‘My Waka Journey’ Introducing a New Co-Editor

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It’s safe to say that the world of publishing is where much of my academic passion resides. After co-editing EASA’s flagship journal, *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, with Sarah Green for the past four years, what I feel I most strongly bring to *AJEC* is an interdisciplinary research profile and an international trajectory. With formative years in Edinburgh and London, I have been exposed to the diverse subfields of human ecology and medical anthropology as well as material, digital and visual culture studies. Indeed, much of my research has occurred in quite multi- or transdisciplinary settings, often dealing with the formulation of British and European sociocultural identities. This parallels the interests of many ethnographers who explore the anthropologies of the familiar or even ‘at home’ topics.

Additionally, I’ve spent nearly four years working in New Zealand (2007–2010) and eight in Estonia (2010–2018). The thread that ties this background together has been a consistent focus on the phenomenological and creative understandings of cultural landscapes by exploring various manifestations of the socially embodied imagination. In this regard I have recently been carrying out new empirical research on the urban exploration of abandoned postindustrial sites in both Berlin and Tallinn, some of which has been published in the very pages of this journal (Martínez and Laviolette 2016).

In recent years I have completed two ethnographically based monographs. The first was for a volume on alternative sports and adventure landscapes, published by Ashgate in 2011 and reprinted in paperback format by Routledge in 2016 (Laviolette 2016). It has been reviewed over a dozen times and nominated for two international book prize competitions, including the Margaret Mead Award (run by the AAA) and the Turku Book Award (run by the European Society for Environmental History). This monograph was the result of several years of postdoctoral work. It provides a cross-cultural comparative study of extreme games and dangerous behaviour in certain parts of the UK and New Zealand. The other volume, reviewed in *Cultural Anthropology* by Tori Jennings (University of Wisconsin), is an adaptation of my doctoral thesis, published by Peter Lang (Laviolette 2011).

Ethnographically, the findings from this project were highly compatible with European Objective-One rejuvenation agendas concerned with environmental sustainability and economic impoverishment issues in Cornwall. As a result, I was appointed in 2008 to the role of artist consultant as part of an anthropologist/artist team. This took place within the remit of the Heartlands community regeneration project, funded by the Big Lottery's Living Landmarks Programme. This project allowed me to develop new research material on the anthropology of art and media, migration issues, mining identities, Cornish diaspora and belonging in the southern hemisphere (Laviolette and Baird 2011).

In Estonia I've co-edited a compilation with Anu Kannike (*Things in Culture – Culture in Things: Approaches to Culture Theory*) based on an international conference in Tartu (Laviolette and Kannike 2013). The volume was published with the support of the European Development Fund. It brought together twenty chapters on a wide range of topics from interdisciplinary contributors based in top research institutions around the world, such as: S. H. Riggins (Newfoundland), Timo Muhonen (Turku), Brigitte Glaser (Göttingen) and Visa Immonen and Kirsti Salo-Mattila (both Helsinki). I am also laying the groundwork for other books, for instance, a jointly authored venture with Professor Ted Relph (University of Toronto) provisionally entitled *Placelessness Revisited*.

Since 2015 I have been the co-principle investigator of the Wenner-Gren Foundation's Institutional Development Grant for the establishment of the Baltic Anthropology Graduate School (BAGs). This is a joint doctoral programme in social anthropology and ethnology that brings together five universities in the region (RSU and UoL in Riga, VMU in Kaunas and Tallinn and Tartu in Estonia). The goal has been to provide methodological training in ethnographic fieldwork as well as cross-supervision with a critical mass of young, up-and-coming scholars. The Wenner-Gren has funded the consortium of these five institutions for a period of five years in order to build capacity in the management of doctoral-level research. A main objective is to provide the opportunity for staff mobility, international cooperation and supervisory up-skilling with the latest theoretical and methodological best practices. I have also been the Co-PI with Professor Hannes Palang of an Estonian Science Foundation grant in the IUT3-2 programme called *Culturescapes in Transformation* from 2014 to 2018. This project has been a significant part of Tallinn University's Centre for Landscape and Culture.

In the past fifteen years I have presented my research findings at over 115 conferences and seminars in twenty-two countries whilst equally publishing more than two dozen peer-reviewed articles, eleven book chapters, a number of review papers and two guest editorials for special journal issues. One of these, entitled ‘Matter in Place’, was for the Otago-based journal *SITES* (Laviolette and Labrum 2009). This collection of six articles and six book reviews formally set the scene for a comprehensive material culture research agenda in Aotearoa and the South Pacific. In 2012 I took up a visiting scholars fellowship at the Yale Centre for British Art in New Haven with the aim of starting some new research on the heritage value of ‘diasporic objects’. I am also one of the cofounders of PocketVisions, a London-based documentary film group initiative that has been involved with the Royal Anthropological Institute, LIDF, the British Museum and Amnesty International.

During the past eight years I have been the spokesperson for Tallinn University Press’s *Bibliotheca Anthropologica* book series. This series has translated into Estonian such classic authors as Lévi-Strauss, Radcliffe-Brown, Aleida Assmann and Mary Douglas. I was equally co-opted onto *SIEF*’s publications committee from 2012 to 2014 and was one of the chief editors for the academic blog *Material World* from 2007 to 2014. I continue to be an active member of the UK Society for Co-operative Studies and currently sit on the editorial board of their quarterly journal in addition to being on the advisory boards for other internationally circulated journals: *Home Cultures* and the *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*.

My formal ethnographic fieldwork has included both individual and collaborative research. While employed by the Bartlett School of Graduate Studies at UCL, I collected new empirical material on the relationship between ageing, health care and the home for an EQUAL & EPSRC-funded study of medical assistive technology. This project examined the mainstream implementation of ‘telecare’ in relation to facilitating the independence of older disabled people in their urban domestic space. From two ethnographic case studies – the first dealing with chronic heart failure sufferers living in South Yorkshire and the second examining visually impaired people living in sheltered accommodation in Plymouth – our team evaluated the expectations, benefits, drawbacks and social meanings of such home-based health-monitoring schemes (Laviolette and Hanson 2007). Such investigations were carried on through the work of my first doctoral supervisee, Emily Clark, who sadly passed away last year. She had defended her thesis on the visual culture of biomedical imagery.

My time at the Bartlett equally allowed me to distil some findings from a long-term study of cooperative social housing, which I had been undertaking since 2000. From this I have presented a number of papers and published an article that appears in the twentieth-anniversary issue of the AAA's journal *City & Society* (Laviolette 2008a). Such projects are largely subsumed under the rubric dealing with the material, visual and sensory dimensions of domesticity.

A different dimension to my research profile stems from the issues raised during my doctoral fieldwork, which comprised a period of multisited ethnography in Cornwall. This was initially from 1998 to 2000 but was then extended over intensive short periods to investigate specific phenomenon (a process that has been intermittently ongoing since 2001). At first the aim of this research was to investigate the construction of landscape perception from a diversity of conceptual perspectives influenced by contemporary theories in visual and material culture studies. The dissertation that resulted relied on conventional participant observation, interviews and focus groups as well as more novel methodological techniques such as performative interventions, walks and hitchhiking with informants. I also drew on semiotic and hermeneutic forms of analysis when examining certain artistic, literary and pop-cultures genres prominent in this British Duchy. The thesis illustrates the ways in which certain modern, traditional and reinvented environmental practices (mapping, mourning, moving and so forth) negotiate as well as dissipate the creation of a cohesive regional identity. My subsequent investigations in Cornwall have focussed on specific sub-subcultural practices such as surfing, recycled art and adventurous high-risk activities such as cave diving and cliff jumping.

The overall contributions to arise from this body of research deal with outlining an embodied theory of the imagination. So, in terms of the development of cultural theory, the aim has been to draw together the ways in which the material world relates not only to social and sensorial concerns but also to more elusive existential and creative aspects of the imaginary.

Whilst living and working in New Zealand I began exploring the early career of Professor Sir Raymond Firth. Under the guise of an intellectual biography, this project focuses primarily on his research as it initially related (through his MA, Ph.D. and a handful of publications) to Māori issues. This endeavour involves several layers of collaboration with former students, family members and biographers such as Dr Caroline Thomas, Greta Firth, Professor Doug Munro

and Dame Dr Joan Metge. By tracing the career path and early writings of one of the longest-lived and most influential anthropologists in the legacy of the discipline, this study addresses a noticeable gap in the history of social anthropological thought. It shall also provide an experimental contribution to the biographical genre, both regarding New Zealand's academic history and issues dealing with international migration, the movement of ideas, diasporic intellectual landscapes and at/of-home ethnography (Laviolette 2008b, 2019).

A more recent research endeavour is to compile the draft for a comparative monograph on the phenomenon of hitchhiking in Britain, Benelux, Germany and the former Soviet Bloc region. Once a ubiquitous phenomenon of modern societies most of the world over, hitchhiking is now seen as nearly extinct, a 'dying out' phenomenon, at least in the Western world. Yet in many parts of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union the practice continues unabated. Intellectually, this project is a companion to my studies of risk sport. It draws together my personal experience of this activity since the early 1990s with a hermeneutic reading of it as it occurs in the genre of travel writing and the 'mobilities turn' literature. The objective is also to question how breaks of convention, such as those that exist when hitchhiking, impact upon 'roadscape' encounters and the sensing of place (Laviolette 2016; forthcoming, 2020).

This overall research profile parallels my interests in teaching and supervision, whereby I have taken inspiration from a variety of disciplinary and epistemological approaches. With a background in the Anglo/French tradition of social anthropology, I am inspired by an environment that has historically fostered a conceptual and transdisciplinary ethos of learning. Nurtured from the Scottish Enlightenment, this ethos includes student-centred self-learning, research-based teaching as well as a broader scope of scholarship beyond the confines of merely disseminating one's own research. My own trajectory has included an investigation into many aspects of pedagogical rationales and approaches, including experience in the UK (Scotland, Cornwall, Yorkshire and London) as well as considerable exposure to the higher education scenes in New Zealand, Estonia, Germany and Austria. This pedagogical experience certainly provides an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural lineage when it comes to contributing to *AJEC*. In connection to my profile overall, I feel this puts me in a good position to help shape the wider outlook for European ethnology within the humanities and social sciences, not to mention to contribute towards repairing some of the recent damage to have weakened certain ties

with the broader community of European scholars interested in the overlap of ethnology, cultural studies and social anthropology.

I am therefore grateful to Ulli and the advisory board for allowing me to join *AJEC* at the editorial level. This journal's affiliation with Berghahn places it firmly amongst the more important anthropological fora in the list of high-impact periodicals in Europe. I thus look forward to working with Elisabeth to help shape its development in the next years.

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