyday life. Why are they important to you? What do you value about them? How do other inhabitants use them, and what could this say about their lives and social positions?

Additional Resources

Websites

Egypt: The Songs of Tahrir Square. Music at the Heart of the Revolution
This web documentary by Hussein Emara and Priscille Lafitte about the 2011 Egyptian uprising allows you to journey to different locales in Cairo and explore some of the linkages between music, political action, and public space.
http://musictahrir.france24.com/tahrir-en.html

El Tejido Urbano
This mapping project by Liz Kueneke uses embroidered maps to encourage residents to discuss spaces in their urban communities. See the second link for videos of the project from different cities.
http://cargocollective.com/lizkueneke/The-Urban-Fabric-El-Tejido-Urbano
https://vimeo.com/lizkueneke/videos

European Prize for Urban Public Space
Organized by the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona, this site and its archive document public space interventions in different European cities, and its library offers texts and lectures on public space by scholars from different disciplines.
www.publicspace.org/en

International Working Group on Public Space and Diversity
Among the resources of this site, coordinated by Setha Low and Darshan Vigneswaran, is a bibliography on different aspects of public space.
www.mmg.mpg.de/subsites/public-space-and-diversity/homepage

Park(ing) Day
This site by Rebar documents and encourages participation in annual Park(ing) Day events in various cities (usually the third Friday in September).
www.parkingday.org

Public Design Festival
This site documents Esterni's yearly festival in Milan, Italy, which transforms parking sites into usable public spaces and installations.
www.publicdesignfestival.org/portal/EN/contents/generic_home.php?&

Urban Bricolage
This fun collection by Emile Hooge showcases playful ideas and do-it-yourself interventions in public spaces.
http://urbanbricolage.tumblr.com

Vancouver Mural Tour
This site, sponsored by the City of Vancouver, offers an interesting example of walking tours; it describes four itineraries in Vancouver focusing on murals.
www.vancouvermurals.ca

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Notes

1 See a photo of Iacchetti's bench at www.giulioiacchetti.com/?p=785 Return to text.

2 See a video of Brunsing's bench at www.fabianbrunsing.de Return to text.

3 See a video of Esterni's bench at www.esterni.it Return to text.

4 During the Stories and Plays Project that Culhane "co-created" with residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and graduate students, participants shared, constructed, and performed stories together (Culhane 2011, 258). The people involved in the project first agreed to participate in the first series of workshops. They signed the second consent forms to continue the meetings and to be part of a final performance that they decided collaboratively. Lastly, the participants were asked if they agreed to the project being represented and discussed through publications, and were given the option that no academic products be generated from the project. As Culhane explains, obtaining informed consent in several stages, and understanding it as a developing relationship rather than a one-time contract, recognizes the "performative principle" of ethnography: "that meaning emerges in the performance of storytelling and reception by diverse audiences" and that as a consequence, consent should be negotiated not just before but also during and after the performance (2011, 261). The goal of this method in the Stories and Plays Project was to experiment with alternative "ethical engagements" between ethnographers and participants, and to counter exploitative practices in research in a marginalized neighborhood where residents are routinely "mined for data" (Culhane 2011, 261). This approach,

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moreover, helps shift the focus of attention from the end products to the process of ethnography and the kinds of relations, insights, and experiences it creates (Culhane 2011, 261; see also Centre for Imaginative Ethnography at www.imaginativeethnography.org). Return to text.

5 See an interview with Irving at http://blog.wennergren.org/2013/06/interview-dr-andrew-irving-new-york-stories Return to text.

6 I thank Erin Martineau for her insightful suggestions on this point. Return to text.

7 See Websites under Additional Resources for more information about this project. Return to text.

8 See Websites under Additional Resources for more information about this project. Return to text.

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Chapter 6

Performing

MAGDALENA KAZUBOWSKI-HOUSTON

Image 6.1: Ethnographic performance *Horses and Angels*.

The performance was developed in collaboration with Polish student actors in 2003 and explored unequal gender relations in Poland.

Credit: Foto Bannach Elblg.

> I almost wish I hadn't gone down the rabbit-hole—and yet—and yet—it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what can have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one!
>
> —Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1993, 61)

Randia—an elderly Polish Roma woman and my long-time interlocutor[1]—once remarked, "You must write a fairy tale about us—because when you come here, it's like a fairy tale, like magic, and when you leave, it's

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all gone—we could then perform it like a play, like we did before" (field notes 2012). Randia's request hit me like a rush of air, as though Alice's White Rabbit had just run past me, his watch in his waistcoat pocket. For over a decade, I have worked with Roma minorities in Elblg, Poland, studying their everyday encounters with prejudice, discrimination, and violence. During this time, I have been committed to exploring the intersections of ethnography and imagination, using theater and performance as both ethnographic processes and products. I practice what can be referred to as "performance of ethnography" (performance as ethnographic representation) and "performance as ethnography" (performance as ethnographic process). Performance and ethnography can be combined in various ways. One can conduct research and then develop a performance based on it; use a performance development process as a way of conducting fieldwork; or use performance as an ethnographic process that culminates in a publicly staged performance.

In an earlier project, I approached my research by employing theater as a means of participant observation and representation. In collaboration with a group of Roma women and local actors from Elblg, I developed a theater performance through rehearsals to learn about Roma women's experiences of violence. The performance was staged in a local cultural center for Roma and non-Roma audiences. Subsequently, I analyzed the power relations that defined our mutual interactions within the ethnographic process itself (Kazubowski-Houston 2010). In another project, I adopted dramatic storytelling as an ethnographic method to study the impact of transnational migration on Roma women's experiences of aging.

Although Randia and I worked together on both projects, I was a bit dumbfounded by her request that I write a fairy tale. I had dramatized excerpts from my field notes, but primarily I worked collaboratively with my interlocutors as storytellers, playwrights, directors, actors, and designers. While they had used fictional accounts to stage their life stories, I had never written an entirely fictional script myself, never mind an ethnographic fairy tale. While I had trained professionally as a theater director, my relationship with Randia could not be easily imagined apart from our roles as anthropologist and interlocutor. But how does one write an ethnographic fairy tale—one that could be staged? What would it be about? Who would our audience be? As my questions multiplied, my excitement grew. There was something enticing in Randia's request—a promising rabbit hole, a new journey into imagination.

I approach imagination not as an abstract faculty, but rather—like other contributors to this book—as diverse and "messy" imaginative practices and creative methodologies (see "Imagining: An Introduction" for more discussion on these terms). "Imaginative practices" are the social practices constituted by human/nonhuman relations, and the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which they are embedded; "creative methodologies" are the transdisciplinary, collaborative, embodied, and critical approaches to research that bridge ethnography, anthropology, and the arts. In embarking upon the fairy tale project, I would attend to the imaginative practices that constitute my fieldwork relations, Randia's life circumstances, and her relationship to me as an anthropologist. As a creative methodology, this project would bring fiction, performance, and ethnography into conversation, in a critical, reflexive, and collaborative ethnographic inquiry.

Imaginative practices are frequently incidental, unintended, and improvisational—and generative. I am inspired by Vincent Crapanzano's (2004, 19) observation that imagination allows us "to project our 'fables' in a direction that does not have to reckon with the 'evident universe.'" Breaking with the evident, the expected, can conjure up new ways of being, dreams, and desires, shifting our focus toward what surfaces, sprouts, and promises (Mittermaier 2011, 30; Crapanzano 2004, 14–15). This generative capacity, however, cannot be understood solely in utopian terms; as "an impulse of real life" (Ingold 2013, 735), imagination can both empower and disempower, subvert oppression and sustain it. Imagination can imbue us with happiness, hope, and strength, just as much as it can fill us with sadness, despair, and resignation.

In embarking on the fairy tale project, it was this anticipatory, creative, and uncertain potential—not really knowing where I was headed—that I found exhilarating, if also anxiety provoking. So: like Alice, down the rabbit hole I went. Down, down, down . . . until, suddenly, I landed with a thump. I jumped to my feet and looked around. Nothing in sight but a big filing cabinet standing in front of me. I peered inside . . . and there it was: a stash of my field notes, diaries, and interview transcripts. I thumbed through them, feeling like I was still falling. How to turn this heap of papers into a fairy tale? Almost ready to throw in the towel, I realized that I needed to sketch out for myself the differences between an "ethnographic" and a "regular" work of fiction. I wouldn't want to confuse the Mouse's "tale" with its "tail," like Alice did.

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Boundaries

Since the 1980s “crisis of representation” (Clifford and Marcus 1986)—a skepticism about ethnography as an adequate means to describe social reality—most anthropologists have come to see ethnographic truths as partial and subjective (Behar 1996, 2007; Abu-Lughod 1993; Geertz 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986). Debating the differences between ethnographic monographs and literary fiction, some saw them as two sides of the same coin: a Tweedledum and Tweedledee of sorts, garrulous twins constantly bickering to assert their identities, yet unable to part. If ethnographic knowledge is partial and subjective, how is it different from a work of fiction? While the border between ethnography and fiction may not be easy to discern, most anthropologists would agree that ethnography is rooted in fieldwork and accountable to the people it represents (Narayan 1999, 42; Clifford and Marcus 1986), while fiction invents the world at will (Narayan 1999, 135). Didier Fassin (2014, 41) writes that while a novelist conjures up a world, an anthropologist seeks to convey the real (what has happened) and to articulate the true (what ought to be brought to light) (see Denielle Elliott’s chapter, “Writing,” in this volume).

Such debates have sparked much experimentation, with anthropologists trying their hand at different literary genres, seeking a more evocative, embodied, and accessible means of expression than the traditional, specialist, ethnographic monograph. Anthropologists have incorporated literary conventions (such as suspense and exaggeration) (Ashforth 2000); improvised upon interlocutors’ stories (Myerhoff 1980); made anonymous research locales and characters (Elliott 2014; Kazubowski-Houston 2012); invented locales, characters, or events, as inspired by one’s fieldwork (Augé 2013); and shifted between ethnographic accuracy and fictional invention (Stewart 1989). Despite this blurring of genres, however, few anthropologists have been willing to do away with boundaries entirely. Tweedledum and Tweedledee were similar—but not identical, after all!

Having considered the differences between ethnography and fiction, I decided to write a fictional dramatic script based on my fieldwork and relationships with my Roma interlocutors, in the form of a fairy tale. But I had no idea how to even begin. My enthusiasm withered like a violet in a drought, and Alice’s “DRINK ME” bottle was nowhere in sight. It occurred to me that perhaps I needed to learn more about fairy tales to be able to write one.

The Fairy Tale Genre

The fairy tale—usually based on oral folk tales (Foster 2012, 8; Zipes 2012, 11)—is a literary genre of fiction that incorporates fantastical characters, events, and locales, and serves both entertaining and didactic functions (Sikharulidze 2012, 91). Fairy tales often comment on how people face and respond to life-changing events or problems (Zipes 2012, xi). Generally, a theatrical adaption of a fairy tale transforms the tale’s narrative into dramatic action and its characters into dramatis personae (Spangler 2013, 16). Anthropologists and folklorists have analyzed fairy tales in terms of their social meanings and functions, using semiotic, hermeneutic, structural, comparative, and psychoanalytic perspectives (see, for example, Zipes, 2012; Shokeid 1982; Propp [1928] 1968; Levi-Strauss 1955, 1979). Feminist and critical race studies scholars and activists have critiqued fairy tales for perpetuating normative gender ideals that maintain dominant systems of power (Zipes 2012), and for their racialized stereotypes of subaltern people (Stewart 2000). Others have reworked popular fairy tales to destabilize patriarchal discourses (Williams 2012) and to create a space in which women may imagine alternative realities (Severin 2003).

While I decided to take on this fairy tale project primarily because Randia had asked me to, I also thought that it might be beneficial to explore the genre as a mode of ethnographic inquiry and reflection. I suspected that its fictional and fantastical characteristics, which encourage the imagination and open a window onto a character’s thoughts and emotions, could potentially carve inroads into “imaginative lifeworlds” (Irving 2011, 22)—interior dialogues, thoughts, moods, and feelings—that cannot always be easily accessed through conventional ethnographic methods but are an important part of lived experience. I hoped that such insights would afford me a different kind of understanding of my interlocutors’ circumstances and our relationships that perhaps would be more attuned to the affective and embodied dimensions of our lives and, consequently, facilitate a more critical and reflexive construction of ethnographic knowledge. I also thought that the

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fictional anonymity of the fairy tale would potentially allow me to reflect upon the more private aspects of my relationship with Randia too confidential to explore publicly, especially if Randia ultimately decided to have the tale performed in front of an audience.

Writing a Fairy Tale

I began to have some ideas about how to approach my writing. First, I needed to think about how the fairy tale could easily be adapted for the stage. Trained as a theater director, I knew there were many options. I was Alice, again, looking down a corridor with many doors! I could write an ethnographic fairy tale in prose form and then adapt it for the stage, or I could write a play or a dramatic scenario (often used in nontraditional, "devised,"[2] or "physical"[3] theater) as a blueprint from which to create a performance. A dramatic scenario—written in either descriptive or poetic form—specifies the locale, dramatis personae, and outline of dramatic action. Had Randia not specifically requested that I write the fairy tale myself, I could have developed a script in rehearsals in collaboration with actors through improvisation.[4] In the end, I decided to write the fairy tale in poetic prose; I would first fictionalize the characters, locales, and events, and then adapt it for the stage.

Inspired by feminist and other critiques of fairy tales, I thought that my tale could speak about Randia's (and other Roma women's) courage and perseverance in the face of oppression and poverty. I would try to say something about how recent transnational migration had transformed experiences of aging. In Poland, the quality of life has deteriorated for Roma since the fall of state socialism. Negative stereotypes, combined with economic crises and Polish nationalist sentiments, have increased the stigmatization of, and violence against, this minority group. As a result, many younger and middle-aged Roma have migrated to Western Europe and the United Kingdom, leaving behind many elderly who are unable to travel due to ill health or age. My fairy tale could tell the story of how Randia has coped—in the absence of her younger relatives—in this context. I wanted the characters, locales, events, and images to stand as metaphors for the relentless hardships Randia faces, her determination to live what she believes to be a good life, the loneliness she frequently conveys when talking about her blindness and her far-away children, her courage in continuing to tell fortunes, and her generosity in supporting her children and grandchildren, both morally and financially, against all odds.

Someone once told me that fairy tales are about "undoing yourself into the world." Perhaps a first step in this direction would be to approach my fairy tale as an exercise in anthropological reflexivity: I could reflect upon the impact of my presence in my interlocutors' lives. I could have the characters and their actions represent my long, complicated relationship with Randia. I have known Randia for 15 years, and she has been one of my most important teachers and a close confidante; however, in recent years, her isolation and her deteriorating sight had transformed our relationship into one of interdependence. She had grown more reliant on my help with performing daily tasks, and I had started feeling a greater responsibility for her well-being. I thought this would be an important aspect of my research to communicate through my fairy tale.

When I first sat down to write, the image of a hump flashed into my head. More precisely, the hump of a hunchback. What did it mean? I wasn't sure—but how remarkable! Maybe it was a creative spark, one that "at the right moment will burst into flame" (Taussig 2011, 118). Lisa Stevenson (2014, 10) argues that images are good to think with because they force us to inhabit uncertainty, which is often avoided in ethnography. I let myself think with the hump. An image, a spark, an open door . . . "Iridescence" is what I found.

Iridescence

A long, long time ago, and far, far away, behind one big mountain and behind another big mountain, there lived Very Tall Old Woman. She lived in a village in a quite tall hut with her quite tall children and her quite tall grandchildren. The other villagers were very small, so small in fact that they never bothered to look Very Tall Old Woman directly in the eye. And Very Tall Old Woman was tall, so tall in fact that she could not look them directly in the eye, either. Very Tall Old Woman worked very hard at putting food on the family table and coal in the family

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hearth. Late every night, she would quietly crawl out of bed, don her nightgown, and venture out into the mountains. She would climb up one big mountain and then climb up another big mountain, and because she was so very tall, she would sweep past this star and past that star, gathering up their pearls of iridescence with her mighty eyes. Light would surge through her body and fill her up with such formidable warmth that with each surge she would grow a few inches taller, and her hair would gray a few strands grayer. In time, she would lower her head down, cup her palms to her eyes, and wait . . . and wait . . . until a stream of stardust would cascade from her eyes into her palms. And so every night, Very Tall Old Woman would return home with her gown pockets brimming with stardust. The following day, on each and every day, as the sun crested the mountain peaks, she would go to the village square and sell sachets of stardust to the villagers for a few copper coins, a few portions of bread, a bunch of carrots, a handful of potatoes, or a basket of strawberries. One day, however, while selling sachets of stardust in the old village square, Very Old Tall Woman chanced upon Very Short Young Girl, who looked Very Tall Old Woman directly in the eye; and Very Tall Old Woman looked Very Short Young Girl directly in the eye too. And from that day on, Girl began visiting Woman in her hut, learning her ways of life, helping her with chores and errands, and the two became dear friends.

The friendship between Woman and Girl continued for years and years, until the day of the great earthquake, when the villagers, including Woman's children and grandchildren, were swallowed up whole. Woman and Girl were the only ones spared. Yet Woman did not escape the earthquake unscathed. Tectonic shards shot up from the ground and took the sight from her eyes. Now blind, her life changed forever. No more climbing over one big mountain and over another big mountain. No more sweeping past the stars' iridescence. No more gathering stardust. No more surges of warmth through her body. She spent most of her days sitting alone in her hut with her vacant eyes turned skyward. But then, one day, she developed an intense itch in the gulley of her back. She scratched and scratched her itch, but the more she scratched, the more it itched. And soon the itch bloomed into a bump, and that bump bloomed into a hump, so big in fact that she could barely move. It kept blooming and blooming until it broke through the roof of her hut. And it was then that she felt a strange tingling on her hump, and asked Girl to come take a look. Posthaste she came, examined the hump, and told Woman of a tiny door at the tingly spot. Curious, Woman asked Girl to open it. A wave of familiar warmth rushed out through the door and enveloped Woman, who grew a few inches taller and grayed a few strands grayer. Mesmerized, she asked Girl to enter through the door. Girl was gone one long minute, and then another long minute, and after several long minutes, returned and told Woman how the hump was filled with iridescence and warmth. And that off in the distance she could see two mountains shimmering like gold. Woman asked the Girl to climb up the one big mountain and climb up the other big mountain, and to sweep past the stars and then return back. So Girl was gone for one long hour and another long hour while Woman waited eagerly. But to her dismay, Girl returned to report that she was too short to sweep past the stars. Woman instructed her to try once again. So Girl went back to the top of one mountain and the top of another mountain, and stretched up on the tips of her toes, but again could not reach the stars. In grief she looked up at the stars, and let forth such a terrible cry that the hump of Woman trembled and quaked. And from the firmament fell fast iridescence into Girl's upturned eyes. The light surged through her body, and filled her up with such formidable warmth that with each surge Girl grew a few inches taller, and her hair grayed a few strands grayer. But Woman kept trembling and quaking, and Girl kept growing and graying. When all was finally quiet, Girl lowered her head down, cupped her palms to her eyes, and a stream of stardust cascaded from her eyes into her palms. She returned to the door with her pockets brimming with stardust, but Girl had grown so tall, that she could no longer walk through the door, and Girl had grown so old that she could no longer crawl through it. So she scooped the stardust out from one pocket, and out from another pocket, and passed it through to Woman. But as the stardust crossed the threshold, the inside of the hump went dark

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and cold. And as soon as it touched Woman's hands, it coated them with hoarfrost, which surged through her body, and filled her up with such formidable cold that with each surge Woman shrank a few inches smaller . . . and smaller . . . until she was finally gone.

Ethnographic Experimentation

It was time to plunge into adapting the fairy tale for the stage. This is always the most exciting, albeit capricious, part of the process for me. I feel like I'm at Alice's "mad tea party," with the March Hare, the Hatter, and the somnolent Dormouse, attempting to solve riddle after riddle.

In the last few decades, anthropology and cognate fields have taken up performance as an approach to research and representation. This has been largely a response to post-modern critiques of scientific positivism and the power imbalances in research relationships, and it has spawned a wide range of ethnographic experiments. Anthropologists and researchers across the disciplines have used a variety of terms—"performance ethnography," "performative ethnography," "ethnographic theatre," and "ethnodrama," to name a few—in reference to these experiments.

My fairy tale project used performance as a form of ethnographic representation, and, as such, can be best understood as a performance of ethnography. In fact, most performance-centered ethnography has been conducted at the level of representation, dating back to the early-1980s collaborations between anthropologists Victor Turner and Edith Turner and performance studies scholar/theater director Richard Schechner. These took place at a time when the anthropological focus had begun shifting from function to process and from structure to performance. The Turners and Schechner used performance as "instructional theatre" to represent fieldwork data to facilitate a "kinetic" learning process about another culture's way of life (Schechner 1985; Turner and Turner 1982). The Turners and Schechner involved students in staging pieces of existing ethnographic writing on ritual (e.g., on puberty rites and marriage ceremonies) to give them a more embodied understanding, rather than the descriptive and detached representations found in ethnographic monographs (Turner and Turner 1982, 33–34).

The crisis of representation, blurred genres, and performative turns that beset anthropology and other disciplines engendered epistemological[5] and ethical[6] questions about empirical research. Researchers across the disciplines began to examine performance's potential for communication and pedagogy (see, for example, Denzin 2003; Saldaña 2003, Mienczakowski 1995, 2000). Health researcher Jim Mienczakowski, for example, creates scripts based on fieldwork conducted in health care settings. He refers to these critical "ethno-dramas" (Mienczakowski 1995, 360) as "acceptable fictions"—created by the ethnographer based on informant interviews but vetted by informants for accuracy (Mienczakowski 2000, 136). The scripts are circulated within health care communities for feedback and subsequently performed by medical or nursing students for various health stakeholders. Similarly, Norman Denzin (2003) creates performative ethnographic scripts to be read aloud, which bridge auto-ethnography,[7] performance, and commentary. Some scholars have criticized a performance of ethnography approach, arguing that it assumes that the "truth" about another culture is more authentically represented and expressed through theater than through writing. This was the primary reason why I had, thus far, refrained from developing a theater performance based on ethnographic material without the collaboration of my interlocutors. Now, however, the fairy tale project demanded that I give it a try. What I needed to do, though, was to tailor it in ways that would mesh with what I believe about anthropology and ethnography. My intent was not to create a "more authentic" ethnographic product, but rather to transform this making of a performative fairy tale into an ethnographic process itself.

Experiments with ethnographic process—performance as ethnography—have been relatively rare. In anthropology, Johannes Fabian (1990) has been a trailblazer. Working with a theater troupe in Shaba, Zaire, he employed theater performance as a form of participant observation, addressing his research questions by collaboratively developing a theater performance with his interlocutors. Fabian (19) advanced a "performative"—as opposed to "informative"—ethnography, in which the ethnographer becomes a co-performer who does research "*with*, not *of* " the people with whom he works (43). Other explorations include Dwight Conquergood's (1988) ethnography as street performance in a Hmong refugee camp in Thailand; Soyini Madison's (2010) use of performance as a form of activism and human rights intervention

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in Ghana; my own work with Polish Roma, using performance as participant observation in the study of power within my ethnographic process (Kazubowski-Houston 2010); Dara Culhane's (2011) utopian improvisational ethnography conducted in collaboration with residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside; the work by Lee Papa and Luke Eric Lassiter (2003) on ethnography as performative and collaborative community engagement; and Virginie Magnat's (2012) performance as a collaborative and ethnographic "ceremony" honoring Indigenous ways of knowing.

Rather than dramatizing my field notes and interview transcripts, I would engage in improvisational writing, allowing ideas to freely spill onto the page and characters to spontaneously emerge. An ethnography of chance (see Taussig 2011, 59–60, where he talks about "chance in fieldwork"), an ethnography of surprise! What "imaginative horizons" would open up (Crapanzano 2004)? What ethnographic "truths" would be constructed through this process?

Theater and performance studies scholars have long held that improvisation—where content is created in the moment—can lead to discovery and unintended outcomes (Peters 2009). Michael Taussig (2011, 19) writes that "words written down in feverish haste score a bull's eye." Certainly, not every improvisation will hit the mark—the vulnerability of improvisation can at times hinder creativity, leading one to fall back on familiar clichés. I felt, however, that even such moments of "falling back" could provide me with novel insights into my relationship with Randia. As well, improvisation made sense to me theatrically; as a theater director, it frequently helped me to generate more compelling dramatic material. Qualitative researcher and theater practitioner Johnny Saldaña (2003, 220) reminds us that performance ethnographers should strive to create engaging, sophisticated, and affective ethnographic representations. Who wants to listen to the Dormouse drone on and on?

For Saldaña (2003, 220), the primary goal of theater is to explore ideas and to entertain the audience. Others argue that performance-centered research should educate and provoke (see, for example, Kazubowski-Houston 2010, 2011; Madison 2005; Denzin 2003; Conquergood 1988, 1991). This argument draws on Bertolt Brecht's (1964) notion of the politicization of theater; Brecht, a theater theoretician, playwright, and director, asserted that theater should engage audience members in questioning and challenging the status quo. I wanted the fairy tale to invite the audience to think critically about the issues represented without rendering it a soapbox for our ideas. I thus balanced an improvisational mode of writing with sketching out in advance some of the issues with which I wanted the audience to engage critically.

Imagining Performance

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Image 6.2: Randia.

Credit: Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston, 2013.

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