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Something to contribute?

Cutting Edge is currently accepting submissions for consideration in its next edition. Details and guidelines may be found on the journal website: cuttingedge.isgp.ubc.ca

You can also contact the editorial team directly by email at: isgpjournal@gmail.com

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Editor's Introduction

It is with great pleasure tempered with some relief that we on the editorial committee of Cutting Edge unveil the Spring 2017 edition.

Due to various limitations, and the challenge of recruiting both authors and peer reviewers at a particularly hectic juncture in the academic year, the timeline available to produce this volume has been somewhat constrained. Nonetheless, we are pleased with the end product and the array of articles that comprise this volume. We hope our readers will profit by the knowledge, insight, and scholarship of the contributing authors as much as we have.

Each of the articles explores a different facet of the broad theme of Culture and Community.

In “Surveying the Leaky Pipeline”, Audrey Aday, a master’s degree candidate whose research examines issues of gender bias and social identification, writes about the unwelcoming sociocultural climate that hampers the advancement of women in science, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. She recommends policies that can help promote success and a sense of belonging for women in STEM, and facilitate entry and retention of women along the path to STEM careers.

Rocky James, a Coast Salish interdisciplinary philosopher and UBC ISGP alumnus, analyzes issues related to the footprint of colonialism in an academic context, and encourages scholars to view and interpret the world through a lens informed by Coast Salish oral history. In “Coast Salish Methodology and Interdisciplinary Research”, he presents Coast Salish oral history as an effective framework for understanding issues around gender identity and sexual orientation, discusses his experience within academia, and explains the significance of the various components of his own traditional Coast Salish formal introduction.
The Brazilian non-governmental organization Video in the Villages—*Vídeo nas aldeias* in Portuguese—has yielded a vast archive of insightful, original films and videos since its inception in 1987. These films frequently examine aspects of the lived experience of Indigenous people in Brazil, and many are created by Indigenous filmmakers. Media artist and ISGP PhD candidate Sarah Shamash offers readers a closer look at Video in the Villages, and analyzes the film *Tava: House of Stone*, a collaborative work by Guarani and non-Indigenous filmmakers that explores the historical and contemporary legacy of Jesuit missions from a Guarani perspective.

In another analysis linked to Brazil, Matt Husain and Kaitlynd Stewart discuss the impact of neoliberal economic policies—and in particular, cutbacks to social services—on homeless youth in the cities of Recife, Brazil, and Vancouver, Canada. Unsurprisingly, they find that cuts to social spending tend to exacerbate homelessness among young people, but just as importantly, such cuts also complicate the challenge that young homeless people face as they aspire to escape poverty and contribute to the overall economic welfare of society.

Rachael Goddard-Rebstein has expertise in English literature, psychology, neuroscience, and theatre and drama. In “Neuroscience and Visions in *The Book of Margery Kempe*”, she explains how she integrated aspects of these seemingly disparate disciplines into a stage play she authored about the life of Margery Kempe, a religious mystic who inhabited England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Their focus on a centuries-old figure notwithstanding, Goddard-Rebstein’s article and stage play both address themes that remain highly relevant today: mental illness and social stigmas familiar to individuals who struggle with it; sexism and institutional bias against women; and the limitations of the scientific method and rationality vis-à-vis faith and spirituality.

At this point, I’d like to take the opportunity to remind readers that Cutting Edge is currently accepting submissions for the Fall 2017 volume, and for consideration for future editions. Please visit [http://www.cuttingedge.isgp.ubc.ca/call-for-submissions/](http://www.cuttingedge.isgp.ubc.ca/call-for-submissions/) for criteria and contact information.
I’d also like to acknowledge the efforts of my co-editor Cluny South, editorial support provided by Noel Kreuz and Enid Ho, and the expert supervision of ISGP professor Dr. Hillel Goelman. Without their assistance and guidance, it would not have been possible to bring this issue of Cutting Edge to fruition.

Sincerely,

Kyle Farquharson
Co-Editor
Cutting Edge ISGP Journal
Abstracts and Bios

Surveying the leaky pipeline: Examining the factors that contribute to a culture of exclusion for women in STEM

Author: Audrey Aday

Abstract: Despite having equal potential to succeed in math and science, women earn only 38 percent of undergraduate degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM; Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2010). In industry, women become even further underrepresented in STEM fields such as engineering and computer and mathematical sciences, where they make up a mere 15 and 25 percent of the workforce, respectively. This gradual loss of women at various stages en route to a STEM career has been termed “the leaky pipeline” (Blickenstaff, 2005). Research has suggested that many women opt to “leak out” of the pipeline due to a culture of gender-based exclusion that exists in the STEM fields. In this piece, I review the various factors that contribute to this culture of exclusion, and offer suggestions for how we may promote a more positive culture for women in the STEM community.

Bio: Audrey Aday is a 1st year MA student in Psychology at UBC. Audrey's work examines how different facets of the social environment affect women's social and academic outcomes in the STEM fields, and how we may intervene to create a positive social climate for women in STEM.

Coast Salish Methodology and Interdisciplinary Research

Author: Rocky James

Abstract: This article expands on the research methodology I developed for my master’s thesis in Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria’s Studies in Policy and Practice Program. The title of my thesis is “Lateral Violence as a Process in First Nations Institutions”. In the methodology chapter, I incorporated a Coast Salish formal introduction protocol, which is an act of acknowledging who I am, what tribe I come from, and my lived experience as a Coast Salish person, through text and painting acrylic on canvas. In this article I explore how to incorporate Coast Salish research methodology into an interdisciplinary framework, as part of my philosophy doctorate in the Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program at the University of British Columbia. I also elaborate on the oral history in the Coast Salish formal introduction.

Bio: Rocky James is an interdisciplinary philosopher and alumnus of the UBC Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program. Through his scholarship, he interrogates and
critiques the intellectual legacy of colonialism in academia, and seeks to promote Coast Salish ways of knowing—for example, in relation to complex phenomena like gender identity and sexual orientation. Underlying his analysis is a call for recognition not only of the legitimacy of Coast Salish oral history as a compendium of knowledge, but also as a framework by which scholars at institutions like the University of British Columbia—whose Vancouver campus sits on unceded Coast Salish territory—can interpret the modern world. James is of Musqueam, Squamish, Kwakwaka’wakw, and Nuu-chah-nulth heritage.

**Subverting dominant ideologies of the cinematic apparatus; The Mbya-Guarani Cinema Collective transforms digital optics**

*Author: Sarah Shamash*

*Abstract:* Since its origin in the 19th century, cinema has become an industry, a medium, a technology, an art, and a field of study. The intervening decades have brought a proliferation in the diversity of forms, genres, aesthetics, ideologies, histories, theories, and philosophies represented in film. The advancement of digital film technology today affords us the opportunity to discuss how the promise and possibility of the seventh art have been democratized and pluralized. In particular, considering the continuum of oral and textual media and the power shifts from oral to textual, analogue to digital, film as an art form and video as a technology participate in this power balance by shifting the power of oral and visual media into the hands of storytellers. In this article, the focus is on this democratization within the context of contemporary Indigenous film and video in Brazil.

*Bio:* Sarah Shamash is a Vancouver based media artist and PhD candidate in the Interdisciplinary studies program at UBC. Influenced by cinema, her experimental projects typically explore identities and geographies as personal, political, feminine and dynamic, while critiquing and subverting fixed, colonial and hegemonic demarcations of the body, territory, and space. Since the 2000s she has been exhibiting her work in art venues and film festivals. She also currently teaches film theory at UBC and VFS, programs films for the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival and the Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival. Her work as an artist, researcher, educator, and programmer can be understood as interconnected and whole; they all revolve around a passion for cinema.

**Youth Homelessness and Available Resources: Country Comparison between Brazil and Canada**

*Authors: Matt Husain and Kaitlynd Stewart*

*Abstract:* Our research examines the impact of social services on youth homelessness and compares findings from Brazil and Canada, in conjunction with neo-liberal application in
these countries. We conducted a qualitative analysis based on literature review and interview data. Our findings suggest that services that directly assist homeless youth should focus on prevention, as well as intervention. We argue that learning about the factors and obstacles that contribute to youths leaving their homes could be more effective in preventing youth homelessness.

Bios:

Matt Husain is a Doctoral Candidate in Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies and an Adjunct Faculty in Anthropology and Sociology at the UBC Okanagan.

Kaitlynd Stewart is a fourth year student at the University of British Columbia Okanagan campus, based in Kelowna British Columbia. She is in the Bachelor of Arts program and upon completion of her degree she will graduate with a major in psychology.

Neuroscience and Visions in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Author: Rachael Goddard-Rebstein

Abstract: This article discusses how I integrated twenty-first century neuroscience and psychology with medieval culture and religion in my play adaptation of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Written in around 1436, *The Book of Margery Kempe* tells the true story of Margery Kempe, a middle-class wife and mother of 14 children who experienced extraordinary visions shortly after the birth of her first child. She recorded her experiences in *The Book of Margery Kempe* with the aid of a priestly scribe, as she was illiterate. Her visions resemble those of present-day individuals who suffer from conditions such as postnatal psychosis, postnatal depression and temporal lobe epilepsy. Yet Kempe saw them as gifts from God, and firmly rejected the notion that they could arise from a physical or psychological condition. She sought to claim the influential and powerful role of a religious mystic, even though her gender and social status made her a figure of controversy in that vocation. This article explores the cultural and social factors that influenced Kempe, including the tradition of female mystical piety, and shows why psychological explanations for her visions must also take into account their religious content and form.

Bio: Rachael Goddard-Rebstein is a recent graduate from UBC and has an interdisciplinary master's degree in English, Psychology and Film and Theatre. She completed a play as her master's thesis based on the life of the medieval mystic Margery Kempe. She also enjoys writing fiction and poetry, and has published articles in 'The Oxford Student' and 'The Oxonian Review'.
Surveying the leaky pipeline: Examining the factors that contribute to a culture of exclusivity for women in STEM

Despite having equal potential to succeed in math and science, women earn only 38 percent of undergraduate degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines (Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2010). In industry, women become even further underrepresented in STEM fields such as engineering and computer and mathematical sciences, where they make up a mere 15 and 25 percent of the workforce, respectively. This gradual loss of women at various stages en route to a STEM career has been termed “the leaky pipeline” (Blickenstaff, 2005). Much work in recent decades has been done to identify the key forces that shape the leaky pipeline and ultimately dissuade women from pursuing careers in STEM, whether at the K-12, undergraduate, or professional phase of their career paths. One explanation that has been offered for women’s decision to leak out of the pipeline is the existence of a “chilly climate,” or a culture of exclusion, for women in STEM (Blickenstaff, 2005). In the present piece, I briefly outline several key factors that perpetuate a culture of exclusion for women in STEM. These factors may broadly be grouped into three categories: 1) the social climate, 2) gender bias, and 3) stereotypes about the field.

Social Climate

Past work shows that a positive social climate and sense of belonging are critical predictors of women’s social and academic outcomes in STEM. For instance, women who had a positive social interaction with an advanced female peer in math reported more positive attitudes toward math and greater implicit identification with the subject, and demonstrated greater effort while taking a difficult math test following the interaction (Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011). Other work examining the social climate in STEM shows that a stronger sense of belonging (i.e. feeling that one belongs within one’s immediate social context) in physics positively predicts students’ motivation and persistence (Stout, Ito, Finkelstein, & Pollock, 2012). At the same time, women in STEM
tend to feel a lower sense of belonging in these fields (Aday & Seyranian, in prep; Stout, Ito, Finkelstein, & Pollock, 2012). Thus, interventions aimed at bolstering women’s sense of social belonging in STEM (e.g. Walton, Logel, Peach, Spencer, & Zanna, 2015) may present a promising strategy for boosting women’s achievement in the STEM fields.

**Gender Bias**

Another prominent factor in women’s decision to exit the STEM pipeline is perceived gender bias in the field (Cheryan, Ziegler, Montoya, & Jiang, 2016). According to Davies, Spencer, Quinn, and Gerhardstein (2002), mere exposure to gender stereotypes (e.g. viewing gender stereotypic depictions in the media) can persuade women to withdraw from domains in which they run the risk of being devalued on the basis of their gender. Indeed, Smith, Sandsone, and White (2007) find that who operate under conditions in which they expect to be perceived as less proficient than their male counterparts in math may be discouraged from pursuing a career in STEM as a result. While such instances of explicit bias are problematic for the retention of women in STEM, implicit biases (biases that occur outside of conscious awareness and control; for a review, see Project Implicit, 2011) pose a similarly substantial threat. For instance, past work finds that, for women, stronger implicit associations between males and math predict greater negativity toward math, less participation, weaker self-ascribed ability, and worse math achievement by women (Nosek & Smyth, 2011). Yet research reveals that people are able to counteract their biases if they are aware they exist and are motivated to set them aside (Devine, 1989). Thus, educational interventions are a promising avenue for reducing such gender bias. By learning about gender bias (increasing awareness), and understanding the ways in which it may negatively impact others (increasing motivation to set bias aside), both men and women may be better positioned to counteract gender bias and create a positive culture for women in STEM.
Stereotypes About the Field

Finally, stereotypes about the field itself may serve to perpetuate a negative culture for women in STEM. Past work on this topic finds that fields such as computer science, engineering, biology, chemistry, mathematics, and physics are viewed as being stereotypically masculine (Cheryan, Plaut, Handron, & Hudson, 2013; Hughes, 2002). Research suggest that some women may view the masculine culture of STEM fields as being misaligned with their own identity, interests, and aspirations. For instance, Cheryan, Siy, Vichayapai, Drury, & Kim (2011) find that simply interacting with a male or female computer science major who embodies stereotypes of the field (e.g. someone who dresses unfashionably, intensely enjoys programming, plays video games, and whose favorite film is Star Wars) serves to deter women’s interest in the pursuit of a computer science career. Yet when STEM careers are reframed as being in line with women’s interests (i.e. when women are shown that STEM careers can afford opportunities to pursue communal, prosocial goals\(^1\)), women’s interest in a STEM career is substantially boosted (Diekman, Clark, Johnston, & Brown, 2011). Thus, by framing STEM careers as less stereotypically masculine and more in line with women’s goals, educators and industry stakeholders alike may powerfully increase women’s interest in a STEM career.

Conclusion

Understanding the factors that contribute to a culture of exclusion for women in STEM is necessary if we wish to address the ongoing gender disparity that exists across the STEM fields. In this piece, I have outlined three key factors that contribute to a culture of exclusion for women in STEM at each stage of their careers. These factors include 1) an unwelcoming social climate, 2) implicit and explicit forms of gender bias, and 3) masculine stereotypes about the STEM fields. Although I describe these factors as separate entities, there is a considerable amount of interplay between them: for instance, among female engineers, the effects of gender bias are largely dependent on the quality of the social

\(^1\) Past work has empirically confirmed that women endorse communal, prosocial goals to a greater degree than their male counterparts (Diekman, Brown, Johnston, & Clark, 2010)
climate (Hall, Schmader, & Croft, 2015). Together, these factors interact to create a “chilly climate” (Blickenstaff, 2005) for women in STEM. I have also reviewed ways in which we may address each of these facets in order to promote an inclusive culture for women in STEM. The impetus for this change does not come from any one specific entity, but rather must involve a constellation of efforts from individuals, organizations, and institutions. By taking steps toward this end, I suggest that we may begin repairing the leaky pipeline and facilitating women’s achievement and retention in the STEM industry.

Author: Audrey Aday
References


Coast Salish Methodology and Interdisciplinary Research

The Coast Salish formal introduction is the verbal protocol by which Coast Salish individuals have traditionally communicated information about themselves to people previously unknown to them, particularly at public gatherings and ceremonies. The standard formal introduction is self-referential, and includes the name, tribal affiliation, geographic origin, and a description of aspects of the lived experience of the speaker. Today, Coast Salish individuals often deliver a formal introduction in a Coast Salish language or dialect, followed by a translation thereof into English.

In the modern era, the formal introduction also represents an anti-racist and anti-colonial assertion of Coast Salish sovereignty, title, and rights to traditional Coast Salish territory. The use of the formal introduction in this manner emerged in the 1960s with the rise of equal rights movements like the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the National Indian Brotherhood in Canada. Coast Salish peoples also use the formal introduction to acquaint non-First Nations people with the concept of asserting title and rights through oratory performance, a practice that precedes the existence of the settler-Canadian judicial system.

The formal introduction signals a challenge to the structural racism and colonialism of a settler society has long sought to exclude or erase Indigenous institutions from the spaces over which it presides. It also constitutes a distinct form of culturally-situated knowledge with deep roots in Coast Salish history.

National sovereignty is an originally Western model for delineating nation-state boundaries, citizenship, and governance systems, the prototype for which was established in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. However, sovereignty has a second meaning in the context of relations between the Canadian settler state and Indigenous peoples. Canada deemed itself a sovereign country on September 1, 1867. But the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples was a formal precondition for that event. Without treaties and other formal and informal accords between the Crown and sovereign Indigenous nations, there would be no legal basis for Canada’s existence.
In the context of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, sovereignty (for lack of a better term) is a system for allocating access to territory amongst family, tribes, and First Nations. The Coast Salish formal introduction provides a glimpse into the form and function of Indigenous sovereignty prior to first contact between Coast Salish peoples and European settlers.

The formal introduction was historically used on occasions when different families from the same tribe, neighbouring tribes, or nations gathered together to discuss political, economic, and cultural affairs. Prior to the establishment of Canada, the Coast Salish formal introduction would sometimes last several days or weeks. The oratory exercise may be abbreviated today, but it is nonetheless important.

I regard the formal introduction as a counter-memory to a colonial-settler imaginary which seeks to subvert Coast Salish sovereignty in order to extend, entrench, and maintain settler socio-political structures. A Coast Salish formal introduction defies settler-imposed political boundaries demarcating Indian reserves within the nation-state of Canada, the province of British Columbia, the municipalities of Vancouver and Vancouver Island, and the U.S. state of Washington. Through a Coast Salish formal introduction, both First Nations and non-First Nations people have an opportunity to learn about the diversity of Coast Salish First Nations, tribes, and kinship networks.

The incorporation of a Coast Salish formal introduction into interdisciplinary research in Coast Salish territory challenges researchers to adopt an anti-racist moral stance, regardless of their disciplinary commitments. A Coast Salish formal introduction is itself an interdisciplinary practice. As is the case with interdisciplinary research itself, there is no single, fixed method of introduction. There are over 50 First Nations in British Columbia and over 100 tribes. A researcher could spend her entire academic career studying the diversity of formal Coast Salish introductions. One benefit of such research, hypothetically, is that it could help raise awareness of how racism is perpetuated in academic institutions, and how the sovereignty of Coast Salish people is subverted through the erasure of Coast Salish social-geographic histories.
I will spend the remainder of the article examining the various components of one example of a Coast Salish formal introduction—my own. These components reveal the genealogical, social, and political connections among family, tribe, and nation.

By explicating the individual parts of the formal introduction, I will also uncover its dialectical attributes. In the words of Marxist geographer David Harvey, “Dialectics restructures our thinking about reality by replacing the common sense notion of ‘thing,’ as something that has a history and has external connections with other things, with notions of ‘process,’ which contains its history and possible futures, and ‘relation,’ which contains as part of what it is its ties with other relations” (1996, p. 48). An examination of the dialectical attributes of the formal introduction will bring to the fore the complex knowledge encompassed within the performance of Coast Salish oral history.

A Coast Salish formal introduction offers researchers and research subjects an avenue by which to become active participants in the Coast Salish community. Through exposure to the formal introduction, they are able to glean a more nuanced understanding of the role of Coast Salish tribes within the broader Coast Salish First Nation. In my interpretation, the relationship of the First Nation to its constituent tribes is roughly analogous to that between Canada and its provinces and territories.

The Coast Salish share Vancouver Island with two other First Nations, the Nuu-Chah-nulth and the Kwakwaka’wakw. The Nuu-chah-nulth live along the western portion of Vancouver Island, and their territory intersects with that of the Kwakwaka’wakw in Campbell River. The Kwakwaka’wakw inhabit the northern portion of the island.

**Examining my own Coast Salish formal introduction**

What follows is my own traditional Coast Salish formal introduction—in the Hul’qumi’num language—transliterated into Latin script. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will translate the text into English and offer some analysis of its components:


English Translation:

Respected ones, thank you. I would like to acknowledge the traditional territory. I would like to acknowledge the local tribes – the people of Musqueam – the people who are in the area closest to us. I thank all of you. Being as one, one thought, one mind. I would like to acknowledge my family, my family from Musqueam, Squamish, and my family from the Kwakwaka’wakw nation and the Nuu-chah-nulth nation. Being as one thought, one mind, Squamish. Those who are thinking from one mind. Here on the land. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional territory of Hwlitsum, Katzie, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Matsqui, Qayqayt, Semiahmoo, Tsawassen, and Tseil’watuth First Nations occupied by the Vancouver municipality, the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada.

My English Name is Rocky James. I am from the Coast Salish Nation. I am a member of the Penelakut Tribes, located around central Vancouver Island.

First, “A-a-a Siiem Huy’tseep qu’ kwu tst hwu l’ ‘u tun’a tumuhws,” which I translate as “I would like to acknowledge the traditional territory,” juxtaposes the settler geographic imaginary and the Coast Salish imaginary. This statement brings awareness to the ongoing and unresolved colonial struggle between Indigenous peoples and the settler state and society in British Columbia. The settler imaginary superimposes itself over Coast Salish territory by presenting itself as the sovereign authority that adjudicates who lives where,
who has access to natural resources, and what can be done with those natural resources. By contrast, a Coast Salish formal introduction acknowledges that there are still multiple Coast Salish tribes asserting their sovereignty, both as individual tribes and as constituents of the larger Coast Salish nation.

Second, “Huy’tseep qu’ Hwulmuhw Mustimuhws. Tu Hwmuthqwi’um – Tu Mustimuhw Sh’tunu’xuns: I would like to acknowledge the local tribes – the people of Musqueam – the people who are in the area closest to us. I thank all of you.” As a Penelakut Tribes member of the Coast Salish Nation, I must acknowledge that I am in Musqueam traditional territory. This is not merely a diplomatic gesture, but also a recognition of my kinship ties to the Musqueam people. (I have second and third cousins in the Musqueam tribe.) I affirm the relationship between the Penelakut Tribes and the Musqueam as I explain who I am and where I come from, and acknowledge the Musqueam tribe. The formal introduction involves a recognition of mutual being.

Third, “Huy’tseep qu’ ts’ii ‘a ‘talu tsun. Nu (s)ts-lhnuts’umat – I would like to acknowledge the nation, the Coast Salish Nation.” This statement de-centres Eurocentric and mainstream Canadian conceptions of social and political geography by asserting the sovereignty of a First Nation—in this case, the Coast Salish First Nation—over its traditional territory.

Mapping out traditional Coast Salish territory through the performance of oral history brings awareness to the size of the land over which the Coast Salish people assert title. Traditional Coast Salish territory on Vancouver Island runs from Campbell River down the centre of Vancouver Island into Victoria. On the mainland, titled land runs from south-central British Columbia down along the coast of Washington State. Canada, the U.S., and the Coast Salish First Nation overlap each other’s ostensible political boundaries. I have strong family ties on both sides of the settler (Canada-U.S.) border. Thus, my Coast Salish heritage conflicts with Canadian and American political geography, particularly the respective countries’ notions of national sovereignty and boundaries.
Fourth, “Nu sts ’lh Hwulmuhw, nu siiyeyu, Siiem. Hwumuthwei’um Mustimuhw ‘utl’. Nu (s)ts’ Ihnutsumat tuni Sq’xwamush. (S)ts-Ihnutsumat tuni ‘utl Kwakwaka’wakw: I would like to acknowledge my family, my family from the Musqueam, the Squamish, the Kwakwaka’wakw nation and the Nuu-chah-nulth nation.” As the formal introduction progresses, Indigenous nationalism emerges as central to being, where 'being' in this instance involves consciousness of self, family, tribe, and nation.

By acknowledging this social geography, one signals to other Indigenous audience members that one has committed time and effort to learning the oral history of one’s family, tribe, and nation. For non-Coast Salish Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people alike, taking the time to learn about and appreciate the significance of the Coast Salish formal introduction is an act of support for Coast Salish nationalism, an act beyond simple lip service. Indeed, it may form one aspect of a broader commitment to the decolonization of Coast Salish territory.

Nenad Miscevic, a contemporary philosopher who specializes in the study of nationalism, writes: “The term ‘nationalism’ is generally used to describe two phenomena: (1) the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity, and (2) the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve (or sustain) self-determination” (2010). In relation to this conception of nationalism, the formal introduction can be thought of as a practice of asserting one’s identity as a member of both a Coast Salish tribe and the Coast Salish nation.

To understand the relationship between Canada and the Coast Salish peoples, one must appreciate that the Coast Salish Nation is an entirely distinct entity from Canada. The Canadian settler nation-state is merely a political imaginary superimposed onto Coast Salish consciousness and traditional territory. Moreover, the state has long sought to erase Coast Salish sovereignty so as to entrench its own hegemonic power, and remove obstacles to the exclusive political authority of Canadian governments over the territory they deem Canada. The physical erasure of indigeneity, numerous attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples into mainstream Canadian society, and the ongoing marginalization of Coast Salish
decision-making powers and self-determination at both individual and collective levels, are all facets of this strategy.

The performance of a formal introduction suggests that the one who is making it is aware of the tension between Coast Salish peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. This tension is partly attributable to settler-colonial racism, but is also rooted in a conflict over space and authority. Ironically, although Canada's national sovereignty is historically conditioned on that of Indigenous peoples, the very existence of Canada as we know it depends on the continued displacement of Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories.

Thus, the statement “I would like to acknowledge my family, my family from Musqueam, Squamish, the Kwakwaka’wakw Nation and the Nuu-chah-nulth Nation” is a radical and decolonizing acknowledgment that all three First Nations still exist as sovereign political entities, separate and distinct from Canada.

(S) ts – lnutsumat – The Family as a Political Body

A Coast Salish child’s first experience of relationships in tribal and First Nations settings occurs at the level of family. In The Ecology of Human Development, developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner introduces the concept of ecological transitions, which he defines as “shifts in roles or setting, which occur throughout the life-span. Examples of ecological transitions include the arrival of a younger sibling, entry into preschool or school...graduating, finding a job, marrying, having a child, changing jobs, moving, and retiring.” In Coast Salish families, each of these ecological transitions is guided by family oral histories. The family thus can be interpreted as the embodiment of Coast Salish oral history.

As Bronfenbrenner explains, one of the basic units of analysis is the dyad, or two-person relationship—for example, that between a mother and a child. In an ideal Coast Salish mother-child relationship, the mother assumes responsibility for conveying a Coast Salish family’s oral history to the child. As a Coast Salish child matures and becomes increasingly involved in social settings outside of the home, whether it be school or
ceremony - or those occasions when the scholastic and ceremonial spheres intersect – she experiences development in a multilayered fashion, embodying the Coast Salish past, present, and future.

The developmental outcome of the child's entry into a new environment is informed by the oral history endowed by the parent. First, the parent prepares the child to enter a new environment, drawing on the wisdom embodied in Coast Salish oral history. Oral histories may contain lessons about identity, rules for social interaction such as how to deal with conflict, or the heightened sense of self that an awareness of tribal histories provides.

The child thus enters an environment informed by the worldview of the parent. The information the child retains about oral history then influences her interactions with others. The child exits that environment with questions about her experiences and seeks further guidance, which results in further interaction with Coast Salish oral history.

As the parent in the dyad engages the questions the child brings from her new environment, oral history becomes reflexive. The parent recalls how her own parents used oral history to prepare her for a transition into a new environment, and draws insight from her own lived experience. By assuming the threefold role of parent, teacher, and elder, the dyadic parent also continues a learning process of her own. Through these shared educational experiences, a Coast Salish child learns to comprehend social context, aided by the world view of her family, which comprehends diverse oral histories. This process extends to her interactions with her own culture, community, scholastic environment, and various other individuals and institutions.

As a student and aspiring social policy practitioner, I recognize the extent to which these cultural teachings inform my personal interactions with family, community, tribe, and both First Nation and non-First Nation people, which is why a formal introduction is so important in public forums. A formal Coast Salish introduction identifies me as a Coast Salish person, with inherent rights and title to Coast Salish territory. I assert the past, present, and future title of Coast Salish sovereignty through a formal introduction, which is also an expression of interdisciplinary research practice, firmly grounded in my identity.
As a Coast Salish advocate for queer indigenous theory, I synthesize Bronfenbrenner’s ecological transitions with First Nations oral history as a framework for interpreting the social context of Indigenous gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (GLBTQI) individuals. In conjunction with a formal introduction in public forums, I can simultaneously assert Coast Salish sovereignty while creating space for queer Indigenous activism in different settings. The incorporation of queer Indigenous theory into a formal Coast Salish introduction is a work in progress and beyond the scope of this article. I intend to elaborate that analysis in my future endeavours.

For now, however, I must emphasize the importance of addressing and challenging heteronormativity in queer Indigenous research, journal articles and Coast Salish formal introductions. Heteronormativity oppresses Indigenous GLBTQI people in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous settings. The assertion of western heteronormativity as the norm situates other sexual identities as marginal and non-normative.

In conclusion, a Coast Salish formal introduction, as a tool of decolonization, disrupts non-Indigenous social geographies by making transparent the ways in which settler imaginaries conflict with Indigenous imaginaries. A formal introduction performed outside the context of an exclusively Coast Salish environment takes on new meaning. It becomes a re-assertion of Coast Salish sovereignty, in contradistinction with the sovereignty of Canada.

The formal introduction that appears in this article is an anti-racist performance. It explicitly draws awareness to the fact that the University of British Columbia is on unceded Coast Salish territory. For its part, the university's administration officially acknowledges that the institution sits on Musqueam traditional territory.

This is a good start, but it is also a superficial form of recognition. The Musqueam people hold title to this tract of land. But the Musqueam tribe is only a subgroup of the larger Coast Salish nation, and a broad kinship network.

Finally, I would challenge University of British Columbia faculty journals to avoid implicitly condoning the colonization of Coast Salish territory and people by failing to
integrate Coast Salish ways of knowing into academic peer-review processes. Ideally, these journals would instead acknowledge the sovereignty of the Coast Salish nation in the foreword of each publication, and actively contribute to both a mutually beneficial relationship between Coast Salish and non-Coast Salish peoples, and a shared body of knowledge. Together, these efforts would help develop and sustain a nuanced anti-colonial academic praxis. This paradigm would also bring settler Canadians face-to-face with the Coast Salish people, and compel non-Coast Salish people to confront the heteronormative settler Canadian imaginaries that perpetuate hegemonic power and erasure.

Author: Rocky James
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Press.


Subverting dominant ideologies of the cinematic apparatus; The Mbya-Guarani Cinema Collective transforms digital optics

“Western Science, whose birth coincides exactly with the development of the optical apparatus which will have as a consequence the decentering of the human universe, the end of geocentrism (Galileo).”

Film history began in the 1890s with the advent of the motion picture camera. The medium of film itself represents the incorporation of many forms into a single art, known as the seventh art. The first six arts were described by the German philosopher, Hegel, in his “lectures on aesthetics” (which he held from 1818 to 1829 in Heidelberg and in Berlin). The Italian film theoretician Ricciotto Canudo gave currency to the term “seventh art” in a manifesto published in 1919, in which he argues that cinema synthesized the spatial arts (architecture, sculpture, and painting) with the temporal arts (music, poetry, and dance). When Canudo wrote his manifesto, film was a new medium, black and white and silent.

Since its origin in the nineteenth century, cinema has become an industry, an art form, and a field of study. The intervening decades have brought a proliferation in the diversity of forms, genres, aesthetics, ideologies, histories, theories, and philosophies represented in film. The advancement of digital film technology today affords us the opportunity to discuss how the promise and possibility of the seventh art have been democratized and pluralized. Considering the continuum of oral and textual media, and the power shifts that attend the transition from oral to textual, and by extension, analogue to digital, film as an art form and video as a technology effectively transfer the power of oral and visual media into the hands of storytellers. In this article, I focus on this democratization within the context of contemporary Indigenous film and video in Brazil.

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2 Ricciotto Canudo initially wrote “Towards an Archeology of Film Theory: The Birth of the Sixth Art” in 1911 after architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry; later he added dance making cinema the 7th art.
3 Transcripts of his lectures have been translated and included in various publications.
Brazil’s interconnected political and cinematic history bears witness to and strengthens the struggle of Indigenous peoples in the face of (neo)colonial state violence. Rooted in this tradition, my research focus is on the cinema produced at Video in the Villages—a non-governmental organization that has created an important body of films and incubated and launched a rising generation of Brazilian Indigenous filmmakers. Operating over the last thirty years (1987-2017), Vídeo nas aldeias in Portuguese, Video in the Villages in English, or VNA henceforth, is currently located in Olinda, in the state of Pernambuco, in Brazil’s northeast. VNA’s original archive of films and videos on and by Indigenous (and by non-Indigenous) peoples in Brazil includes more than ninety films that have aired and premiered internationally at film festivals and movie theatres. Interestingly, VNA’s work recently premiered in the art world; it was on display during the São Paulo biennial 2016. This exhibition of VNA’s work in a contemporary art context created new possibilities for the categorization of VNA productions, aside from ethnographic documentary, activist video, or even “Indian film”.

The late 1960s adoption in Brazil of video technology that had recently been introduced to the consumer market by Japanese electronics companies (Machado 1996) made the South American country a video pioneer. Due to the cost effectiveness of video technology, and the fact that Brazil is a television-centred nation (Machado 225), different independent groups quickly adopted this technology for their own purposes—cultural, political, and artistic. “Here was the birthplace of video art, an aesthetic at first limited to the universe of fine arts, whose only exhibition space was the sophisticated circuit of museums and galleries” (Machado 226). Non-profit groups, such as VNA, also seized on this cost-effective technology to pursue their own political and cultural agendas through video production. Although video art has transcended the walls of elitist galleries and museums in recent decades, VNA’s installation at the Sao Paolo biennial in 2016 is a unique instance of video production that had operated and evolved outside the contemporary art scene, being shown in a pavilion designed by Oscar Niemeyer specifically for the biennial and an art-going public.
Founded by the Franco-Brazilian activist and filmmaker, Vincent Carelli, VNA is an innovative project that emerged out of Carelli’s work at the non-governmental organization Centro de Trabalho Indigenista (Indigenous Labour Centre), an organization he co-founded with other activists and anthropologists after he became disillusioned with the state paternalism he witnessed while working at the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI). VNA, like the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista, is a political project that supports the Indigenous struggle by strengthening cultural and territorial identities and heritages with the use of audio-visual resources within Indigenous communities. In 1986, the year Brazil’s military dictatorship came to an end, Carelli conducted an experiment in the course of his work for the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista: he filmed the Indigenous Nambiquara community and showed its members the footage. This self-reflexive experience, in which the Nambiquara saw themselves on a screen for the first time, generated a collective mobilization whereby the Nambiquara become critical of western influence as embodied in the medium of film. One of the community members, Pedro Mâmâindê, decided to become involved in the filming process, and thus initiated Indigenous participation in film production.

The experience awakened Carelli to the power of video and the collective image. VNA started making films with Indigenous participation and then eventually became a film school for Indigenous filmmakers. The first video workshops to train a future generation of Indigenous filmmakers took place in 1997 in the Xavante de Sangradouro village in the Mato Grosso region. Today, VNA celebrates its thirty-year history with the various communities that have become stakeholders in VNA’s vision and films (Indigenous groups, activists, scholars, journalists, film critics, students, and supporters), all of whom are now able to discuss and promote the films, filmmakers, and cinematic trends, and clarify the distinctions between the increasingly diverse genres and aesthetics of Brazilian Indigenous cinema.

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4 English: Indigenist Labour Centre (author’s translation).
5 Vincent Carelli cited in Vídeo nas aldeias 25 year catalogue, p.46.
6 Cited in VNA’s 25 year catalogue, p.46.
By Indigenous cinema, I refer to films and videos of which Indigenous directors, editors, producers, and collaborators have played an integral role in the production process. Indigenous films and videos are as varied as Indigenous life itself. As Faye Ginsburg (1994, 366), a social anthropologist specializing in Indigenous media, puts it: “Such works are inherently complex cultural objects, as they cross multiple cultural boundaries in their production, distribution, and consumption.” In the case of VNA, there has been a range of involvement and collaboration from non-Indigenous filmmakers over the years, which hinders attempts at simplified, essentialized, or fetishized analyses of the films, on the basis of ethnic identity. Ginsburg (1991, 92) defines Indigenous media as “a variety of media, including film and video, as new vehicles for internal communication, for self-determination, and for resistance to outside cultural domination.”

Certainly, the term “Indigenous” represents an unstable category, encompassing diverse societies, cosmologies, cultures, languages, geographies, histories, and knowledge systems. In reference to people and communities, the descriptor “Indigenous” also tends to reduce and homogenize complex notions of identity. For the purposes of this article, I employ the term in its global sense, to describe individuals, communities, and groups of people who self-identify as Indigenous and tend to share certain characteristics—including “historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; [a] strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic or political systems; distinct language, culture and beliefs; [the tendency to] form non-dominant groups of society; and [a] resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.”

It is no easy task to establish a working definition of “Indigenous peoples”, in view of the tremendous diversity this category necessarily comprises. For guidance, I quote Sami scholar, Rauna Kuokkanen (2007):

I recognize that Indigenous peoples are not homogenous even internally and that their cultures, histories, and socio-economic circumstances are not the same. Having said that, I point out that underpinning these apparent

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These characteristics have been enumerated by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.
differences is a set of shared perceptions of the world – perceptions relating to cultural and social practices and discourses that are driven by an intimate relationship with the natural environment. Indigenous people share a number of experiences related to being colonized and marginalized by dominant societies.

Brazil has a relatively small Indigenous minority—896,917 people, or 0.47 percent of its population self-identified as Indigenous in a 2010 census. Compare this to pluralities and majorities that exist in other Latin American countries, such as Bolivia (41%), Guatemala (60%), Ecuador (60.3%), and Mexico (15.1%)\(^8\). However, of particular interest in Brazil is the remarkable cultural and linguistic diversity of the Indigenous cohort, comprising 305 different ethnic groups and at least 274 languages. That is nearly double the number of native languages in all of Europe—140, according to a study by the Institute of European History in 2011.\(^9\)

I propose that VNA participates in the politicization of Latin America’s Indigenous movements through “visual sovereignty” as exemplified in the films of VNA. Programs like VNA in Brazil, which have produced films with and by over 40 Indigenous ethnic groups, are part of larger Latin American, pan-Indigenous movements that demand new forms of representation, political autonomy, and multicultural recognition through film and video.

As part of my filmic analysis and interpretation, I employ visual sovereignty as an overarching concept to think through how filmmakers construct and present dominant themes of self-determination, sovereignty, identity, culture, tradition, colonial legacies and political resistance. While the Oxford online dictionary’s first definition of sovereignty is “Supreme power or authority: ‘the sovereignty of Parliament’,” Indigenous notions of sovereignty emphasize the power embodied in the inseparability of the people from their land: “our sovereignty is based on our spiritual relation with Mother Earth, whom we

recognize as a point of meeting with the supreme creator and the source of life.” This Latin American articulation of Indigenous sovereignty echoes its counterparts among the First Peoples of Turtle Island: “Haudenosaunee political structure may be the oldest continuously operating governmental system in the world and arises out of the consciousness that it is the renewable quality of the earth's ecosystems that sustains life.” (Rickard 2011, 469).

In an interview I carried out last December with Patricia Ferreira, one of the filmmakers from the Mbya-Guarani Cinema Collective, and one who was trained by VNA, she explained that she and her fellow filmmakers would think of the camera itself as a Guarani person. By personifying the camera and reconceiving it as a Guarani entity, the filmmakers imbue it with sovereign cultural, spiritual, and social potential. In the opening quote by Baudry, we see how the apparatus itself (not the content), in this case a digital camera as a technological evolution of the film camera, is an instrument of dominant ideology. “Thus the cinema assumes the role played throughout Western history by various artistic formations. The ideology of representation (as a principal axis orienting the notion of aesthetic ‘creation’) and specularization ... form a singularly coherent system in cinema” (Baudry 1975, 46). Here, Baudry elaborates how the seventh art has taken from western conventions of painting to inform and define the grammar of cinema. “The dimensions of the image itself, the ratio between height and width, seem clearly taken from an average drawn from Western easel painting” (Baudry, 41).

The transformation of the apparatus into a Guarani person subverts the ideology of representation. The apparatus becomes “a vector of human experience in its immediacy,” (Badiou 2010, 6), a vector of a dynamic and evolving process of construction of Mbya-Guarani identity, tradition, culture, collectivity, community, politics, history, and geography – in short, a part of the oral-performative-visual semiotics of Mbya-Guarani knowledge production. In this way, Indigenous cinema and the films of the Mbya-Guarani Cinema Collective counter static conceptions of culture and indigeneity as frozen in time; through

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11 Cited in “Cultural Survival”, an organization that advocates for Indigenous rights. This is a quote from an article on their webpage titled: “Indigenous Sovereignty: the Ecuadorian Perspective.”
their art form, the Mbya-Guarani filmmakers actively perform, create, and transform culture and indigeneity. The Mbya-Guarani Cinema Collective, which formed in 2008, has authored five films to date.¹²

In the forty-first minute of the film Tava, The House of Stone (Ortega et al., 2012), Ariel Duarte, one of the first VNA-trained filmmakers from the Mbya-Guarani community, explains: “In 2007 we began to make videos for the Guarani cause. They weren’t like the videos made by the whites. We always wanted to show our sacred journey, who built the Tava, to understand why the Guarani have no land anymore and why life is so difficult…” Authored by two Indigenous and two non-Indigenous filmmakers, Tava is a prime example of a film that defies essentialist, reductionist or fetishized analyses of its “Indigenous” qualities, while highlighting film as a hybrid art form. In the case of the Mbya-Guarani filmic repertoire, oral history, spirituality, politics, and notions of time are transmitted through digital optics and sound engineering in a collaborative and collectively accountable process.

Tava, like all of the Mbya-Guarani films, features strong spiritual and political undertones as it tells the story of seventeenth-century Jesuit missions in Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, and in so doing, reveals hidden or suppressed historical truths from an Indigenous point of view. According to official (non-Indigenous) history, the Guarani abandoned their beliefs and converted to Christianity under the tutelage of the Jesuit priests. The films by the Mbya-Guarani Cinema Collective presents evidence to the contrary of this claim, through a lens that bears witness to the continuity of oral histories and contemporary practices of ancient Mbya-Guarani belief systems.

Roland Joffé’s 1986 film, The Mission, which features renowned actors Robert DeNiro and Jeremy Irons, won top prizes at Cannes, and was nominated for a best film Oscar, idealizes the role of the Jesuit priests as protectors, guardians, and educators of the Guarani in the face of the demonized, colonizing Portuguese and Spanish slave traders.

Indeed, the violence of the Europeans to destroy Indigenous culture was, by all accounts, brutal; the dramatization of the 1756 Guarani war in the film The Mission masterfully depicts this appalling history. However, the Jesuit missions were not exactly havens of safety and uccor for the Guarani; in fact, these missions contributed in their own way to the cultural genocide of Brazilian Indigenous peoples. The conquest, combined with a century and a half of Jesuit missionary activities, severed the Guarani from their traditional society. “It is too often forgotten how radical an upheaval of the traditional society accompanied the new order imposed by the Jesuits: the shape of the village and its houses, daily activities, economy, parentage systems, intertribal relations; everything was transformed” (Clastres, 1975, p.5).

VNA-produced films, such as Tava, provide insight into present-day Mbya-Guarani life, their resilience, their living culture and spirituality, and their profound awareness of their past, present, and future. In a manner indicative of the acute awareness among the Guarani and Indigenous people in general about the dominant history and media produced about them, the whole film employs a strikingly self-reflexive aesthetic. For example, there is a scene in which Guarani people watch and react to a screening of The Mission. The Mbya-Guarani filmmakers often appear on camera, to discuss aspects of the film and convey their intentions to their fellow Guarani subjects. We also watch them as they wander through historical sites and hear “official” accounts of history.

The ruins of the Jesuit missions are important symbolic and historical landmarks for the Guarani, but they have also become popular destinations for tourists. The Guarani are unable to enter parts of their traditional territories where the ruins have been earmarked for tourism. The non-Indigenous custodians of these sites, while claiming to present objective, factual historical accounts, generally exclude the Mbya-Guarani perspective from the narrative.

In contrast with the filmic and photographic practices of tourists at the ruins, the filmmakers actively seek consent and feedback from the rightful stewards of Guarani traditional territory and culture in an immersive, collaborative process. As the filmmakers
record, they are simultaneously subjects of video recorded by others. Characters in Tava record the filmmakers with cellphone cameras, as part of a discursive and dialogic approach that expresses and asserts aesthetic principles that guide their cinematic framework, a framework that invites reciprocity and self-reflection. In an earlier scene, Ariel Duarte says to an Elder (at 21:40): “We also came to ask about the ruins, Tava Mirim. So far the story has been told by the whites and we wish to know the Mbya-Guarani version. The story that prevails even today is the one that the whites wrote. They say we don’t have rights to the place. That we were not the ones who built the ruins.” Duarte performs a politics of identity that seeks to present a Mbya-Guarani perspective as a means to discourse with and empower his Mbya-Guarani community, while also dispelling national myths that persist within the collective consciousness of the broader non- Indigenous community.

We learn that the impressive stone Tavas, comparable in scale to the Egyptian pyramids, were built with Mbya-Guarani labour. The filmmakers journey across their traditional territories, as did their ancestors, in search of the Land-Without-Evil13; this time, the young Guarani filmmakers take this spiritual journey to speak with Elders and other tribal members in order to uncover the true history behind their sacred Tavas and territories. We also witness the intergenerational passing on of the real history behind the Tavas and their meaning to the Guarani. The apparatus, transformed into a Guarani lens, elicits this answer from an Elder: “Since you are filming, I shall tell the trut

Fittingly, it is this pivotal moment which embodies the decolonization of the apparatus. In the eyes of the Guarani, the camera is imbued with personhood, and thus can never be neutral nor objective. This conception subverts western science and digital optics into evolving collective human consciousness. In this pivotal moment of visual sovereignty in the seventh art, the apparatus transformed into a Mbya-Guarani entity becomes a storyteller. This growing trend for Indigenous peoples to employ technologies as a form of

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13 According to Hélène Clastres, the French anthropologist, The Land-Without-Evil is the “land where everything is abundantly produced without any labour, where one enjoys perpetual youth…” p.37. (The Land-Without-Evil: Tupi- Guarani Prophetism.)
storytelling, representation, and political activism, promotes an anticolonial gaze, one that counters the racist, sexist stereotypes and misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples in the film and media of the dominant society, and also counters discrimination and oppression within Indigenous nation-states. The appropriation of technology for media production by Indigenous agents thus becomes a conduit for transmitting knowledge, and disseminating culture, social consciousness, and social memory—all of which contribute to the notion of “visual sovereignty.” In openly rejecting the presumed neutrality of the optical machine and the notion of objectivity that undergirds much of Western science, the filmmakers assert power and authority of their own. The digitally revolutionized Mbya-Guarani storyteller exemplifies a rising consciousness in the democratization of film and video through a plurality of subjectivities, epistemologies, and ontologies.

Author: Sarah Shamash
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Filmography


Youth Homelessness and Available Resources: Country Comparison between Brazil and Canada

Introduction

Despite the adoption of Neo-liberal policies in Canada and Brazil, there have been different outcomes in the incidence of poverty reduction in the two countries, particularly resulting in homelessness among youth. In theory, Neo-liberalism posits the establishment of free markets would "trickle down" wealth and eradicate poverty (Harvey 64 - 65). However, Neo-liberalism favors the deregulation and privatization of basic public services, such as education, health, and welfare, which can generate economic and social inequality when the only focus is on trade and profit generation (Harvey 72; Polanyi 37, 206). It is because the adoption of Neo-liberalism, in respect to social services, reduces the social safety net and can attribute a person's failure to their own doing rather than systemic barriers, such as class exclusions (Harvey 66). In Brazil, Neo-liberal policies resulted in "modest growth rates, a chronic current account deficit, widespread job losses, and a stalling of poverty reduction," thus causing Brazil to reject Neo-liberal polices in regards to social spending so as to negate said consequences (Shmalz and Ebenau 491). However, in Canada an opposite trend has occurred. A decrease in welfare measures, such as affordable housing and social assistance, are subtle ways in which the Neo-liberal framework has eradicated the safety net for impoverished youth (Karabanow 142). However, rising economic inequality highlights otherwise as substantiated by Oxfam Wealth Inequality report, which states, “eight men own the same wealth as the poorest half of the world” (Oxfam 1). For example, in Canada between 1999 and 2012, for the bottom income quintile net worth increased by 38 per cent, whereas for families in the top income quintile net worth increased by 80 per cent (Statistics).

Homeless youths between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four is a growing portion of the homeless population in Canada (Karabanow, Carson, and Clement 9). Due to neo-liberal practices, youth have access to less resources that will allow them to contribute productively in the economy (Karabanow, Carson, and Clement 9). In contrast, although Brazil still faces high-income inequality, since the 1990s these levels have reduced because
of increased social spending on education and health care (Stiglitz 5). Statistics on the estimate of homeless youths in Brazil are unreliable because they were inflated in the 1990’s, however witnesses report a noticeable reduction in the presence of homeless youths (Hunter and Sugiyama 835). In regards to the construction of poverty, Amartya Sen explains famine results not from a lack of resources, but from the market mechanism that allocates the resources available to suit the needs of those with entitlement (qtd in, Stewart 2 - 3). There is a moral obligation to assist youth who live in poverty, and it is a political choice to not effectively assist them (Stiglitz 17). In this context, the intent of our study was to research how the adoption of neo-liberal policies has impacted homeless youth in Recife, Brazil and Vancouver, Canada.

We hypothesized that the deregulation of social services would negatively impact homeless youth in both Recife and Vancouver. We specifically analyzed preventive social services available to homeless youth as means of helping them leave the streets. We outlined our research methodology below followed by a description of the services available to homeless youth in Recife, and the social services available to the general Brazilian population. We also described the services available to homeless youth in Vancouver followed by describing the social services available to the general British Columbian population.

Methodology:

We¹ conducted a qualitative analysis of data collected through a phone interview and a review of literature. Our phone interview occurred in June 2016, which we later transcribed. Our interviewee was a veteran in the Canadian social service sector and was based out of Vancouver and. The interviewee provided instrumental and supplemental information specifically on the issues homeless youth may face in Vancouver. We conducted our literature review on the social services in both Recife, Brazil, and Vancouver.

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Additionally, we gathered articles and books through several online databases using key words that related to homeless youth.

**Literature Review of Brazil:**

Despite the fact that Brazilian Federal Government follows neo-liberal policies, in the country’s impoverished areas, as a Recife, the federal government works in conjunctions with the provincial government to implement a comprehensive program. It implements measures and services to address multiple needs youths may face including housing, education, and counseling, and these have proved to be successful to assist youth in transitioning back into the community. In fact, since the 1980’s the Brazilian government sensitized the non-government sector to assist street youth (Hecht 149). Casa de Passagem was one of the first organizations that emerged out of this facilitation to work with homeless youths (Passage). A program offered by the organization, Passage to Life, directed girls between seven and seventeen years of age, who were survivors of domestic violence (Passage). This program provided numerous services including recreational activities, and computer skills education (Passage). Girls also receive assistance in transitioning into the public school system (Passage). The organization, Grupo Ruas e Pracas, worked with homeless youth for several decades while providing comprehensive services and focusing on the reasons youths entered the streets, such as poverty or abuse (Schwinger 803). These services included or involved the families in the process. For example, in receiving counseling, as a means of reintegrating youths into the community (Schwinger 803).

Researchers including Melissa Harris (Harris et al. 729) has identified these programs as a success. For example, according to these researchers, Associacao Promocional Oracao e Trabalho (APOT) was designed to treat substance abuse among homeless youths and assist them in transitioning into the community (Harris et al. 729). Youths enrolled in the program received housing and trainings to acquire basic skills required for future employment (Harris et al. 729-730). Ultimately, these services managed to reintegrate fifty-six percent of homeless youths into the community upon completion (Harris et al. 729). A high percentage of youth in the program that were not
assisted by these measures, indicated the consideration to keep the programs running for a longer tenure.

We also found that services that assist homeless youth in Brazil do not simply focus on crisis management, but also offers prevention measures. This insight complements Brazilian government’s mandate to prevent youth homelessness by increasing access to social programs among the general population, especially among the lower classes. In the 1990’s, it was estimated 40 per cent of youths under the age of 14 lived on less than half a monthly minimum salary and were unable to attend school, with poverty as a factor that led them to the streets (Klees, Rizzini, and Dewees 83; Fernandes and Vaughn 671). A health care system was established by Hernando Henrique Cardaso, who was president between 1995 and 2003 (Auyero, Bourgois, and Scheper-Hughes 43). Health care services are provided directly to at risk homes (Auyero, Bourgois, and Scheper-Hughes 43). After President Lula was elected into office in 2003, social services were further extended (Schmalz and Ebaneau 492). Minimum wage was doubled to the benefit of the lower classes, and there was high economic growth (Schmalz and Ebenau 492). A Zero Hunger campaign funded by the government provides food to impoverished and single mothers to ensure their children are fed (Auyero, Bourgois, and Scheper-Hughes 44). Bolsa Familia, a government program that extends grants to families based on their socio-economic status to send their children to school, increases the opportunities available to impoverished youth (Hunter and Sugiyama 833). It was reported before the program children would commonly be seen on the streets begging for food because there was not enough food at home, whereas now it is rare (Hunter and Sugiyama 835). Thus, access to basic social services among the general population has increased in Brazil.

Literature Review of Vancouver:

In Vancouver there are comprehensive programs that directly assist homeless youth as well. The Covenant House has multiple programs that address short-term, and long-term needs of youths with various services including a place to stay, counseling, and assistance with maintaining an education and/or employment plan (Covenant). It is reported that 49 per cent of youth left their Crisis program with permanent residency (Covenant). The Inner
City Youth Mental Health Program is funded by the Ministry of Health, which offers six beds for homeless youth who want treatment for mental health/ addiction issues (*Providence*). Clients are typically able to stay for several months (*Providence*).

However, the provincial government, elected in 2001, decreased accessibility to welfare services, which adversely affected youth on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver because currently welfare payments are not enough for youth to live off of (Morrow, Frischmuth, and Johnson 7; Karabanow, Carson, and Clement 74). The provincial government has also increased funding for private schools, where students tend to come from families of a higher socioeconomic status; in comparison, funding from the government in the public school system has decreased (Shuetze et al. 66, 73-74). Activities perceived as non-essential by the government are then funded by the families. However, poor neighborhoods are not as capable of raising these funds (Shuetze et al. 76). Whilst these budget cuts were in progress within the public education system, youth with special needs were increasing in numbers (Schuetze et al. 66). Thus, there has been a decrease in funding for social services in British Columbia.

**Personal Interview:**

Our interviewee describes the necessity for measures that assist homeless youth to be comprehensive. As she indicates:

> Now for youth that are already out on the street level, there are youth shelters or halfway houses, of course there's not enough around. They are not always available. Drug addiction is a huge issue. Most youth can get into detox within a couple of days. The problem is after detox where do they go for treatment. Detox is the best first step, but if there isn’t any follow up it becomes a revolving door. So we need more treatment for youth with drug addiction. and available homes for them to be in.

Furthermore, our interviewee highlights the negative consequences of defunding the education system, that is:
A high percentage of the youth that are in care that are Aboriginal have special needs that need to be addressed in main stream schools, and with all the cuts to programs with the school districts those services are not there like they used to be and to help a youth transition into post-secondary, they need a stable home. How can you have a child that’s in school when they don’t know if they are going to be moved to their fifteenth home next week or which school they are going to be going to?

Considering the sectors of the population can be more susceptible to becoming homeless than others our interviewee further mentioned we need to increase investment in education, especially with parents around sexual orientation. It is because the LGBTQ youths run an increasing risk of becoming homeless. We also came to learn that the homeless rates under twenty-four on the streets of Vancouver has actually gone up. Among these, thirteen per cent of them are LGBTQ and thirty-eight percent are Aboriginal.

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<th>Canada</th>
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<td>Adoption of Neo-liberal policies</td>
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<td>Comprehensive programs are available (Covenant), however, drug detox centres and drug treatment are provided unevenly (key informant).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td>Expanded the health care system (Auyero, Bourgois, and Scheper-Hughes 43) ability to receive an education (Hunter and Sugiyama 833).</td>
<td>Reduced as a result of deregulation, and defunding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth homelessness</td>
<td>Statistics show a reduction in poverty (Stiglitz 5), and witnesses report a reduction in the presence of homeless youth on the streets (Hunter and Sugiyama 835).</td>
<td>Increase in the proportion of youth among the homeless population (Karabanow, Carson, and Clement 9).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion:
Findings from both Brazil and Canada suggest when multiple factors are addressed via service providers, such as housing, treatment, and skills training, such a system enables youth to be successfully reinserted into the community. Although the presence and effectiveness of comprehensive programs can be limited, research shows that a piece meal and uneven approach is not beneficial in terms of assisting youths of the streets. Youth do not avoid work, as numerous hours are spent in attempt to acquire an income that is abysmal (Gaetz and O'Grady 451). Before a job is secured other potential barriers to working that job must be solved. Mental health issues are a reality among many homeless youth in Canada (Karabanow, Carson, and Clement 61). Before health problems are addressed, housing must be established (Gharabaghi and Stuart 1618). However, employment is required in order to find permanent residency, and finding youth jobs or employment training is not a realistic solution (Gaetz and O'Grady 453). If health problems are not addressed, this may prevent the ability to work in an occupation, which henceforth prevents the ability to secure permanent residency. Mental health issues are a reality among many homeless youths in Canada (Karabanow, Carson, and Clement 61).

Before health problems are addressed, housing must be established (Gharabaghi and Stuart 1618). However, employment is required in order to find permanent residency, and finding youth jobs or employment training is not a realistic solution (Gaetz and O'Grady 453). A more comprehensive approach to detox and subsequent treatment of drug use may be beneficial in Vancouver. The response to homelessness across Canada has primarily taken the form of provisions for those who are already homeless, however, these measures have been rather ineffectual (Canadian Observatory 10). Services that work with street youth are necessary, but fail to adequately address the issue because these measures only assist youth after they are already on the streets. For example, the causes and consequences of street life - including family dysfunction, abuse and trauma, exploitation and alienation, poverty, addiction, mental health and child welfare inadequacies, need to be addressed to impede the prevalent issues regarding youth homelessness. Research on Brazil suggests that social services provided to the general population can address causes of youth homelessness. As stated earlier, Brazil has extended access to health care, and
education among the general population, which helped decrease poverty rates and reduce the prevalence of youth homelessness. That shared, British Columbia’s decision to reduce funding on Social programs can increase the vulnerability of those who are impoverished.

**Conclusion:**

For the issue of youth homelessness to be adequately addressed, there needs to be a dual approach. Access to resources must be in place for youth who are homeless, whilst resources available to the general population addresses prevention. The causes of youth homelessness described above are not exhaustive, and are not meant to be as there are many. Our research merely suggests the prevention may be the best practice.

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Works Cited


Interviewee. Telephone interview. 3 June 2013.


Neuroscience and Visions in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Through writing a play based on the life of the English religious mystic Margery Kempe, who lived in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, I strove to capture Kempe’s unique perspective and to connect her experience to contemporary issues of mental illness and the stigmatization of the mentally ill. I also explored the medieval religious beliefs that influenced Kempe, such as the tradition of female mystical piety. In her autobiography, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Kempe situates herself in the tradition of female mystics such as Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen. Like Kempe, these women had visions of God and spiritual revelations and later recorded their experiences in autobiographies and religious treatises. Their examples helped inspire Kempe to become a religious mystic, and strengthened her belief in the religious significance of her visions. Kempe’s religious interpretation of her visions contrasts with that of twenty-first skeptics, such as Diana Jefferies and Debbie Horsfalls, who attribute Kempe’s experience to postnatal psychosis.

Through the lens of twenty-first century psychology and neuroscience, Kempe’s visions could be interpreted as evidence of a neurological disorder such as temporal lobe epilepsy, or a psychiatric condition such as postnatal psychosis, postnatal depression or schizophrenia. But even in Kempe’s time, extraordinary visions were frequently attributed to mental illness. On numerous occasions, Kempe defended herself against the suggestion that her visions arose from a mental or physical sickness, and she was ostracized by many in her community who perceived her as mentally ill. My play draws attention to the stigma attached to mental illness in the medieval era and in the twenty-first century, and explores the contrast between prevailing attitudes towards mystical visions then and now. I depict the isolation and confusion that Kempe experiences following her first vision, and her ongoing struggle to gain acceptance from her community. My play shows the vital importance of religion for Kempe in helping her regain a sense of purpose and self-respect after the chaos and confusion unleashed by her first vision.
Kempe had her first mystical experience shortly after the birth of her first child in 1393. After a prolonged illness, she began having horrific visions of demons and hell, and went through a period of being, as she puts it, 'out of her mind' (Kempe 54). In the second scene in my play, Kempe sees devils and demons, represented by actors wearing horns and large, padded costumes, who demand that she renounce all Christian teachings and behave in a manner diametrically opposed to those teachings. Overcome with terror and despair, Kempe acquiesces. In her autobiography, Kempe records hearing voices that instruct her to do evil acts, and she repeatedly inflicts physical harm on herself and tries to end her own life. I do not depict Kempe’s acts of self-mutilation and suicide attempts in my play, as I felt this would add an element of graphic violence to the play and potentially limit its audience. Instead, I use lighting and sound effects to evoke Kempe’s confusion and despair, such as flames projected against the back of the stage and the sound of a heartbeat in the background.

Kempe states that she lost touch with reality for several months, and had to be physically bound to prevent her from harming herself or others. She interpreted the experience as a punishment for her sins, and concluded that she was eternally damned.

This period of despondency came to an end, however, when Kempe had a vision of Jesus holding her hand and speaking words of comfort. Shortly afterwards, her sanity appeared to be miraculously restored, and she was able to return to her normal life. Her experience inspired her to become a religious mystic and to dedicate her life to God. She decided to take a vow of chastity, but her husband forbade her to do so until 1413, by which time she had already given birth to 13 more children.

In the subsequent decade, she travelled by herself on pilgrimages throughout Europe and the Middle East, and met with some of the most powerful and influential religious leaders of her day, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the mystic Julian of Norwich. She also aroused controversy, as public officials such as the Mayor of Leicester accused her of
undermining the authority of the Church and promoting the heresy of Lollardy\(^1\). She was imprisoned and put on trial for heresy at Leicester in 1417. After questioning her extensively on her beliefs regarding the sacrament of the altar, a tradition that the Lollards questioned, the religious officials overseeing her trial concluded that she was an obedient Christian, and the charges of heresy were dropped. But Kempe subsequently stood trial for heresy at York, Cawood and Beverley, and each time was obliged to vindicate herself by demonstrating the orthodoxy of her religious beliefs. In her accounts of the trials in The Book of Margery Kempe, she claims to have impressed the religious authorities with her extensive knowledge of scripture, and thereby convinced them that the source of her visions could be none other than God Himself. But when she quoted from scripture during her trial at York, one of the clerks declared, “here we know well that she has a devil within her, for she speaks of the gospel” (Kempe 252). He is dumbfounded at her ability to quote perfectly from scripture as an illiterate woman, and assumes that her knowledge must come from the devil.

Kempe’s attempts to prove her credibility as a religious mystic were fraught with difficulty because of her gender and social status as a married, middle-class woman. Writing The Book of Margery Kempe was part of her effort to overcome these obstacles and communicate her visions to others. Today, The Book of Margery Kempe is considered the first autobiography ever authored in the English language, and remains one of the few surviving examples of medieval women’s writing. It offers a rare glimpse into the medieval world from the perspective of an extraordinary individual.

I first encountered The Book of Margery Kempe while completing my undergraduate degree at Oxford, and it struck me as a text that would make for a fascinating and engaging play. In many scenes, Kempe must perform the role of a religious mystic to perfection to gain the respect and approval of her community and the Church. When Kempe visits the Mount of Calvary in Jerusalem, for instance, and views the site where Jesus was believed to

\(^{1}\) Led by theologian John Wycliffe, Lollardy was an ostensibly heretical Christian movement active in England during Kempe’s lifetime whose sympathizers advocated reforms of the Roman Catholic Church.
have been crucified, she is expected to display her emotions in a manner that convinces onlookers that she is indeed having a mystical vision. Yet her violent weeping instead leads some to conclude that she suffers from a mental or physical illness. A friar praises her great gifts, while other pilgrims speculate that she has simply lost her wits or drunk too much wine. I include this scene in my play to show how Kempe’s behavior could be interpreted in vastly different lights, and to dramatize Kempe’s struggle to convince others that her visions indeed come from God. In other scenes in my play, Kempe deals with opposition from close family members such as her husband, who is reluctant to allow her to take a vow of chastity. My play focuses on the impact of Kempe’s visions on herself and her community, as Kempe struggles to make sense of the strange, fantastical sights and sounds that she encounters and to achieve status and recognition within an intensely patriarchal and highly intolerant society. Through my play, I aim to accurately portray the historical and cultural context of Kempe’s visions and at the same time to relate her struggle to that of individuals today who suffer from mental illness.

I introduce the characters of four neurologists and psychiatrists, who remain on the sidelines throughout the play and comment on Kempe’s unfolding narrative. They attempt to diagnose Kempe with a particular neurological disorder or psychiatric condition, but are ultimately unable to determine the cause of her visions with any certainty. Their uncertainty reflects the limitations of a purely physical explanation for Kempe’s experience, which fails to take into account the contrast between cultural beliefs surrounding visions in the medieval era and today. In Kempe’s time, having a vision was often interpreted as evidence that one could communicate directly to God. In our own time, the same experience would be most likely taken as evidence of a neurological disorder or chemical imbalance in the brain. My play explores these contrasting perceptions of visions and invites audiences to reflect upon the scientific and cultural discourses that shape their own attitudes towards mental illness.

The four mental health professionals appear in the scene that depicts Kempe’s vision following the birth of her first child and diagnose Kempe with postnatal psychosis—an extreme psychiatric condition that affects one to two women per thousand today in the
first four weeks following childbirth. It involves auditory, visual and olfactory hallucinations and delusions, and entails an increased risk of self-harm, suicide and infanticide (Jefferies and Horsfalls 348). In the passage below, taken directly from The Book of Margery Kempe, Kempe describes in graphic terms the visions of hell and damnation that she experienced for over half a year following the birth of her child. She refers to herself in the third person throughout her book, a convention that may have been intended to signify her humbleness and submission before God.

And in this time she saw, in her thoughts, devils open their mouths all inflamed with burning fire, as if they would swallow her in, sometimes pawing at her, sometimes threatening her, sometimes pulling her and dragging her both night and day during theforesaid time (Kempe 54).

Kempe emphasizes the visceral pain caused by her visions with physical verbs that suggest a violent, continuous assault, describing how the devils constantly paw at her, pull her and drag her. The imagery of devils opening mouths filled with fire evokes the Hellmouth illustrations that frequently appear in medieval manuscripts, which depict the entrance of hell as the gaping mouth of a huge monster. Medieval art and Christian beliefs regarding hell and damnation shape the content of Kempe’s visions as well as her interpretation of them. She concludes that the horrifying sights and sounds have been sent by the devil as a punishment for her sins, and that they are proof that she is eternally damned. She views her violent, erratic and self-destructive behavior during this period as a sign that she has succumbed to the temptations of the devil. But a contemporary psychiatrist would most likely attribute her irrational actions and distorted perceptions to postnatal psychosis, or an extreme form of postnatal depression—a condition that affects between 7 and 19 percent of women today, is connected to suicidal behavior and self-harm(1), and entails disproportionate feelings of guilt, hopelessness and despair, similar to those experienced by Kempe (Jones and Shakespeare 1). Kempe’s belief in her own wickedness and in the impossibility of salvation during this period would likely be interpreted by a modern psychiatrist as a symptom of postnatal depression. But Kempe views her feelings and
perceptions in a religious light, as evidence that she has lost all hope of salvation and given her soul to the devil.

Kempe’s subsequent vision of Jesus Christ represents a turning point in her life, and a significant step towards her recovery from the depths of despair. In her autobiography, she describes seeing Christ appear at her bedside in the likeness of a handsome young man clad in purple silk. He asks her “daughter, why have you forsaken me, when I never forsook thee?” (Kempe 56). He implies that his love for her is constant and unwavering, and available to her even when she lapses into despair. Kempe afterwards feels calmer and more stable, and calls upon her husband to bring her the keys to the buttery, so that she can get something to eat (57). Her servants and keepers advise her husband to refuse her request, since they suspect that she still cannot control herself and will only give away the food in the buttery. But Kempe’s husband trusts her enough to give her the keys, and Kempe indeed appears to be ‘restored to her wits’, as she puts it (42).

In ‘Forged by Fire: Margery Kempe’s Account of Postnatal Psychosis’, Diana Jeffries and Debbie Horsfall argue that Kempe’s visions of hellfire and demons resulted from postnatal psychosis (Jeffries and Horsfall 349). They also speculate that Kempe’s envisaged conversations with Christ constitute empowering strategies that Kempe uses to recover from and attempt to prevent further episodes of postnatal psychosis. They point out that Kempe uses these conversations to justify her desire to take a vow of chastity, which she hoped would prevent further pregnancies. Of course, Kempe would not have had any scientific conception of postnatal psychosis, but on a subconscious or even a conscious level, she might have associated her psychological crisis with the birth of her first child. Nonetheless, she does not explicitly make this connection at any point in her autobiography. Instead, she argues that she should be allowed to take a vow of chastity to purify herself from the sin of sexual relations with her husband.

Kempe took an official vow of chastity at the hands of a bishop in 1413, two decades after she first expressed a wish to live chaste, and after having given birth to 13 more children. She does not mention any further episodes of depression or horrifying visions during any
of these later pregnancies. She records having visions of hellfire and demons on occasions when she acts in a way that she regrets or that clashes with her Christian beliefs. For the most part, however, her descriptions of her visions are much more positive. She describes witnessing firsthand scenes from the Bible, such as the birth of the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, and Christ, and speaking directly to Christ and the Virgin Mary. From the perspective of twenty-first century psychiatry, Kempe’s total disconnection from her immediate surroundings and immersion in imagined scenes during these episodes could be interpreted as symptoms of schizophrenia (Jefferies and Horsfall 349). But Kempe was convinced of the reality of her visions, and viewed them as a rare and precious insight into scripture, a chance to see in the flesh the figures that she learned about through listening to sermons and readings of religious texts.

Her mystical experiences also afforded her a strong sense of purpose and of her own worth and value. In one vision, Christ tells Kempe “thou art to me a singular lover, and therefore I promise thee that thou shalt have a singular grace in heaven, daughter” (Kempe 136). He suggests that Kempe is unique, and that she will receive a degree of love and grace that is unavailable to most of mankind. By addressing Kempe as his daughter, he emphasizes the intimacy of their relationship. Kempe’s close bond with the Christ of her visions and her sense of her own uniqueness helped her to cope with the isolation and social ostracism that she experienced in her hometown of Lynn and elsewhere. She was barred from attending the sermons of a famous friar who objected to her weeping and her extreme displays of emotion. Shut out from the Church, Kempe describes feeling ‘so much sorrow that she knew not what she might do’ (290).

Soon afterwards, she has a vision of Christ, who offers consolation by telling her that one day her fame will exceed that of the friar, that her true worth will be recognized and that the religious officials who speak against her will one day suffer the shame and criticism that they now inflict upon her. He tells her “no clergyman can speak against the lifestyle that I teach thee, and if one does, he is not God’s clerk, he is the devil’s clerk” (Kempe 301). He assures Kempe that his authority overrides that of hostile members of the clergy and that any clergyman who attempts to deny or discredit her visions is on the side of the devil.
In the face of opposition from influential religious and secular authorities such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Mayor of Leicester, as well as many others in her local community, Kempe’s conversations with Christ provide her essential emotional support. Whether or not one interprets Kempe’s visions of Christ as connected to mental illness, the fact remains that they fulfill important psychological needs of hers, and give meaning and purpose to her life. The exchanges with Christ could not be more different from the visions of hellfire and demons that tormented Kempe following the birth of her first child. Those images profoundly destabilized her view of herself, and pushed her into a state of utter confusion and despair. Following her vision of Christ, Kempe at last regained a sense of stability and wellbeing. She ceased to believe that she was destined for damnation, and instead became convinced that she had been specially selected to receive God’s grace.

Kempe also interpreted the copious, violent bouts of weeping that frequently overcame her when in the presence of religious icons or images as divine gifts. Her first truly violent fit of weeping took place when she visited the Mount of Calvary in Jerusalem in 1414. In her autobiography, she describes in graphic terms the vision that she had of Christ’s body hanging from the cross, and dwells upon the wounds inflicted on Christ’s body.

And when through dispensation of the high mercy of our Sovereign Savior Christ Jesus, it was granted to this creature to behold so verily his precious, tender body, all rent and torn with scourges, more full of wounds than a dovehouse is full of holes, hanging upon the cross with a crown of thorns upon his head, his blissful hands, his tender feet nailed to the hard tree (Kempe 163).

Kempe’s detailed description of Christ’s body on the cross suggests that she is in a position of unique proximity to Christ’s suffering. She describes each part of Christ’s body in turn, moving from his head to his hands to his feet, and infusing each part of his body with his character and personality by employing adjectives such as blissful and tender. She focuses on Christ’s wounds, and emphasizes their sheer quantity by comparing his body to a dovehouse full of holes, a metaphor also employed to describe Christ’s crucified body by
the medieval English mystic Richard Rolle in his Meditations on the Passion (Windeatt 166).

Kempe draws upon Rolle’s Meditations to situate herself in the tradition of mystical piety, a tradition that Rolle helped create through his numerous, widely read works. In one of his most famous works, Incendium Amoris (The Fire of Love), Rolle describes having mystical experiences, including feeling physical warmth in his body, having a sense of wonderful sweetness, and hearing heavenly music. In her autobiography, Kempe recalls listening to a priest read from Incendium Amoris and praise Rolle. She also describes having mystical experiences that strongly resemble those of Rolle; she hears heavenly melodies arrive out of thin air and periodically feels a burning heat in her chest (Kempe 61, 194). It is possible that Kempe describes her visions as being similar to those of Rolle to enhance her credibility as a mystic, as Rolle was one of the most widely read, well-respected writers of the fifteenth century. It is also possible that the priest who transcribed The Book of Margery Kempe inserted these passages, as he would have a vested interest in promoting Kempe by likening her to Rolle, thereby justifying his decision to transcribe her book.

When analyzing The Book of Margery Kempe, it is impossible to tell which passages are from Kempe and which were added by the priest who transcribed her work. It is also impossible to tell which incidents in the book actually happened to Margery, and which she borrowed or adapted from the works of other mystics. The mysterious authorship and multiple source texts of The Book of Margery Kempe make it difficult to assign the experiences described to Margery, and even more so to determine the physical or psychological cause of those experiences.

The psychiatrists and neurologists in my play encounter these difficulties when attempting to diagnose Kempe with a particular psychiatric condition or neurological disorder. At the conclusion of the play, they note with horror that the The Book of Margery Kempe was not even written by Kempe herself, and so makes for an utterly unreliable basis for their clinical observations. Yet they perceive strong similarities between Kempe’s behavior and that of individuals who suffer from conditions such as postnatal psychosis or depression or temporal lobe epilepsy, which leads them to speculate that Kempe’s experience might have
a physical origin. From a secular, scientific, twenty-first century standpoint, they attribute Kempe’s visions to damage to certain neural pathways or a chemical imbalance in the brain. Their perspective clashes with that of Kempe and other medieval characters, who believe that Kempe’s visions are of divine origin.

The contrast between the perspectives of the medieval characters and the psychiatrists and neurologists is particularly apparent in the scene that takes place at the Mount of Calvary in Jerusalem, when Kempe has her first particularly violent fit of weeping. Kempe is so overcome with emotion upon seeing the site where Jesus is believed to have been crucified that, in her own words, ‘she fell down that she might not stand or kneel, but wailed and twisted her body’ (Kempe 163). Her extreme emotional reaction evokes depictions of the Virgin Mary in many medieval religious texts, as well as descriptions of pilgrims writhing on the ground or weeping in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Windeatt 166). But although Kempe was acting according to a precedent set by previous pilgrims and religious texts, her behavior was perceived as abnormal by the onlookers present at the scene, who suspected it may have been attributable to mental illness or inebriation (Kempe 165). The four psychiatrists and neurologists observing in the background suggest that she suffers from temporal lobe epilepsy.

Damage or sensitivity to the temporal lobes can cause individuals to experience partial seizures, which may manifest in symptoms similar to those displayed by Kempe (Sachs 53). An individual having a seizure could hallucinate smells or colors and then experience strong, overpowering emotions, followed by muscle twitching, sweating and difficulty breathing. Similarly, on the Mount of Calvary Kempe has a vision of Jesus hanging from the cross and feels extreme compassion for Christ’s suffering as well as exaltation and a sense of religious epiphany. She has a strong urge to cry, which she attempts to suppress. But her attempt to keep silent only increases her inner turmoil, and she turns ‘as gray as any lead’ (Kempe 163). This change of color may indicate that she is having difficulty breathing. She loses control over her body, and falls to the ground. Her involuntary body movements resemble spasms or twitching that frequently accompany temporal lobe seizures.
Temporal lobe seizures can also cause long-term changes in personality which in some respects resemble those undergone by Kempe, whose bouts of weeping become more frequent, more intense and longer in duration following her experience on the Mount of Calvary. In her autobiography, Kempe states that her weeping could be triggered by any sight or sound that reminded her of Christ, including religious icons and relics, witnessing Holy Sacrament being brought about town, a handsome man who reminds her of Christ, infants who remind her of the infant Christ, people being chastised or punished in the way that she feels she should be punished for her sins, and a wealthy man being worshipped in the way that Christ is worshipped in heaven (Kempe 320). She stresses that her weeping occurs suddenly and without conscious effort, and that she cannot start or stop it at will. Her increased responsiveness to religious imagery resembles the symptoms of individuals who as a result of frequent temporal lobe seizures develop temporal lobe personalities.

Temporal lobe personalities entail heightened emotions and a tendency to perceive cosmic significance in trivial, everyday events. Neurologist V.S. Ramachandran speculates that these traits result from a strengthening of the neural pathways between the amygdala and sensory centers in the brain after frequent temporal lobe seizures. The amygdala specializes in recognizing the emotional significance of events in the real world, and the sensory centers are involved in vision and hearing. During a temporal lobe seizure, extra signals travel between the amygdala and the sensory centers and reinforce the pathways between these particular areas of the brain. In the long term, the alteration of these pathways causes individuals to perceive everyday and sometimes mundane events as imbued with cosmic significance (180). This resonates with Kempe’s sense of being directly connected to God, and being able to perceive the sacred significance of everyday objects and events.

However, Kempe does not display two of the key features of temporal lobe personality—a loss of libido, and a calm, serene sense of certainty and enlightenment (Ramachandran
Ramachandran measured the galvanic skin response\(^2\) of individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy when viewing religious words and images and when viewing emotionally and sexually charged words and images, and compared it to that of normal individuals. He found that individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy displayed a heightened galvanic skin response to religious words and images, but a greatly diminished galvanic skin response to sexually and emotionally charged words or images as compared to normal individuals. Hence individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy exhibit a decreased libido, and increased responsiveness to religious icons and images (186).

Although Kempe displays particular characteristics of the classic temporal lobe personality, such as a passion for religious icons and images, she does not experience loss of libido or much of a sense of certainty and enlightenment. Kempe feels sexually attracted to a man outside her marriage shortly after she has her first vision and continues to struggle with feelings of sexual desire throughout her life, which she views with guilt and shame. She also experiences doubts and fears surrounding her visions and sensations, which lead her to seek advice and reassurance from religious figures such as Julian of Norwich—a famous English anchoress and mystic who, like Kempe, experienced dazzling visions of God following a period of long illness. In The Showings, Julian describes witnessing the Crucifixion, having a conversation with Christ, witnessing the Virgin Mary during the Annunciation, and seeing an image of the devil. Kempe was familiar with Julian’s accounts of her visions, having heard them read out loud by priests, and saw Julian as a spiritual guide and mentor. She met Julian in 1416, and sought her assurance that the visions Kempe was experiencing indeed came from God, and not from an evil spirit. In my play, Kempe’s meeting with Julian represents a turning point for the protagonist, as she becomes more confident in her powers as a mystic and in the truth of her visions. Julian advises Kempe to trust in her visions, and not to give way to doubts and fears.

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\(^2\) The galvanic skin response is a change in the electrical resistance of the skin caused by emotional stress.
I included this scene in my play to show the vital importance of religion, and in particular female mysticism, to Kempe. Like Julian of Norwich and other female mystics, Kempe saw her visions as an essential means of connecting with God and strove to communicate the insights she had gained to the rest of her community. Kempe also mentions the mystics Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen and Marie of Oignes as important role models in her quest to become a mystic. Many of these women achieved positions of power and influence through speaking and writing of their visions; Marie of Oignes was the first female spiritual director of the religious movement of the Beguines, and Hildegard of Bingen became an advisor to the pope. Even within the highly patriarchal institution of the Church, female mystics could achieve a degree of status and authority. But they were also on occasion persecuted for their beliefs and behaviour. The French mystic Marguerite Porete publicly taught the message of her visions without the assistance of a priest and published a record of her experiences, The Mirror of Simple Souls in around 1300. She was arrested on charges of heresy in 1310 and burned at the stake. Thus, although they could achieve a degree of power and influence in their own right, female mystics remained subject to a power hierarchy dominated by male clerics and officials.

Kempe was well aware of the dangers that she faced in adopting the role of a religious mystic. In her autobiography, she describes praying to Jesus that she might be spared the fate of being burned alive, since the thought of such a painful death filled her with fear and horror. But in spite of her fears, Kempe continued to speak publicly of her visions and to pursue the vocation of religious mysticism. Her willingness to face persecution for her beliefs and even to risk her life to become a religious mystic testifies to her courage and personal conviction. My play emphasizes Kempe’s resilience in the face of the obstacles that she encountered as a result of her gender and social status, and her resourcefulness in seeking solutions to seemingly insurmountable challenges.

In the scene that depicts Kempe’s trial for heresy at Leicester, Kempe refutes the charges against her while remaining calm and composed. She accuses the Mayor of Leicester of committing an injustice, and quotes from the Bible to suggest that he will ultimately be
punished by God for his sins. Kempe’s strong belief in herself and her visions in the face of hostility from some of the most powerful leaders and institutions of her time makes her an inspiring example of a marginalized figure who struggled to define a place for herself within a highly intolerant society. My play strives to do justice to her unique perspective, and to relate her struggle to that of marginalized groups today, specifically women and individuals suffering from mental health issues. I explore the contrast between the treatment and perception of these groups in the medieval era and in the twenty-first century, while at the same time recognizing similarities between the patriarchal institutions that perpetuate injustice in both periods.

Through my play, I approach Kempe’s story from the perspective of abnormal psychology, as well as from the perspective of medieval literary studies and theatre studies, to investigate the relationship between Kempe’s experience and that of individuals today who suffer from conditions such as schizophrenia, postnatal psychosis, postnatal depression, and temporal lobe epilepsy. Kempe’s story could also be analyzed from the perspective of cultural or religious psychology, as her Christian beliefs and her desire to become a religious mystic shaped her interpretation of her visions. However, I chose to primarily examine Kempe’s visions through the lens of abnormal psychology to relate her experiences to those of individuals who are diagnosed with psychiatric conditions or neurological disorders. My play strove to portray Kempe in a manner that is true to her unique perspective, and at the same time to connect her story to that of individuals today who are living with mental illness, and who understand visions more in terms of physical mechanisms than religious beliefs. Through my play, I balance Kempe’s medieval Christian worldview with that of twenty-first century neuroscience and psychology to open up a dialogue around the cultural and scientific discourses that shape our understanding of mental illness.

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Bibliography


