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Involuntary attention as creative disruption: meeting the urban wild with neurodivergent strategies

Hannah Reeves

Abstract

This chapter offers a contemplation on the implications of neurodiverse, more-than-human sociality for psychosocial studies. Drawing on my experience of doing auto/ethnographic research at Crossbones Graveyard (a burial ground and “wild” garden of remembrance in Southeast London) as a neurodivergent researcher, I consolidate the proposition that neurodiverse sociality is already more-than-human sociality (Davidson & Smith, 2009; Judge, 2018). I offer passages of my open-field (Duncan, 1973) approach to auto/ethnography, an accidental path to materialising a neurodivergent strategy. Discussing these experiences in relation to neurotypically humanist paradigms of social science, I consider the specific responsibilities of psychosocial studies. What might taking on this responsibility mean for how we select and delimit “subject” matter, and for the processes by which we appraise ontological and epistemological coherence and intellectual “value”? Further, how can we create epistemological and institutional space for neurodiverse perspectives to multiply, including - and especially – those brought forth directly by neurodivergent people themselves?

Keywords Neurodiversity, More-than-human sociality, Open-field poetics, Ethnography, Urban wild, Southwark, Spatiality, Materiality

Introduction

This chapter offers a contemplation on the implications of neurodiverse, more-than-human sociality for psychosocial studies. Drawing on my experience of doing auto/ethnographic research at Crossbones Graveyard (a burial ground and "wild" garden of remembrance in Southeast London) as a neurodivergent researcher, I consider and consolidate Judge's (2018) and Davidson and Smith's (2009) propositions that a neurodiverse sociality is already a more-than-human sociality. I offer passages of my open-field (Bloomfield, 2013; Duncan, 1973; Tarlo, 2013) approach to auto/ethnography, an accidental path to materialising a neurodivergent strategy. Discussing these experiences in relation to neurotypically humanist paradigms of social science, I reflect upon the specific responsibility of psychosocial studies towards neurodivergent people and analytics. What might taking on this responsibility - or response-ability (Haraway, 2016) - mean for how we select and delimit "subject" matter, and for the processes by which we appraise ontological and epistemological coherence and intellectual "value"?[1] Further, how can we create epistemological and institutional space for neurodiverse perspectives to multiply, including - and especially - those brought forth directly by neurodivergent people themselves?

[1] More than simple responsiveness or a distanced sense of responsibility, response-ability is about rendering each other capable of responding, of taking on the collaborative task of composing some worlds rather than others (Haraway, 2016).

Figure 1. The Pyramid at Crossbones Graveyard in summer (*Source* Photos by author)

Meeting the field

I remember how nervous I felt on the way to the first interview I conducted at Crossbones. Had I selected the right questions? Would they produce the right kind of "data"? Could I perform the role of a researcher as expected: calm, knowledgeable and in control? Could I hold my attention firmly and narrowly enough that I could seamlessly navigate this new terrain of social script? My body thought not. My heart was shuddering against whatever boundaries it could reach, and my hands were quivering ever so slightly. I was heavy with the weight of risk, chance, and my own unpredictability: the interview schedule hadn't prepared me for this. To feel such

discomfort on my way to Crossbones was itself discomforting: usually my walks there are marked with familiar sights, sounds, smells and textures; the anticipation of familiar faces; the expectation of a couple of hours of peace from the speed of life in the city. As I walk my habitual path to Crossbones on ordinary Wednesdays, I am free to daydream or lose myself in details as I please.

I remember this day with Sara Ahmed's thoughts on discomfort. Writing on the discomfort queer bodies feel when inhabiting the pervasive spaces of compulsory heterosexuality, Ahmed (2013, p. 148) describes "a feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled." Even as I walked a familiar path to a familiar place in a geospatial sense, I was acutely aware of the discomforting fit between my *bodymind* (Price, 2015; Rothschild, 2000) and the path it was walking.[2] I was on my way to "the interview," a staged social encounter founded on the assumption that meanings exchanged linguistically by human subjects define the limits of what matters. The well-trodden path to the interview has been forged and consolidated by the Western humanist researcher, inevitably white, cismale, able-bodied, middle-class, neurotypical, calm, confident and eager. He is the archetypal subject of what is most generously termed Western humanism, but which, in its historical situatedness, is Man's colonially-enforced epistemology (Wynter, 2003). He has a habit of rendering himself invisible in social science methodological resources, but the imprints he leaves behind are all too apparent when those of us who do not align with them attempt to put abstracted methods into practice: it becomes viscerally evident that the tread of the path ahead has been smoothed by him, for him. Those of us who cannot walk this path comfortably must find a way through the bumpy

[2] Here I follow Price's (2015, p. 27) use of *bodymind* to insist on "the imbrication (not just the combination) of the entities usually called 'body' and 'mind.'" The arguments of this chapter are based on the premise that bodies are already bodyminds. At certain points, however, I also use "bodies": to acknowledge, where appropriate, the ways in which the surfaces of bodies are shaped in *contact zones* (Haraway, 2008).

surround, pushing through the friction as we go in small gestures to treading out the paths less used (feministkilljoys, 2018).

All this said, the sudden onset of this discomfort against my remembered landscape of comfortability also underscores the many ways in which normative paths through the world *have* been laid out for people with bodies like mine. I had only been free to daydream and lose myself in detail on those habitual Wednesdays because of the *comfortability* of the fit between my body and the bodies that shape it, including the organisations of matter that make up the urban landscape. I cannot forget my deviations from this normative subject position because of the discomfort that inhabiting such norms differently generates. But the extent to which I *am* at home within this position eludes me frequently. Such is the function of normativity, to make learned patterns of thought and behaviour feel completely obvious, natural and therefore invisible.

On this remembered occasion, the discomforting fit between my bodymind and the path I thought I must tread manifested as anxiety. I locate the friction in this *contact zone* (Haraway, 2008) as produced most loudly by expressions of my neurodivergence as I attempted to inhabit what felt like firmly neurotypical terrain. There are some dimensions of this anxiety that I can, perhaps, tease out as specifically neurodivergent trouble entangled with a more "general" sense of anxiety. I was heavy with the anticipation of my baseline cognitive load (that comes with "performing" the embodied-linguistic social script) intensifying in an unfamiliar and high-stakes situation. Whereas typically at Crossbones I could allow my attention to wander with the flux of more-than-human activity in the garden, the interview would ask me to perform an intensive kind of "focus" delimited by a human-human question-answer structure.

All this said, lived experiences of neurodivergence frequently interface with a more generalised anxiety in ways that are often seamless experientially and difficult to tease out. A key potential of the *neurodiversity paradigm* (Chapman, 2020) is that such experiences can be navigated as the lived terrain of difference without obligating its *wayfarers* (Ingold, 2021, p. 181) to codify these experience as "disorders" or "disordered."[3] Neurodivergence *might* describe (but is not limited to) expressions of difference meeting diagnostic criteria for autism, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or ADHD; but equally, neurodivergence offers a language to describe lived experiences that traverse and trouble the boundaries of such diagnoses. As such, neurodiversity offers a mechanism of disclosure with radical potential: to reject the stigma that particular diagnoses might carry; even, perhaps to mitigate some risks attached to disclosure. The promise of neurodiversity is that difference can be understood simply *as* difference on a multidimensional, value-neutral spectrum.

While neurodivergent people might face specific challenges in such situations (which may or may not resonate with my own experiences), neurodivergence is one possible site of friction among many in the contact zones where people with bodyminds variously marked as different from Man's inhabit his shadow. A more general sense of anxiety in doing research – along with a host of other discomforting affects – may be frequently experienced, but less frequently acknowledged, by a great many researchers who diverge, in their various and often overlapping ways, from the imprints Man has left on the paths they must tread. These might include people who are BIPOC, trans, queer, disabled, or women, for example. [4] Acknowledging and honouring these

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[3] Following Chapman (2020, pp. 57–58), the *neurodiversity paradigm* challenges the framing of "those who fall outside neurocognitive norms" as affected by individual medical pathology, instead asserting that neurominorities are marginalised by a neuronormative society that favours neurotypical people.

[4] This is not to suggest that people whose "markers" situate them as fitting within this normative subject position cannot also experience anxiety in doing research; rather, this chapter focuses on the experiential

discomforting affects – which can sometimes be parsed, sometimes be traced, and sometimes not – also brings forward the possibility of building allyship in the discomfort of difference.

My neurodivergence has never been incidental to my doing research: in important ways, neurodivergence pulled me into undertaking a research project at Crossbones in the first place. The monthly vigils that have been held at the gates outside the burial ground for over fifteen years "honour the Outcast, both dead and alive" (Friends of Crossbones, 2019). The burial ground within holds the remains of thousands of working class and poor people buried during its intensive use during the post-medieval period; their histories stifled under layers of asphalt and concrete after the burial ground was sold on for redevelopment after its closure. The ceremony for the Outcast pushes back against the disremembering of those buried at the ground by the dominant historiography and weaves their histories through with local lore that links Crossbones - which is likely to have remained unconsecrated - to a segregated burial ground for the women who worked in medieval Southwark's brothels.[5]

The figure of the Outcast has offered a way to reclaim bodies designated "unholy" and therefore marginalised by the dominant socio-religious order of their day. Alongside foregrounding working class and sex worker histories, the Outcast has located Crossbones as a place to honour people who died by suicide, addiction, and misadventure; as well as queer, trans, and disabled people. The Outcast has done the work of gathering a fluid community of living people who recognise the Outcast in

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discomfort that emerges specifically in the knowledge that one's bodymind has been marked as different.

[5] Crossbones has a rich and fascinating history, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to recount it in more depth here. For a summary of its history from the 18th century to the present day, refer to Berns (2016) and Reeves (2022). For further information about the grassroots campaign to protect the burial ground, refer to the Friends of Crossbones (n.d.) and Hausner (2016).

themselves. The monthly vigils emphasise that the Outcast is not simply a type of person, but also a qualitative dimension of embodiment. Honouring the Outcast is an opportunity to honour the diffuse threads of our bodily being that the dominant order implores us to cast out, or that we might otherwise wish to forget. It is this expansive quality of the Outcast that drew me to Crossbones, and which drew me to return again and again. This Outcast was present with me in the *queer failure* (Halberstam, 2011; Muñoz, 2019) of my learned attempts to present neurotypically; or otherwise, in my intermittent refusal to bother trying; the Outcast was present when my sexuality and gender expression failed to meet cisheteronormative expectations. This Outcast made me feel that coming to Crossbones was like coming home, even as a white, middle-class, cisgendered person.[6]

Finding my place at Crossbones felt inevitable and necessary, and my deep sense of being at home there fed my yearning to study it for my doctoral research. More than simply a case study, point of comparison, or gap in the literature, exploring and sharing Crossbones' stories felt like something I had to do. Undertaking this research within a psychosocial studies department felt similarly necessary, but much less comfortable. My embodied history of fraught interactions with Western psychiatry had foregrounded a hunger to "speak back" to its formative institutions and their codifying practices. As a field founded on the critical and ethical imperative that the "individual" psyche is always steeped in, interfacing with, and coproducing the social, psychosocial studies held a particular promise as challenging assumptive notions that difference, disorder, and distress originate and reside within isolated, neatly-individuated subjects.

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[6] All this said, it remains important to recognise that while the Outcast has done the crucial work of gathering a community who protect those buried at the ground, we cannot assume that those buried there would identify as Outcast themselves. The Outcast, like "the wild," holds a colonising potential and legacy that we at Crossbones must remain attentive to. As Lucy Coleman Talbot (2023) has highlighted, even as a bottom-up heritage site, there remains a need at Crossbones to intersectionally attend to intra-group

I felt a sense that developing psychosocial expertise would allow me to take a critical stance against the harm I had experienced and legitimate my claim in doing so. I hoped that I could shift my position from an *object* of the psy-disciplines to a *subject* capable of forging analyses on my own terms.

As Sara Judge (2018, p. 1102) has observed, while neurodivergent people have frequently been the object of study for neurotypical people, explicit accounts of neurodiverse experience by neurodivergent people themselves are rare in academic literature.[7] As Judge has highlighted, this is a combined consequence of the underrepresentation of neurodivergent people in academia, the potentially stigmatising risk of disclosure, as well as the often discomforting fit between traditional methodologies and neurodivergent perspectives. The latter presents challenges "both in terms of how the researcher works with others, and the ways in which work is communicated" (Judge, 2018, p. 1102). As an emergent field *non-innocently entangled* (Murphy, 2017) with the psy-disciplines, psychosocial studies has a specific responsibility to neurodivergent people. If ethics and reflexivity are central pillars of the field as they are often claimed to be, then a crucial part of the work psychosocial studies takes on should be for the voices of its inherited "objects" to be offered their space as subjects - and authors - of the knowledge practices that centre around them. The task is not only to make space for neurodivergent-identified people to speak within neurotypical frameworks, but also to make space for neurodiverse ontologies, epistemologies, ethics, and methods. Crucially, this also involves working towards

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differences.

[7] Judge (2018, p. 1102) highlights the work of neurodiverse scholars Marcia England (2016), Scott M. Robinson and Ari D. Ne'eman (2008), Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson (2006), and Dawn Prince-Hughes (2005) as increasingly "finding room within the academy to engage with their own ways of knowing and doing."

institutional mechanisms through which such approaches can exist and be appraised, without forever being caught in the trap of assimilation to Man's epistemology.

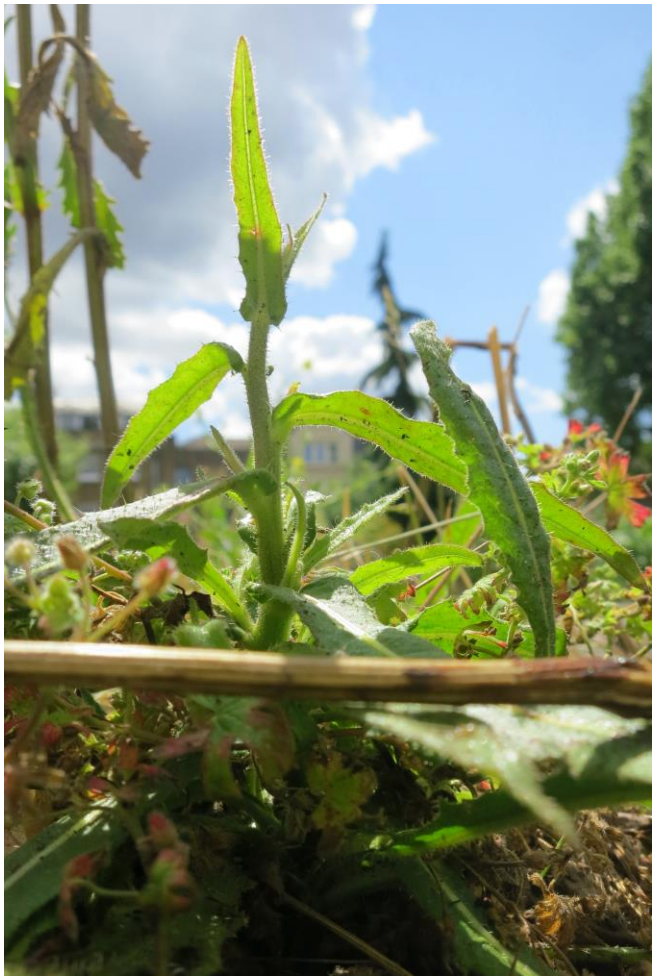

Figure 2. A weedy perspective at Crossbones Graveyard (*Source* Photos by author)

Finding a way in

Despite my fascination with the disruptive potential of the psychosocial, and my fascination with the expansive possibilities of Crossbones, I had unwittingly approached my preliminary research at Crossbones using the practices of what Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2011, 2013, 2014, 2019) has termed *conventional humanist qualitative methodology*. I prefer to think of these practices as *neurotypically humanist qualitative methodology*: an abstracted set of methods through which Man's epistemology is frequently enacted. While psychosocial studies itself occupies a liminal space straddling the social sciences and humanities, a condition of taking up my doctoral studentship was that I undertake a year of social science methodological training. This, I was told by representatives of my funder, was to ensure my knowledge and skills were not limited to the local and specific, but would set me up for a career as a more useful researcher. With little grounding in psychosocial thinking beyond my initial interest, I began the methodological training, which was based in a politics department and designed to encompass all forms of "social research." Navigating the stabilised centres of methodological convention amidst my own uncertainty, inexperience and early-doctoral-stage imposter syndrome, I had come to see neurotypically humanist qualitative methodology as the terms through which I should "prove" my capability as a social science researcher.

My discomfort around interviewing was not only around the encounter itself - although that was a significant part of it - it was also the anticipation of what would come next. As part of a set of social science research methods I was attempting to put to work (which also included using questionnaires and reviewing preexisting online data from campaigns to protect the graveyard), the interview was setting me up for the task of stepping back to see "the big picture." I worked on the fragile premise that the textual data I had gathered and transcribed would allow me to code and classify emergent themes, and from these, I would be able to infer something solid about

Crossbones. Supposedly, I would be able to answer the research question I had defined at the beginning of the process. I might not have found myself so bewildered had I *stayed with the trouble* (Haraway, 2016) that came up when I had, in actuality, failed to articulate a research question in the first place. This was - and continues to be - the aspect of doing research I find most challenging. I continue to be confounded by the idea that I could know what to ask before throwing myself into the mud of the field. I queerly failed to imagine any question at all that I could reconcile with the risk of blinkering myself to the provocations that I knew Crossbones would continue to throw at me from every angle.

As I began to transcribe the interview data, it took on a flat and alien quality. The "variations in tone, intensity, and rhythm" disappeared (Scheurich, 1995, p. 240). The clang of church bells, the roar of helicopters, and the clatter of machinery disappeared; the crackling of the wind and rustling of footsteps disappeared; the soundscape of Crossbones disappeared and the words on the page felt violently excised from it. Frustrated, I began to wonder how the dynamic of the interviews might have been affected if I had tuned *in* to our surroundings rather than tuned them out and had encouraged my interviewees to do the same. Would the interview have been considered derailed? Would it be appropriate for my analysis of those encounters to focus on the fullness of their corporeality and materiality as much as the words exchanged, when my interviewees have presumably given up their time on the assumption that I am interested in their *words*? If I had verbalised the pounding in my chest or asked my interviewees how they were feeling in their bodies, would that have entailed the unwelcome crossing of an assumed boundary? If so, what does this say about the extent to which Man's neurotypical epistemology defines and delimits what counts as meaning and what counts as social? My neurodivergent trouble with the frame of the social science research interview - underpinned by the idea that language-is-representation-is-knowledge-itself - also underscores a more general problem of

grappling with more-than-human materiality within the frame of neurotypically humanist qualitative methodology.

As I butted up against the task of representing something representable, I remembered how challenging I find it to respond when visitors pass by Crossbones and ask me: "so, what *is* all this?" Often these people might be rushing between work meetings, but in lieu of a concise response, I tend to insist they come inside for a quick peek at the garden. My words can't do its uncommon beauty justice, nor can I tell them what Crossbones *is* without holding them up for what would probably be an inappropriate length of time. When speaking to those accidental visitors who have enough time to hear a little more about the site, I need to feel surrounded by it – by the tenacious plants bursting from the cracks in its surface, by the mildewed ribbons fluttering from the industrial-gates-turned-shrine, by its bustling riot of critters – to put the pieces of Crossbones' story together. The site, I have so often felt, tells its own story so much better than I can. Any one of my attempts to weave its stories together feels inexpertly crude compared to what is told so seamlessly in the sedimented layers of Crossbones' more-than-human histories (Barad, 2007, p. 180).

As Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2019, p. 4) has argued, "the 'what is' question, Plato's question, is essentialist and not poststructural. It assumes something already exists, that something 'is,' is stable, and so can be identified and represented." The "what is" question is a central one to established practices of social science research - it is so pervasive as to be barely noticeable, given. The mesh of institutional processes within which such research takes place rests on *what is*: how could a project obtain funding without needing to answer this? "We" live in a world that has been sedimented according to Plato's question, which is precisely why accidental visitors to Crossbones ask me what it *is*: so that they can "make sense" of it in a way that is familiar, comforting, natural. When I was trying in vain to pull a coherent answer to this

question out of my data, I was equally - and stubbornly - convinced that Crossbones was - objectively - simply too complex and multidimensional to be succinctly surmised, and that any attempts to draw conclusions about it would be a reductive waste of time. There is a potent extent to which I still believe this to be the case, but it is only as I revisit such moments in the writing of this chapter that I am also coming to realise that my personal neurodivergent trouble with thinking the "big picture" has also been a very significant factor in making "what is" questions about Crossbones so difficult to answer.[8] Perhaps both are true: the uncontainability of Crossbones and my own trouble with containing objects fitted comfortably together; I had found a "wild" place where my wild attention made sense.

I pick up "wild" here from Crossbones itself and let it mingle with Jack Halberstam's (2020) exploration of the term. Since being reclaimed by the local community, Crossbones has been cultivated as a "wild" garden for the Outcast dead,[9] a manifestation of the work that began at the gates outside it, in which "weeds" - nature's social Outcasts - are offered their place to thrive. For Halberstam (2020, p. 3),

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[8] Developmental psychologist Uta Frith (1989, p. 98) famously hypothesised "weak central coherence" as the key marker of autism: that is, Frith claims that while autistic people may excel at local processing, they lack a "centrally acting high-level cohesive force" that pulls such information together, resulting in "an incoherent world of fragmented experience." While fragmentation is an experience recounted by some autistic people (Davidson & Henderson, 2010, p. 467), I suggest that *equating* a preference for local over global processing with an incoherent and fragmented world is a neurotypical and deficit-oriented leap, implicitly contested in many of the beautifully coherent – but different – experiential accounts of neurodiversity highlighted by Judge (2018) and Davidson and Smith (2009).

[9] If we take "the wild" or wilderness as it is popularly conceived, that is, a place apart from or unchanged by humans, cultivating a wild garden is evidently a contradiction in terms. However, since a pure and untouched wild is little more than a fantasy, I let this apparent contradiction hang here in the hope of gesturing to a different kind of wild. What the garden of remembrance at Crossbones offers instead is an urban wild in which humans are embedded, in which humans negotiate with and learn from more-than-human others as a path of mutual flourishing (Reeves, n.d., 2022).

wildness names "a chaotic force of nature, the outside of categorization, unrestrained forms of embodiment, the refusal to submit to social regulation, loss of control, the unpredictable." The wild inherits its histories of having been abused, fetishised, subjected to attempted mastery and colonisation, its being defined in opposition to civilisation and those who belong to it. At the same time, the wild holds the potential for thinking across queerness, blackness, disability, animality, death, and more, and a offers a potential site from which those bodies marked as wild might build a more-than-human solidarity.[10]

Frustrated with the impossibility (and, it often felt, pointlessness) of the task I had unwittingly given myself - to contain Crossbones – as I shifted into the next stage of my research, away from abstracted methods and into the grounded transdisciplinary field of the psychosocial, I took a turn. Taking the sage advice of my supervisor to "touch the earth," I found a way into the site that started instead with the thickness of auto/ethnographic detail. This immediately became the only way to grapple with the field that felt truly available to me in my neurodivergence: I could stay lost in detail and incrementally build up a picture of Crossbones through acts of noticing caught up in multiple *polyrhythmic* (Tsing, 2013) temporalities producing incremental change. As such, I sought to address the question of what the site "is" through its dynamic fluctuations, as read through my dynamically fluctuating attention. I hoped that another kind of whole could emerge this way, without me ever having to step back far enough to be the one to define or delimit it.

Whereas basing my research on textual data had by default implored me to direct my attention to the human participants in Crossbones' community, it never occurred to me

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[10] Judge (2018, p. 1108) similarly notes that "important threads of marginalisation and solidarity emerge between subjectivities that have been rendered less-than-human, however, creating space for empathetic common ground."

that thick description of Crossbones should begin and end with human people. Setting out to write without a plan, I took refuge in Crossbones-as-place first and foremost; I treasured writing as an opportunity to spend quiet moments surrounded by more-than-human kin. I could write immersed in company - medicinal herbs, self-sown wildflowers, bulging bodies of fungi, mischievous grey squirrels, the bones of the Crossbones dead and the rats that carry their DNA above ground - becoming-together as a post-industrial landscape rich with the kind of urban debris that would have marked Crossbones a wasteland, had it not been met with such warmth and welcome by the people that tended it and the nonhumans that enveloped it.

Without the purposeful care of a community of living humans, there would be no "Crossbones" to speak of; I cherish their work and am proud to count myself among them. Nonetheless, I am also aware that at Crossbones, living people come and go. Many of Crossbones' other participants also transgress its boundaries; but many too inhabit it for many more hours a week than living people do, not least the Crossbones dead (thanks to the sustained, collaborative efforts of humans and nonhumans). With the obvious exception of myself, as a body with a view from somewhere rather than a view from nowhere (Castro-Gómez, 2021; Haraway, 1988; Mignolo, 2009), the living human people in Crossbones' community thus move into and out of my account of it, rather than being automatically central to it.

Just as Crossbones is iteratively constituted by *more-than-human sociality* (Tsing, 2013), neurodiverse sociality is also a more-than-human sociality (Davidson & Smith, 2009; Judge, 2018). Whereas neurodivergent (and particularly, autistic[11]) people are

[11] This chapter avoids the use of people-first language when discussing autism, following the preferred terminology of the majority of authors directly and indirectly cited in this chapter, and taking note of arguments put forward by autistic self-advocates such as Jim Sinclair (2013). Given this chapter's critical stance against the "disordering" of difference, I also avoid referring to autism as ASD (autism spectrum

frequently characterised as "asocial," such an interpretation neglects to account for the often profoundly social connections neurodivergent people can feel with more-than-human others: from biotic critters such as animals and plants, through rivers and winds, stones and seashells, buildings and artworks, and prominently in my case, human remains in their dissolution into the more-than-human flux (Plumwood, 2008). What is frequently neurotypically perceived as a lack or deficit might as lived neurodiversity be sensorially and affectively rich, comforting and even awe-inspiring engagements. What could appear neurotypically as "alienation," or even "disassociation," might, from a neurodivergent perspective, indicate or open up connection with something other than human conversation.[12] What might be neurotypically construed as "distraction" from an isolated and isolable object might, for a neurodivergent person, be a nourishing dance of involuntary attention.[13]

That more-than-human dimensions of sociality have so frequently been ignored in social research is clearly not a product of neurotypicality alone, as many Indigenous

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disorder).

[12] This may sound a counter-intuitive point to grasp. To offer an explanation based on personal experience: I recall, recently, being surrounded by florescent lighting and chattering human voices, which quickly became sensorially overwhelming to the point that I felt I was floating outside my body and unable to focus on holding conversation or basic decision-making. After leaving, I sat down at the base of a tree in the nearest green space, my sensory sensitivity still intensely heightened. The pressure of participating in human-human social interaction was removed and I could simply be in my current state without needing to "perform." The dampness of the earth was more comforting than ever, the flowers brighter, the fractured sunlight more vivid, the rustle of leaves in the trees more textured and dynamic than I had ever heard it. The same sensory sensitivity that had made it so difficult to be in the busy indoor environment actually deepened my experience of more-than-human connection.

[13] Psychology contrasts *involuntary attention* to *directed attention*. Directed attention requires homing concentration onto specific tasks and will eventually lead to fatigue, including in neurotypical people. Involuntary attention, on the other hand, is "resistant to fatigue" (Chung et al., 2018). People can rapidly recover from the fatigue associated with directed attention by switching to involuntary attention, which is

authors and allies have attested in their critiques of Western anthropocentricism (Kimmerer, 2013; TallBear, 2015; Todd, 2015; Watts, 2013) reductive materialism (2008), and related binary constructions of living/non-living (TallBear, 2017). Rather, the historic failure of social research to attend to more-than-human sociality is a consequence of the human exceptionalism that underpins Man's epistemology. Mel Chen (2012) offers a helpful critique of the *animacy hierarchies* that situate Man at its pinnacle, with his wild human others occupying lower rungs, vying for animacy alongside other de-animated beings such as animals and plants, and at the very bottom of the pile, ostensibly inert matter such as rocks. Thinking through neurodiverse sociality as more-than-human sociality is an attempt to thicken one of many strands of knowing-in-being subjugated under Man, in the hope of joining myriad divergent threads in incrementally weaving together an otherwise.

In the following section, I share some of my burgeoning attempts to find a neurodivergent way into the "what is" question via a form of auto/ethnographic poetry, or *anthropoetry* (Kusserow, 2017). This small gesture to treading out the path less used was also the only one I felt able to take, the only path that could sustain my neurodivergent bodymind through a research project spanning several years. Rather than resigning myself to the search for a representable object, I search instead for a way to navigate the muddy middle spaces where moments and words live vividly in unexpected jolts and small details.

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also, pleasingly, referred to as "fascination."

Figure 3. The Shard reflected in the mirrors in the Irish Corner at Crossbones Graveyard (*Source* Photos by author)

Friday the 4th of December, 2020

g a t e s c l a n g o p e n

and the magpie
caws disapprovingly

Time to share this place with human people for another couple of hours.

up
up
and under

the Goose's
Wing

I prop my bike up against the wall, the one that's seen so much over the years.
My front wheel nearly crushes a tiny solitary stem of buddleia bursting up through the cracks.
I know the sapling can't stay here; wandering roots can't be left to fracture the foundations in which the bones of the dead are embedded.
But I won't be the one to enforce this, not today.

I follow a flash of colour eastwards
to something unfamiliar

the green roof of our volunteer hut,
the Clink, is finally green again

six months ago, it had
almost turned to dust

now
the disorderly textures of

Euphorbia
bubbling

floundering
Sedums

and dead grasses

spill over the Clink's edges

the plaque on the substation wall behind screams

1996

a wandering
buddleia grows
sideways,
solitary, from
the Clink's
wood-plated
wall, from a
crevice that was
never intended
to be this
hospitable.

I turn around

deep into winter, the salvias in the infinity beds still sing bright

crumpled brown leaves

from that colossal London Plane over the way

nest suspended in clusters of Salvia's foliage

this one, Hot Lips, has deep red petals edged with white

I look closer
pause at an unexpected pocket
of mutation
a cluster of flowers

completely red

and on the opposite side of the plant

completely white

and wonder

how this sage came to be Hot Lips and whether I am watching them struggle to become whatever they were before, again.

Notes: Friday the 4th December, 2020

"The Clink" is named after the Liberty of the Clink – the medieval jurisdiction in which Crossbones was located - and the Clink prison, which operated nearby until the late 18th century.

The Goose's Wing is a sculptural shelter that envelops visitors as they enter Crossbones, built by Arthur de Mowbray in 2015. Its "goose wing" shape references the Winchester Geese, who worked in brothels locally during the medieval period.

Buddleia

close to the buddleia's centre

the drawn out, high-pitched
frequencies of passing trains

scream in
from the
Northwest

rippling through the site and jolting me into a

different kind of awareness

I follow the noise to its source, towards the railway

arches that cross the northern end of Redcross Way

to the leggy
cascade of
buddleia
spouting
from the
Victorian
brickwork

introduced into cultivation in 1896

brought to Kew Gardens from China by Basque missionary Father Armand David, who gave his name to 14 of his "discoveries," including *Buddleia Davidii*

its highly dispersible

~~lively~~ ~~wayward~~

seed

has since escaped cultivation on multiple occasions

often associated with habitation

additional dispersal can be facilitated by the air currents generated by cars and trains

I run my fingers over the cluster of woody protrusions at the centre of the buddleia's trunk

they remind me of the diagrams I've seen of human hearts, veins and arteries cut off close to the organ as they weave in and out of it. I suppose it would be impossible to follow them to their limits

seeing and feeling that what remains of these branches were cut at different times

pale beige insides,
rough and moist to touch
centres turning hollow

deep,
dark,
earthy
browns

tender green shoots erupt amongst the stumps
finding their way through folds of dry,
brown, leafy debris

I wonder

just how many years I am witnessing
calibrated here
compressed into this space
across this spectrum of texture and tone?

nodes
sprout
young
growth
along
exposed
above me tracts of
bare
branches

Most of the flowering heads have now gone to seed.
A few dense clusters of flowers remain, each an
explosion of tiny, purple, trumpet-shaped flowers.

I b r e a t h e in their just-lingering scent

lilac

A damselfly
or a dragonfly
(I never know)
stops to feed on a
flower
and another
a bee follows
and another

that's what I've read
it should smell like.

I squat down, following the leafy shoots that
spiral around the trunk down to its base, where
it meets the foundations
am met right away with a flush of Euphorbia
and the knowledge that this buddleia is not alone
they burst from these cracks
in complex community

I remember that every one of these leaves, every strip of bark, is saturated with others
too small for me to see.

Notes: Buddleia

This piece draws on direct quoted material from the Non-Native Species Secretariat (n.d.): the relevant text is rendered in bold. Where ellipses might typically be used to indicate that phrases of quoted material have been omitted, line breaks are used instead.

For all suicides

A grey squirrel darts out
onto the stepping stones
that run alongside the
infinity pond and looks
straight at me, belly
exposed, pauses.

The squirrel looks surprised to
see me, but not remotely afraid

reminding me that for every 2
hours we human visitors spend at
Crossbones

the critters that live here
spend 22 more

breathing
digesting
touching
sleeping

with the dead

As one of two volunteers left in here as opening hours wind down, it feels they have been waiting for the (living) humans to leave so that business as usual can resume.

The squirrel holds my gaze
for a moment more before
they bound away

I walk around to greywashed,
splintered coffin resting in the Irish
Corner, bend down to read the
plaque:

Thomas Ball,
3rd Nov 1822

died by suicide after being fined for having an altercation with his wife

a year before the Burial of Suicide
Act 1823 prohibited

the traditional crossroad burial with a stake through the heart, replacing it with an interment in the unconsecrated part of the churchyard.

I pause for a moment, breathe
and attempt to commit Thomas' name to memory.

I look up, southwestwards, to
the shrine

FOR ALL SUICIDES

N
L O V E
V
D I E S
R

and notice sticky letters spelling out
in
green
silver
purple
gold glitter
for the first time.

I move closer
read the names of

meet the familiar
face of the crow
painted on rusty
corrugated tin

IRVING

Marshall Leadbetter Jr.

Graeme Payne

IMOGEN GOLDIE

Jan

MONKEY Resh
DAVE

ED

inked bold and dark over the layers of names since
faded beneath

heralded by a withered
crow feather

I breathe to remember

look down to the young clump of feathery yarrow in
vibrant green unfolding from the cracks beneath the shrine

in the presence of this
involuntary gathering

of the dead we living choose to remember.

Notes: For all suicides

Thomas' coffin was a replica built by local sculptor Adrian for an exhibition curated by Lucy Coleman Talbot (2021), *We Are Here*, held at Crossbones in October 2020 and based on Talbot's archival research. The bold-rendered text in this piece indicates direct quotations from the exhibition guide (Talbot, 2021, p. 2); as with the previous piece, line breaks are used instead of ellipses when omitting phrases from quoted material.

Discussion: making-in-writing as wild sociality

As I approached the task of transposing my chaotically scribbled fieldnotes - meandering the page, refusing to stay within the lines, shifting scales, doubling back on themselves - I ran into moments of tension that felt impossible to express within a neurotypical grammar. “Writing up” once again seemed to implore me to translate my notes into a tidy neurotypicality of which I felt incapable, and which felt far removed from the sensorial immediacy of the encounter with Crossbones. I hit moments of friction as I sought to translate the disorderly text of my notes into structured sentences complete with tenses, pronouns, and punctuation. The very shape of the paragraph became problematic. I found myself having to make decisions about what happened “first” for the sake of putting forward a coherent narrative, when in actuality both things had happened at once, and my attention had been split between them at the time. At other times, I read my surroundings in two or more different and sometimes conflicting ways at once; other times still, I would read my notes but another, remembered dimension of the encounter almost drowned out the words as I did so. Other times, my embodied encounter with the site – or the process of writing it up - was punctuated equally loudly with remembered conversations and fragments of information reverberating through me. Wild sociality does not obey the rules of neurotypical sociality - it is multiple, cacophonous, polyrhythmic and nonlinear.

When I heard in passing of open-field poetics – an approach to poetry that treats the page as space, or even “a place or a landscape” (Bloomfield, 2013) – I was immediately entranced by the possibility that a page might let some of these tensions hang. I wondered if the page, as a *field of play* (Richardson, 1997), might hold the space for certain tensions: between different *intra-actions* (Barad, 2007) on the edge of being determined; between different strands of more-than-human knowledge in their co-presence; between the presumptive linearity of narrative and the *dance of*

attention (Manning & Massumi, 2014) that noisy, lively, neurodiverse, more-than-human worlds necessitate. I wanted the reader to "hear" multiple voices and engage multiple, partial strands of attention at once (as I am so used to doing). As I arranged text on the page, I found that making space for these tensions made it feel less like I was writing in a foreign, neurotypical grammar. As Judge (2018, p. 1112) aptly highlights, the "continuous and actively fluid communicative spectrum" that is neurodiverse expression "requires an openness to different ways of knowing and expressing that may challenge solely verbal frameworks." The incorporation by necessity of a non-verbal component – the spatiality of the page, the white space, the tension – allowed me to approach "writing" as a material process of embodied making in a way that felt severely limited within a neurotypical grammar. The tension helped the words to feel alive, and holding this tension as resonance was deeply and sensorially satisfying to my neurodivergent brain, a moment of space from and disruption to the neurotypical grammar of language-as-representation that constantly insists that I "make sense" through a rational, linguistically-bound and temporally-linear narrative. Opening up the space for something other than words on the page let me call out to a world that is not delimited by language, a world in which meaning is not only present in words, and so a world that is also more-than-human.

As I played with moving text around on the page, I unexpectedly found myself reinhabiting the spatiality of the encounter with Crossbones. I was summoned back to the embodied memory of being there; it was co-present with me as I wrote up at my desk. I could navigate and express Crossbones' spatiality without being obliged to narrativise it every step of the way. I could place my more-than-human kin there without always needing to explain their presence. "I" could emerge and dissolve as placeholder or spatial location, rather than having to stay stuck within the position of stable narrator. Caught up in the perpetual struggle to sit still at my desk, I could reinhabit the embodied experience of moving around Crossbones, surrounded by the

movements of more-than-human others. I could move around the page even as I stayed within it, making it easier to stay with the page and so with my work. As Davidson and Henderson (2010, p. 471) have highlighted in their readings of autistic autobiographies, for neurodivergent people, “movement is often a means of stabilizing volatile space, of reordering one’s place in the environment in more manageable ways.”

That my editing process has become one of making and moving has demanded I work slowly and closely - a temporal disposition that often feels undervalued or nigh impossible within *chrononormative* (Freeman, 2010) trajectories of doctoral research - but which feels deeply satisfying and necessary to me. While in certain ways, then, these neurodivergent strategies have afforded me ways to navigate my work in a way that feels more engaged, stimulating, comfortable - and crucially, possible - as I carve out the space to do this work, I run into different kinds of friction. Against the pull of the institutional demands on me – swimming upstream with diverse others who have variously found themselves “out of sync” with Man’s temporality - I slow down to work in a way that allows me to express my neurodivergent encounters with Crossbones in a way that now feels unavoidable.

Figure 4. Frogspawn in the eco-pond at Crossbones Graveyard (*Source* Photos by author)

Tentative conclusions//Parting notes

What I offer in this chapter is just one possible expression of a neurodivergent research practice among many potential others. "Potential" being key, as so far, the scope of overtly neurodiverse strategies has largely not been realised, due to the limiting factors of underrepresentation, disclosure and epistemological and institutional support. I have found the epistemological space to share these neurodivergent strategies in the capacious spaces of psychosocial studies, and yet much work remains to be done if psychosocial studies is to sufficiently grapple with neurodiverse and more-than-human sociality. The neurodivergent strategies that have burgeoned through my engagement with Crossbones are not solely my output; they are generated as a path of wild attention, itself demanded and produced by the lively more-than-human community within which I work. They are my co-creators of epistemic space.

A key contention of this chapter is that if psychosocial studies is to take seriously neurodiverse sociality, it should also purposefully attend to expanding its sense of sociality beyond the human. The transdisciplinarity of psychosocial studies opens up a host of pathways through which this might be realised. At the same time, it should take care that the "psycho-" in psychosocial does not crowd out more-than-human sociality. While the psychosocial intends to disrupt the psycho/social binary, there is a risk that the "psycho-" in psychosocial implicitly insists that its analyses always come back to an ostensibly internal and somehow exclusively "human" mind, thus reiterating the binary it attempts to dismantle. As our gut bacteria will attest, no such thing exists.[14] Perhaps a more meaningful psychosocial engagement with more-than-

[14] Recent years have seen an explosion of research around the brain-gut-microbiota axis, with profound implications for understanding human-nonhuman entanglement. Dinan and Cryan's (2017) review of key studies in the field highlights the accumulating evidence of the role of the brain-gut-microbiota axis in

human sociality could offer unexpected paths to thinking queerly beyond the psycho/social binary.

As I have argued here, psychosocial studies has a particular responsibility towards enacting conditions by which neurodivergent people can participate in the field *in their neurodivergence*, and not exclusively through the many ways in which they have had to learn to speak the neurotypical language. In this chapter, I have contextualised my neurodivergent strategies within a largely neurotypical grammar. This is a technique I have had to go to great effort to learn and doing so generates more than enough friction. That I have done so is also a marker of a privilege that many neurodivergent people do not have: the learned ability to traverse neurotypical modes of communication steadily enough to be able express myself through them, however intermittently. Crucially, then, if psychosocial studies is to take seriously the work of neurodiversifying its perspectives, a neurotypical epistemology and grammar should not be regarded as the only framework through which neurodiverse strategies can become legible. This frame of legibility should not be limited to being literally understood, but rather, should also seek to recognise neurodiverse strategies as performative modes of criticality. That is, psychosocial studies should afford the space for neurodiverse strategies to *just be* rather than always to insist on their assimilation within a neurotypical frame.

Epistemic space can be an important refuge for neurodivergent people and also, therefore, a site of healing and justice. As a transdisciplinary field concerned with contemplations on critical epistemology, psychosocial studies might just afford the epistemic wriggle room within which neurodiverse perspectives can articulate themselves. As has been discussed, overtly neurodivergent perspectives are rare in academia not only because of underrepresentation and inadequate mechanisms for

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modulating depression, anxiety and neurological difference.

recognising their value, but also because of legitimate concerns around disclosure. But psychosocial studies cannot wait for underrepresentation to be rectified or for the risk of stigma to be ameliorated for more overtly neurodivergent perspectives to suddenly appear. Rather, to create the space for neurodiverse perspectives to flourish, psychosocial studies should embolden its commitment to a more general diversifying of critical approaches through which all manner of wild epistemologies can come to take up space. It should be open to diverse forms of writing, and to diverse and collaborative approaches to appraising such writing. This stands to benefit not only neurodivergent people, but a great many others who tread the lived terrain of divergence from Man and his epistemology.

Further, psychosocial studies should take seriously the potential of *more-than-verbal* (Judge, 2018, p. 1102) methods to grapple with its material. While writing can, for some neurodivergent people, offer a particularly potent mode of communication (Prince-Hughes, 2002), for others, entirely non-verbal communication methods may be preferable or necessary. These methods might be actualised through mediums more often figured as creative, such as movement, performance, video, sound, painting, or sculpture, for example. The response-ability the field should take on is to build capacity to recognise the criticality already present within such forms of communication.

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Biography

Hannah is a transdisciplinary scholar working across psychosocial studies, sociology, anthropology and environmental humanities; her long-term commitments are to exploring human-nonhuman relations in sites of anthropogenic disturbance ethnographically, particularly in urban settings. Hannah is passionate about fostering collaboration within and beyond academia, including with collaborators based in visual arts, archaeology and the natural sciences.

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