

Where did the joy go?

Sacred Laughter and The Revolutionary Community

Morna Finnegan

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<https://youtube.com/watch?v=oJblySM1T5Q>

Introduction

Cicius: This is Mariam and me, we curate and organize together these Commons talks.

We welcome you all on this platform. Academia is an online academy which offers an ecological sound educational program and aims to connect people from around the globe. We invite you to check on our website to see what kind of courses we offer.

We were invited to introduce Morna, Camilla, and Chris.

Camilla is a radical anthropologist from the Radical Anthropology Group, and she has spoke on this platform before. So, and yeah, why is laughter and and joy important and why is it missing? And we'd like to, maybe explain a bit the title and what is missing in our society today.

Camilla: Thanks, Cicius. It's a great pleasure to introduce Dr. Morna Finnegan, who's currently teaching at the University of Edinburgh, Social Anthropology in the Open Centre for Social, for Learning. I'm not sure exactly. Yeah, got it. But who is a long-term colleague and has been worked with me as a co-editor on a book on human origins. I'll put in the chat how you can e-mail me to get a hold of that book because there's a wonderful chapter in it by Mona that you really need to read. But to say more, I think, in my view, Owen Morna is perhaps the most important or one of the most important anthropologists on the whole question of egalitarianism, but especially the question of sexual egalitarianism and how women can and do have power by sharing power, sharing power through their bodies, and that this idea of bodies that cannot be privatized as being this, like the fortress of women's power, But the main weapon of those bodies is laughter. And whether that's talking about the laughter of shared bodies in the medieval carnivals that we've heard about from Bakhtin and the dialogue, the dialogic nature of those carnivals, or whether that is Central African forest hunter-gatherers who Morna has studied with previously, the women, the women's rituals there, or whether that is the raucous laughter of the stories told about the trickster. This talk is about the sacred and laughter. So let's hear from Warner about that.

Presentation

Morna: OK, thank you, Camilla. Really, this is very closely connected to the ideas that you have been bringing forwards for a number of years. Of course, not just the

understanding of sexual egalitarianism and gender. I watched your wonderful YouTube talk on the Trickster about a week ago. And it reminded me, we talked in the, when we had the session on the book and we talked about my chapter there, that you're actually someone who has managed to connect the anthropology and the ethnography and this incredible understanding of the Southern African and the East African data to the evolutionary contexts. And we didn't mention that actually in talking about my chapter and the book as a whole. We talked about Herdi and Tomasello. So it's important to flag up that Camilla you have kind of managed to in in the different pieces that you've written and the the different perspectives you've come at this from that you've managed to fuse things as well really nicely and I'm saying that because you know there's this back and forth of ideas and insights and I know that your work has had a big influence on things that I've written And so what I would like to do today is keep an eye on all of that, keep an eye on things like the theory coming out of cognitive and evolutionary anthropology to do with how we became so intensely pro-social, what the foundations for that were, and why it's really, really important that we continue to emphasize the cooperative breeding part of that. I was reading an article by Bowen about a week ago as well, and he was talking about the use of lethal weaponry as a driver in creating egalitarian societies. You know, kind of the fact that people were increasingly able to kill and be wary of one another. And there was a tiny little piece on cooperative breeding in that article. He mentioned several other things. I know these are ideas that some of you are already working with. So, I'd like to do something a wee bit different today. I'm going to try to travel through a big territory, bringing in lots of different strands. And the reason that that's useful for me as well as maybe interesting for you is that I'm kind of in the process of trying to get a book ready to send out to a few publishers with my doctoral work in it. And one of the things that seems really important to me is to not lose sight of the impact of this data that we're working with in anthropology, the anthropology of egalitarian hunter-gatherers, not lose sight of how relevant that is to where we now are and to, you know, any kind of positive changes that we might be able to make in the social fabric.

So, I'm going to start on the back of a quote from William Blake's poem, which is, "Energy is eternal delight". I want to start thinking in a more positive way about what happens when we use energy in a certain way, socially, politically, ritually, and to some extent, on the level of the spirit of a community.

So, energy as eternal delight. And I want to begin with a kind of almost like a thought experiment. Imagine really now that you are profoundly, sensually connected to every other living being. So I kind of want to talk us through, you know, we're coming now from communities that find themselves in this principle of the collective body remaining public and open, audible and visible in so many ways. One of the things I'll move on to is looking at the techniques for how joy, for how sacred laughter get used to drive that collective body. But I want to start by almost a thought experiment.

So, you're profoundly connected to every other living being. Your sensitivity to and responsibility for that connection has been cultivated since birth by an organic community in which power is understood as a living thing, something electrical or molecular. You can only realize it when you share it. You try to grab it for yourself and it spoils. So you can't privatize power in this community. Nobody owns it. It only exists as a between element. But its roots are firmly planted in your own body. And particularly in that earthy kind of procreative core that has such a ringing voice in societies where women have stead collective.

So, you live by a general cultural consensus, that every person is viscerally, energetically continuous with all others, and there are lots of ritual mechanisms and techniques for pushing that.

Being good isn't something imposed on you from the outside by the use of violence or shame. Law is not punitive or restrictive necessarily, that's not its key feature. It's lodged in your own gut, it's in your own blood and there's an understanding that energy is what's shared and body is what's shared. The illness of the vulnerable can be taken on and shared, for example.

So, in this community, skill Songs, dances, meat, breast milk, blood, babies, can all be shared. And the mechanism for doing that is in your own body. And I've talked recently about the fact that for the Bayaka, that's *equila*, for the Southern African Jundo that's *nom*. In Cameroon, you can find something similar under the name of *jambe*.

It always signifies power. It always lives in the body and it's always most potent when shared. So imagine now that you reach puberty in this community and you're drawn into the correct ritual association that will teach you how to cultivate and harness this kind of almost quantum power in ways appropriate for your own development and the health of your community.

Imagine that when you dance, you're capable of calling down the rains. You can lure thunder gods to earth. You can serenade the moon. You can communicate with forest spirits and game animals. There's no private ego in your world. Yet as a person, your autonomy is sacred.

So, all the things that we associate with social loneliness, stress, addiction, anxiety, autoimmune malfunctions are not part of your daily existence. And you are the pivot of a political dynamism that is incredibly sophisticated. So with your whole body, you sing and dance and work and laugh, and you'll move through life like that. Held at the crux of a social and moral collective that upholds your integrity and demands it fiercely, simultaneously. And that demand is a very important word.

Demand sharing among egalitarian hunter-gatherers is not nice. It's not polite. But we'll come back to that. So, the fact that you are expected to participate in the collective body in certain ways that enable everyone to maintain their freedom of movement.

The purpose of your life is not to please or appease anybody. All these categories that smother our children, such as obedient, successful, famous, winner and loser, are empty categories for people like the Bayaka, the Mbuti, the Baka, the Juntwa, traditionally.

The bully has no nook in which to gain a foothold because your whole culture is premised on the deliberate collective action against bullies, against alpha males, and against the big boss.

So, your life is not a burden. It's not based on this fundamental idea of lack. People laugh a lot, sing a lot, dance a lot, work together, and learn the appropriate methods for taking the lives of others who also share the social world around you, game animals and other animals within the forest.

Again and again, really from the most profound to the most mundane levels, you learn that you are connected. You learn self-assured self, body-assured body, and you learn that as long as you continue to share, to practice the vigilance, you know, that that's needed to work against the kind of grab hoard impulse in yourself or others, that you and your children will be okay. And this isn't theoretical or philosophical or judicial. It's a physiology of power coming out of your own gut and its connection to everyone else around you. And I've talked about this possibility of corporeal morality that functions in sexually egalitarian societies. So really what I want to say is that the stories we tell shape us. The possibilities that we believe we have available to us shape us. They shape the way we move in the world. and the expectations we have of our lives. So I want to use some of the data on techniques used among various Central African or Southern African hunter-gatherers this evening to kind of free up our collective imagination. And I also want to look at some of the Amazonian material in particular on laughter. on this idea of sacred laughter. Because what you find if you look at the record on recent or contemporary hunter-gatherers is exactly the working alternative to hierarchy, you know, to the kind of capitalist, patriarchal types of society that we're all very familiar with. When you look into the hunter-gatherer ethnography, you see what happens when power belongs to everyone, and therefore to no one. So the whole moving matrix of relationships that represents a coherent political philosophy in situations where the move against privatization is really the dominant impulse. And the kind of sharing we're talking about, as people like Jerome Lewis has underlined, isn't just a form of reciprocity, it's a means of creating society. So how does this happen? How is it possible to kind of amplify biology to such an extent that it becomes culture? And going through some old material for to thinking about what I wanted to say tonight, I came across a reference to an old paper by Marshall Sahlins, where he's talking about the history of sadness. So the isolation and lack, he argues, haunts the Western philosophical and religious tradition, and which Sahlins attributes, in part, to the biological body and its selfish grabbing, you know, of what it can for itself. But here, what I want to do is keep biology and look through it at the technologies used for formalizing strong emotions, strong tensions, for collectivizing them and lifting them, as it were, out of the individual. So to look at things like theatrical grieving, theatrical aggression, theatrical laughter, or sacred laughter, and how that connects

to the collectively embodied ecstasy or joy that we find being described by people like Masato Sawada, Dais Gundo, Michelle Kisluk, Jerome Lewis, Joanna Overing, and others. I want to look at how ritualized laughter takes the rigidity. that might threaten the moving social body. And I've spoken about how it's really profoundly important to the kinds of egalitarian society I'm talking about, that movement not be curtailed, that motion not be stopped. And so the way that laughter kind of works on the kind of the knots in the social body, the places where things need stretched and pulled out and given a new elasticity. So sacred laughter as a technique for working against rigidity. And I want to look at how that offers an alternative to Salon's, the history of sadness, This cultivation of a collective attitude going on constantly, and you see it in the work of Peter Gow as well, Amazonia and the Piro. This deceptively ordinary atmosphere, which is actually disguising a huge effort being made to hold a door open socially, ritually, politically, using the body. Now, I've talked and written at length about what I saw at Mbule. It's a semi-permanent forest camp, an Mbenjele Yaka forest camp in Congo, Congo-Brazzaville. And then, you know, subsequently corroborated in the regional literature, which is the fact that women particularly, in remaining vocally, bodied, ritually bodied and very public, transform the social landscape by carrying through onto a symbolically accessible level the biological imperatives of both the maternal and the child element. And an important part of what I've been trying to do theoretically in looking at power is really connected to looking at what gets lost when one part of society, in this case the male, becomes dominant. What other items, what other qualities get squished out of the social frame there? Things that you find coming back into the public zone where mothers and children are still socially and publicly powerful so central rather. So items like sharing, cooperation, negotiation, freedom of movement, attention to the lunar cycle and relationships with with the moon itself. qualities like openness, transformation and mutability. And you find these embodied in the spirits and also in the Southern African trickster figures. And then you also, in this kind of social community where the child has also said publicly accessible as an element, as a principle almost, you find play. becoming a very important part of the way that the whole society negotiates and manages to keep the power pendulum moving. So play a serious community practice. And Johan Huizinga said, the kind of Dutch philosopher, cultural philosopher, I suppose, said, The ritual act or an important part of it will always remain within the play category. But in this seeming subordination, the recognition of its holiness isn't lost. The hallowed spot is a playground. So where did the joy go? is the title I came up with for this talk because I wanted to connect some of the things I've just mentioned to the fact that increasingly we're finding ourselves living life cut off from that whole rich collective body that defines society for people like the Ben Jelly. And which, as Jerome Lewis is always pointing out, is just inherently joyful. There's a huge amount of emphasis placed on feeling good in these communities. And really what we're doing is flagging up the things that get outlawed in hierarchical societies, some might say traumatized societies. And as a kind of prelude to looking at the literature on what happens in an alternative scenario, so to look at what goes

underground, where energy is no longer eternal delight, and what happens to all that social and creative and erotic energy, And that's a question that French feminism made it its mission to address, of course, the question of power. So what happens politically and socially? What happens in terms of accessible models when the female procreative and libidinal body is removed from culture? And One of the things that I would like to highlight is the fact that for the average woman or girl living in, you know, very late capitalist, post-industrial, patriarchal societies, societies based on the principle of the paternal body, and I'm talking here about principles. There is a part of our self that's missing. So we're travelling through a social and political landscape daily, which simply isn't reflective of our deepest physiological, hormonal and cyclic reality. And that's just a fact, even before we mention, you know, that wonderful creativity that we bring to gender. And as Camilla Power has succinctly put it, understanding that basic loss and the evolutionary foundations for it. And Camilla says, evolutionary theory predicts conflict over offspring. We have to know that if we want to move past it. And that's the irony in dumping the biological body, in dumping the fact that we have different bodies and that they create different needs. and cause us to, you know, to push different values into the cultural zone. In trying to forget about all of that, we get stuck with it, but we can't share it anymore because now it's outside culture. Biology, I'm talking about here, it becomes inconvenient and messy and individual, and you deal with it privately. And then, of course, it takes a variety of distorted forms. So all that wonderfully expansive material of the sensuous that you would find during Carnival gets cut off from the social group as a whole. You know, all the qualities that were once particles of what Bakhtin called an immense whole. So the tricksters, the spirits, the grannies, the children, all the other items that would have balanced the dominance of the male collective body. And really, what I want to be constantly keeping in mind is the fact that you have this thinning of society. You have this thinning of community where all the other qualities are removed. And so let's look at the idea of happiness or joy as revolutionary potential. So radical joy, revolutionary joy. That's something that Victor Turner at the end of his career became really interested in. They underestimated power of the play element, specifically in culture. So dancing, drumming and singing, not a specialist activity, Turner said. you know, not a spectator sport, but as a collective movement where everybody dances, drums, whistles, stamps, sings, touches, and then, you know, moves to back into the kind of mundane, back into the daily subsistence effort, and work, need to work. What I want to do is really look at how that is possible in empirical context. How does it work in context? How do people actually manage to keep the play element, to keep play and joy and laughter at the heart of the social body? And I also want to point out the fact that We're talking about a formality, a formalizing of these things, so that they can be used publicly, so that they can be used collectively. OK, so the anthropologist, Isaac Bongo. was studying the Baka in Ndimako village in East Cameroon. And he was looking at their dances and spirit dance in particular. And he'd been trying to observe and categorize these for months. And he was asking people, why do you dance? And they

were saying, Awa joko, because it's a good thing, or Awa en dewe, because there's no problem. And he was really kind of prodding here, it's a good thing, it's fun, there's no problem, seemed like a very flimsy explanation for something that was taking up a huge amount of time and energy. And he was also struck by the fact that there was a huge amount of dances taking place without there being a formal frame for these. So often at a moment's notice, and after a big crowd had assembled, A dance would simply evaporate without further comment. And what perplexed Bundo about these moments was the lack of concern shown by the participants who would just shrug and disperse. Even the spirit who was supposed to have danced never got angry. And that's a quote from Bundo. Now, the apparent nonchalance here is deceptive because the stress put on people, put by people on lack of anger, is really indicative of this socially cultivated collective body for whom emotions are matters of interactive performance. So the good or joyful nature of these occasions and the pull away from formalizing them is integral to their nature, it's integral to their power. And one of the things that Bundo and many other ethnographers of dance among the Baka and the Bayaka have found, this is something I've also talked about before, is the fact that women's informal or non-spirit dances are really almost continual And these are named and recognised by ethnographers, but because they differ in scale from big community, Iboka, big community dances, they've tended to be dismissed with the aside that they're mainly for amusement. And Bundo himself says, non-spurred performance is principally women and children. In this sense, the non-spurred performance is joyful play. So what are the methods, the technologies of joy in empirical context? And why is this joyful play really at the heart, I'm going to argue, of what the community is trying to do, that door that they're trying to keep open all the time, the skill, the effort, the brilliance of complex egalitarianism. and the fact that it presents itself in such kind of modest or almost humble ways. You know, we're doing it because we're having a good time. Why not? And in fact what they're doing is keeping this churn of movement running all the time. Okay. So song, if you go into any Benjeli camp or spend time among people, you find that song is like a stream running from women's mundane activities, what we would consider mundane, gathering, childcare, food preparation to the most defined ritual occasions. And Jerome Lewis points out that for the Benjeli, a good camp should ring out regularly with laughter and song. And this is really a kind of an interesting and key thing, this keeping of the audible engine going all the time, whether through singing, through laughter, through the cultivation of particular speech styles, which tend to employ mimicry and mockery as really central. Jerome himself describes women's talk, which involves laughter and rhythm and stylized body language as being really socially central. It's a key way that women keep themselves and their voices at the heart of the camp. Now, what's interesting about the way that this vocal, polyphonic, moving, multi-limbed body operates is that it's always extremely theatrical. It's, there's a formality, a performative formality that it doesn't allow it to be reduced to any single body. So for example, if someone has, there's been some kind of a transgression against an individual woman, women, a few older ladies,

sometimes accompanied by younger women, will stride into the central space and start parodying the person who's being targeted, mimicking them. you know, using their facial expressions, mocking their accents, their gait, their kind of the foibles of the person. And in effect, says Lewis, says Jerome Lewis, women are using mimicry in the social context of moajo as a very effective means of social control. And we can connect that to the dance that happens as well continually in the average Benjilli camp. The fact that people are constantly gearing up for moving in and out of various kinds of physical performance. And that's really a kind of a way to lead into an anecdote. that I want to recount before I talk about laughter specifically from Michelle Kisluk, an anthropologist looking at the Bayaka. She labours the point that these kind of dances for amusement, the non-spirits dances, the dances for joy have such a critical place in creating a platform for the bigger ritual performances that hasn't really been recognized in the regional literature. And so she gives this example of something that happened during her field work. She talks about the fact that missionary influence has had a really destructive impact on Bayaka spirit dance. In one camp, because of Mondowa and Zapa, the matter of God, all the major spirit rituals, including Ijengi and Ngoku, have been abandoned. So left without their main source of medicine and disarmed of their spirit allies and encounters with Bilo, Bayaka at Dzanza in the Central African Republic were disoriented and vulnerable. And in that climate of fear instilled by evangelical threats, that spirit dances and traditional medicines were satanic, Kisluk speculated that the threat of cultural annihilation was looming, not because of change, but because of a campaign that threatened to dismantle the cultural tools to cope with change. And in the middle of this crisis, women confided to her that they never intended to throw away bayaka things and were in fact still regularly dancing Elanda under the noses of the evangelists. evangelists, who considered this non-spirit dance a harmless game. So the dance for joy here, Elanda, slipped through the missionary net. You know, it slipped past the missionaries, but it kept the door open for Bayaka dancers. And when Kisluk returned to the same community many years later, Expecting to find them assimilated, they had actually reinvented most of their dances and were now dancing them routinely. And the God dance was poised very uneasily, she says, within a more dynamic Biac repertoire. So creating a split between formal and informal rituals and dances and you know, ritual songs that isn't generally made by locals. And then marking down joy or play or amusement assumes that joy bears the same individualistic connotations that it does in societies in which it has stopped signifying the activation of counter power. Johan Huizinga, again, to return to him, says the apparently quite simple question of what play is leads us deep into the problem of the nature and origin of religious concepts. And he argued strongly against the use of symbolic correspondence to describe transformations that take place via ritual where, you know, the human becomes the animal or the spirit. And he goes on, The identity, the essential oneness, goes far deeper than the correspondence between a substance and its symbolic image. It's a mystic unity. In play as we conceive it, the distinction between belief and make-belief breaks down. The concept of play merges quite naturally with that of holiness.

And of course, it's this that Juntos healers describe in their transfigured state prior to drawing the sickness out of others or embarking on shamanic journeys or becoming the lion. It's this that women anticipate when in yellow trance, they leave their bodies behind and move out through the forest to find game. What's really nice here is the way that we can connect this ability to see as this ability to cross boundaries and to break down fences and walls. how we can connect this to laughter and to the fact that there's so much humour involved in creating this socially cultivated body. And if you look at the work of Joanna Overing on Amazonia, she talks about how anthropology has failed to see so much of this because we're suffering from the illness of gravitas, she puts it. She says Pirroa myths center on the risable, the erotic, the obscene, the scatological and hilarious side of godly behavior, very much like the Juntos trickster figures or Central African spirits. Like women's Ngoku lyrics, Benjele, women's Ngoku lyrics. For Pierroa, the strongest obscenities and most colorful, dirty words are found in the sacred language of chance. And she wonders whether this is related to the fact that laughter is understood to have a dangerous relation to the body. And it's really interesting to look at the banishing of the body. the slapstick, the burlesque from Christian religion, in the context of the fact that these very qualities sit at the heart of the hunter-gatherer concept of the sacred. So, you know, when you look at Trickster, when you look at the forest spirits among the Benjele, they are intensely ambivalent, intensely mutable, They're incredibly transformative entities. And they're using all the time the most graphic, sexual, procreative, biological language and items. So they're drawing on this to create the very kind of body laughter that Sallens and Overing and others have said Christian philosophy had to outlaw, had to push underground in order to operate. And so I suppose what I want to emphasize here is the effort. The work that is done in bringing these things into the social kind of core and then using them. So sacred laughter isn't just a natural state that occurs because It's, you know, released from the confines of gravitas. It's a carefully cultivated communal state, requiring hard work and attention to boundary. As Overing says, jokes have power. And this, I believe that this is really key in understanding so much of the literature on the spirits in Central Africa, their place for Central African hunter-gatherers in the whole kind of cosmological fabric, as well as the various trickster figures described by people like Gunther. I mean, really, we talked, I spoke on a recent in a recent paper about that kind of the power of that collective formal laughter as animating the collective body and the fact that figures like the Khoisan Trickster is much more of a Rabelian character. The spirits themselves are kind of like Rabelian beings. They're kind of shot through with ambiguity and anti-structural strains. And as Gunther says, they're consistent with experience for people. And if you look at that beside the piety and suffering of the Christian God, the contrast is extraordinary. On one hand, you have the multifaceted the idea of God as a comba, for example, whose blood and snot and excrement and testicles are the frame for popular organo fables and described by Michelle Kinsluk for the Bayaka. On the other hand, you have things very much stripped of their laughter and their blood and their bawdiness. And some of the lyrics, actually, that Michelle

Kislik gives us about a ritual chant sung by ACA women detail the cadaver of Komba's mother, the vagina of Komba's wife, the shit of master of Komba. And the fact that in the seemingly most obscene terms, you know, the use of the most visceral graphic body terms, you have this transfer into sacred space, a kind of condensed language signalling the collective transfer to a different kind of awareness, what Victor Turner called *communitas*. Such words, Joanna Overing says, these obscenities, these bawdy kind of ritual chants and songs that accompany the dances, and which women in particular relish, are good, strong words, conducive to the fecundity that allows for the creation of food and healthy children. And that tells us a lot about the politics going on here. Okay, so, I mean, there are lots of other directions that I could take this in, particularly thinking about the spirits themselves as entities, as characters, spirits like Ajengi or Ngoku who brings Eros into camp, Elanda, thinking about also climb spirits for the Benjele like in Bwambo. And what we're really talking about all the time is a core kind of cosmological and social structure that constantly circles items such as sex and meat, hunting and childbirth, desire and hunger. And you have a whole kind of resonant community pushing these terms into a ritual shape. You know, as Marilyn Strathern said in one of her books, that what it was that allowed men to become powerful or dominant as a collective was the men at their back. So in terms of the group power, it was the ability to rely on a ritual community, an extended ritual body that would support one and push, you know, one's own agendas. And it's almost as if here, when we look at the literature on Central Africa, when we look at what the Benjele, or the F or the Baka or the Juntos are doing, we find women relying on the others at their back, who in this case are not just other women. They're also kids and grannies, but they're also spirits and game animals and the moon and the forest itself. There's a whole other society there, a very kind of graphic formally raised society that's employing tools like laughter, mockery, collective dance, bringing people into ecstatic or joyful states. That's constantly working on behalf of this core that is the kind of female collective body. And that's constantly pushing the pendulum to swing back and forth and turn up power. And so, an awareness of that, an awareness of the fact that when we talk about joy, when we talk about play, we're talking about power. We're talking about ways in which people are able to keep things open. And that's a big part of what the Benjeli say they're doing when they dance. They want to keep the community open and access to the forest and to all the other beings that are part of that accessible. And that's where we come to Huizinga's, one of his main insights that the concept of play emerges quite naturally with that of holiness. And you find that idea rooted in Bakhtin's work too. And you find it sitting at the very heart of the hunter-gatherer social economy. The fact that laughter and play, when they become collectivized, take on the same kind of power that the collective body takes on. They're looseners and levellers and they take on an incredible ability to drive the dynamic of the egalitarian community. Okay, I'm going to tie up. Okay, the theatrical and the fact that it breaks down mechanical elasticity. The fact that laughter in particular, formal laughter, achieves a level similar to formal grief or formal plays on aggression.

There is a strength in bringing these things out of the individual frame and making them collective expressions. And the fact that you then have spirits and so many other figures behind them make them even more compelling. And that's something that I saw when I was at Imbula, the fact that the social world that people had access to, not just the range of the body but the entire social world that people had access to was so much broader and wider than anything I had encountered anywhere else. And there are profound ontological consequences where all of that relationship and movement and conversation is cut off from the human community. So I would close by saying there's a lot, almost an overwhelming amount of ethnographic evidence for the fact that joy, feeling good, being one, experiencing happiness is not something extraordinary that belongs to, occasional ritual moments. In societies where the body has stayed collective, where the whole range of figures and elements, you know, across the society are accessible, you find that joy, happiness, sharing, feeling good together become fundamental political concepts as well. And they drive the egalitarianism that's happening, which is coming from a completely different perspective, from the history of sadness that Marshall Sallins speaks about. And if we ask, where did the joy go? Why is the joy element so conspicuously absent in our public, political, social environments? It's very much to do with privatisation and separation. because the joy is essentially still here. It's in our own bodies and in the bodies of everyone and everything that we love and touch, despite all the ways in which we're being constantly, we're constantly having the bad news streamed into our lives. And the human capacity for being galvanized and mobilized by the pleasure of connection, the feel good aspect of connecting is really enormous. So I think bringing the information we have from societies that still routinely do that or until recently did that is fundamental to understanding the possibilities for ourselves. and really for any kind of significant social change. And I'll leave it at that and just let people see what they have to say. Yeah. Thank you.

Discussion

Cicius: Thank you very much, Morna, for a very interesting and yeah. It's a lot of food for thought. So I'm very happy with what we heard and have to reflect on it and see what kind of questions are there. So we can open it for everyone to ask questions.

Chris: Do you have any ideas how we... I mean, I keep getting asked, Chris, you've got all these ideas and ISIS themselves asked this question when I've done these talks. What do we do? I'm almost, I've almost given up, but I've maybe not quite given up. But what do we do?

Morna: Well, you know what? I think, I mean, I feel as though sometimes in trying to substantiate what I want to say, I end up overloading it with information. And that's just a habit of mine. But What I would say, Chris, really, is that we have to start taking back access to collective space in different ways. And that means dancing. We have to

do a lot more dancing, a lot more singing, a lot more touching. These are things that we have available to us all the time.

Also, to realise, I think, because you can get lost in the lament, you can get lost in the bad news, to recognise that we have available to us all the time, the power to make connections, to touch, you know, and for example, you know, to maybe bring children much more to the forefront, of any kind of social or political movement. Because of course, one of the things I wanted to say, it's really interesting to me, this talk had two shapes. And one of them, it was saying a lot of things that I felt I wanted to say personally. And then the other, it was, you know, trying to give the ethnographic information. And But one of the things that I would have said is we, I personally, I think we have to remember collectively where we came from. So we have to remember that we wouldn't be sitting here on Zoom without a small core of women and their kin who somewhere And we're bringing in the father, bringing in the hunter that has kind of inflated to such ridiculous proportions that it squeezed everything else out, but accepting that that's an important part of what we are. But really to go back to that cooperatively breeding community that gave us all the faculties that we have for mind reading and touching and sharing and caring. And to remember that this was an issue of survival, that we touched and connected and danced and sang for our lives, pretty much, and the lives of the children, and not to let that go and let it get lost in theoretical abstractions. We definitely need an awful lot more dancing, an awful lot more touching, moving collectively, And we need this stuff to be happening on a much larger scale, because that's a massive loss of energy. You know, the Blake thing, energy is eternal delight. So we're not just talking anymore about environmental energy, you know, and the fact that we need to think about ways to handle energy differently. All of our energy is connected, the planet to the human society, to all the other creatures. And it's somehow, for me, it's becoming more and more about taking back the joy, you know, the radical potential of feeling really happy when we touch and move together, when we kind of remember that collective body.

Chris: Can I just introduce a memory of my own? It was, I think, 1994 in the spring. And I was, of course, I'd just got a job teaching anthropology at the University of East London. And I remember some students who kind of knew I was kind of a revolutionary. They were just saying, Chris, come to an event. It was in Hackney Marshes among a whole bunch of electricity pylons. And it was a really strange night, went on all night actually. And what it was, it was to prepare for an amazing event in Camden. And it was reclaim the streets. There was a bunch of anarchists and musicians and I don't know, a whole bunch of young people, many of them my students of course. And what happened was we did exactly what you said. We danced. So what we did is we went down into the underground. And because the police couldn't use their sort of surveillance equipment down there, we had an instruction which was we get out at Mornington Crescent and we run towards Camden Town. And when the two cars collide, that's when we take the streets. And we took the streets. and we danced. And just what you're saying, Morna, about children being priority, our lollipops, our signs

were halt, stop, children at play. And we put right across the road huge heaps of sand, little slides for kids to play and swings. It was a real playground. It was a whole place became a playground. We danced and danced and danced. And it was at that point, that I learned something which my students were telling me. They were saying, Chris, we know you've been involved in politics all your life. You're some kind of communist or Trotskyist or something. But can you just see what we're saying to you here? If you're not having fun, if you're not full of joy, you're not a very good indication of the future. And I just thought, it just hit me. I just almost cried. I just realised how true it was. And we took the streets and we did it again and again and again and again. And Reclaim the Streets was a kind of anti-car movement because we thought cars are what isolate people in their homes and stop us dancing in the streets. Let's get rid of the cars. But instead of having a philosophical programme and asking politicians to sort of ban cars, You thought, well, why don't we do it like, and this is what the students were telling me, is DIY, Chris. You want something, you do it yourself. So we just reclaimed the streets. And it went global, of course, and we linked up with the Liverpool Dockers and we nearly won the revolution, to be honest, in the 90s. It was an amazing, amazing thing. But the point I want to make is just that everything you've said was something I was hugely involved with. in the 90s, when actually you were a student, of course, at University of East London. And of course, you were kind of in London, but you were also kind of still in Ireland, and you weren't so much involved in all these things. But children first, laughter first, dancing first, music first. And my kids, by the way, were involved in a big component of that, because this was the rave culture. This was dance, dance, dance, dance, dance. just seize places, seize, I don't know, aircraft hangars, huge, huge barns, just, you know, we need to dance, we need to dance, we need to dance. And that was the time when in response to that, the Prime Minister of the time, Maggie Thatcher, introduced legislation. And the legislation was against what she called repetitive beats. So repetitive beats became illegal. And we thought, right, let's have some more repetitive beats. And I learnt about Samba when I was up in Liverpool, supporting the Liverpool Dockers on their anniversary of their long dispute. So we had Samba on the picket line and I brought Samba back to London and we set up the first Samba band called the Barking Battery and it became Rhythms of Resistance and we found Rhythms of Resistance right across the planet actually. I remember being on a big demonstration in London in 1990 and we met the, our Chicago sisters and brothers, the Eternal Noise Brigade, another Samba band. So I'm just saying, I suppose I'm saying, you know, I've lived it, I've been there, I've kind of done it. Very, very difficult for me to go through all those things. Yes, Well, the message is we won the revolution, the human revolution. We know how to do it. We can do it again. But all I'm saying is I'm getting on a bit and somehow a new generation needs to kind of find a way of doing it even more joyfully.

Morna: Yeah, here, to that. because I mean, the fun is also very serious, like you said, Chris, it has a it has a very serious core, and that's what I love about the the Johan Huizinga's understanding of playing. It's deadly serious. Yeah, exactly. As it is

actually, if you're in any Benjeli camp and you look at the women suddenly descending on somebody who's tried to hide a cigarette. That's frightening, you know, because it has to be, it's almost life or death that you defend. the right of everyone to have an equal part of whatever it is, from a box of cigarettes to social power. Everyone gets their part and no one's allowed to hoard it. And that's kind of where, you know, this idea of bringing the fun, bringing the joy, bringing the laughter to bear is really ingenious. Because, those things they do, they break down boundaries. They force people to relent. And the trickster and the spirits are embodiments of that. It's like they're personifying this value, which is slippery and open and body and graphic and erotic and all the things that are still formally there in the culture.

Chris: Just one little bit of a memory because it reclaimed the streets were absolutely adamant. We don't have leaders. No one's a leader. And anyone who starts to become a leader, like a steward or something, I mean, just the derision and the laughter. But having said that, because I was a bit older than some of them and I was a kind of, you know, lecturer at East London, what I tended to find when we did occupy the streets, well, they say, can you be the one that just... tries to calm the police down. So I just remember at Camden, the first of these street parties, I was the one who had to say to the police, no, come on, if you start cancelling it, start arresting us all, it'll all get nasty, there might be some broken windows. And so just, you know, we're going to have a good old time, we're going to have a dance. I know it's a bit difficult for the motorists and so on, but we are happy to help redirect all the traffic. Just wait till 6:00. I can tell you that we want to start this and we want to finish it and everything will be all right. And I was, my job was to calm the police down. But apart from that, absolutely, the idea that anybody was any kind of leadership role was absolutely frowned on. And yet, of course, naturally, a few people were absolutely dead set on making sure that this play was taken seriously and that it would work. So if we needed a huge lot of sand in the middle of the road, you know, we didn't mess around. We had a massive big truck full of sand, huge lot of sand, and it was a tipper truck. You could unload all the sand in the middle of the road so the children could play sandcastles. So it was a combination of playfulness, joy, and absolute solid determination. Come what may, we are going to be playing in this particular street for this particular day, and no one's going to stop us.

Morna: David Graver has that nice bit where he's talking about, you know, the, I think, you know, elements of that movement trying to cross police picket lines. how if they'd been storming them, the batons, it all would have been over in a few minutes, but this big wobbly giant puppet comes up and starts dancing with the police. It's so much harder. But.

Chris: We knew we were playing the drums because I became a sambista, as you probably know, with my big surro drum, but we knew when we noticed that the police were all rhythmically stamping their feet to our beat. We were banging the drums and all the whole line of police around the corner. They were all beating, they were all stamping their feet to our beat. We thought, right, okay, we've got there. Yeah, It's not

humanly possible. So yeah, just trying to beat them up is just playing their own game. And of course, they've got more trunches than we would ever have. So another way of doing things is very, very, very important. And obviously, David's Written about that more brilliantly than any anybody, his wonderful work on carnival and puppets and how to, how to, how to, successful in direct action.

Camilla: Your talk has started to make me feel a lot more optimistic and possibly able to sense the possibility of joy. That this is actually so close under the surface that the possibility can reassert and break out again because it's so much part of our just are just bodily being. And it's kind of so difficult to keep that suppressed. So the way you've described what a loss has been suffered and how the loss is really to be understood in terms of diversity, we've got all these forces at our back, including non-human forces and spirits. And the emphasis of just the male and the father and the hierarchy is It's so artificial and so out of where our minds and our bodies really are, our hearts and our souls as hunter-gatherers. But it's not just that, it's been even in non-hunter-gatherer societies and cultures, thinking of Bakhtin and thinking of the medieval carnival and the lower bodily stratum, it's been there so recently. And the way that you describe the women when the evangelicals have been suppressing, which of course happened with Puritanism as the lead into capitalism in English culture, for instance, among other countries around the world, the attacks on Christmas, the attacks. But you described the women with their Ellanda dances, which are supposed to be, well, they're non-spirit, they're not ritual, they're not important. But of course, the women are just keeping it moving. And just think of all the resources that still belong in, even in European cultures, just under the surface. Think about the children, the nursery rhymes, the fairy tales, all that secret knowledge, joy, you know, all that that's stored in there that can be released and that can bring us so much back. And so it really makes me feel, you know, what are the possibilities of this recouping here? I had, I was going to talk a bit about the Hadza, because you're always referring to the Central African and the , but of course, the Hadza have a lot of very interesting things to show, too, about collectivity and gender power. But it's really a very fine edge because there's no question women can fight back with their power. And I watched maitoko, which is the Hadza girls initiation, being danced or being performed or women going through the women and girls, especially girls, because it's Majokoi is about the beauty of young girls when they're adorning themselves, they're covering with beads, and they're, but they're also armed with great fierce sticks and they go chasing after the boys with these sticks. but they're meant to be the emblem of beauty and the stories of mitakoa that these girls that used to have these in the old times with their sticks, they could actually spear the boys with their sticks. They were so fierce, but they were so beautiful. And oftentimes it was really difficult to know whether the mitakoa was real, were the girls just practicing Or was it the real thing where they're going to go through? Because the magical can becomes an ordeal where girls have to go through some cutting. So it's a very fine balance thing of this incredible, fierce, joyous dancing and chasing of boys and also ordeal that the girls are ferocious about. They, you know,

it's their, it's their thing. So is it real or not real? And I couldn't, I couldn't decide. Is that real, might occur? That's. pretend, that's practice. It's this thing that you're talking about that the women are and the girls encouraged by the women are bringing out what they have to the dancing that they need, the dancing they need to hold up their end of the of their power. So we get we get examples with the Hadza where it's very finely tuned when, are the men's collective trying to dominate and the women are able to resist? And of course, they're using their bodies, their laughter, but it's also a, there's a, there's a fine line where can, do the women step too far? Are the women able to laugh at EPMS spirit? And if a woman is alone, it's very dangerous. But if she's in the collective body, there's real power that the men have to back down. So it's just a very, it really illustrates this very fine turning around of where men are trying to get on top. So the question of, is it possible to laugh at those spirits can women collectively laugh at those spirits, is a very fine measure of the degree of egalitarianism, I think. They were one of those trickster stories, especially where the trickster God, the girl actually cuts off his testicles and the huge laughter that we'll be going with that story about God, being castrated like that. We can think of all the drab examples in Greek mythology, where we've got horrible, you know, episodes of Greek gods being castrated, and so there isn't, we aren't hearing the laughter, but surely that was where it was, because it's talking about what you're saying, Comber's shit and Comber's wife's cunt, it's talking about all that. But we've lost it. But on the other hand, it's not very far under the surface. We can get it back. That's what your talk is saying to me.

Jonathan Chadwick: Well done. Can I say something about this? I'm always a bit scared when Camilla starts talking about these stories about cutting off testicles and things. I find it slightly upsetting because it's very violent. But anyway, I mean, I think I understand. I mean, this as a symbolic act, I don't think. But anyway, just... The thing that caught my attention, Morna, in what you said was about the effort of keeping the door open and the really hard work that is done in order to actually ensure that this movement continues and that happens. And I believe But Chris may have actually asked a question about this, but we missed some of what Chris had to say in the earlier interventions he made because the sound was quite bad on our speaker at any rate. But what I wanted to ask is, what is the practice? What is the work? What is this work apart from it itself? that is to be undertaken in order to keep the door open. What is the effort? How is the effort and the energy commanded? It often feels to me like it's something that we don't, that it's a question of not doing something rather than doing something. And when I'm thinking about work, of course, always, since the very earliest part of my life, when somebody said work, I always have this sort of like, reaction of going, oh God, no, please not work. Such is the nature of the way that I was introduced to the idea of work. So I'm wondering what it is, because it seems to me that also keep taking everything extremely seriously is also very, very important, because if you take everything extremely seriously at every moment of the day. There can't be anything more ridiculous than this. And so therefore, perhaps it's

a way of actually trying to live one's life in that edge between the ludicrous and the tragic. I don't know. But can you, have you got any clues about what that work might be?

Morna: Yeah, that's a great comment, a great question. And I think that the answer, you've kind of given us the answer as well. You know, the fact that so much collective energy is brought to maintaining an openness that runs all the time, whether it's audible, visible, ritual, you know, on whatever level it is. That's the effort, that's the work. I mean, I remember going to bed at one point during a dance that was happening. And somewhere in the early hours of the morning, so very late at night, everyone was shattered, I was shattered anyway, you could still hear people out. at the fire, kind of like just running over a few lines again and again and again, as they were nodding, a few claps and then, you know, a few others would come and there'd be a bit of a dance and then it would fall down again, almost to stopping, but never quite. And it kind of had a tangible quality. It made me think it was almost as if they were, working to keep this thing alive, to keep it kind of, the Benjelis say you should never put a baby down. It should always be held. So they were holding it. They weren't putting it down. And it seemed to be a feature of the society itself, which is that if you let things stop, if you let things get fixed, you know, if you get lax, then you think, oh, you know, so what, he's taken the last, box of cigarettes, or he's trying to hoard that machete, I'll let it go today. Then what happens tomorrow? You know, and then what happens with your dances? So there's a lot of effort and a lot of vigilance really required, as we know, because look at us, you know, there's a huge amount of social effort required, and people have to be ready for that. to continually be vigilant about the opportunist. And we're all opportunists, of course, when we get away with it. So it's almost like we're watching ourselves all the time. And that's part of the practice. It's part of the work. But because it's done in such a fluid way, because there's so much song and dance and banter and laughter, it becomes like, The same creature with two faces, incredible, you know, seriousness. This is grave. This is, you're doing this for your life and your kids' lives. And at the same time, it's ridiculous. There's an element of hilarity in it. And an element of joy, that joy thing. If you look, I wasn't able to talk about Sawada's work on Baca dances. He says again and again, what people are working towards in these dances, and they're fun, they feel good, but there's a lot of energy and effort. They're working to get to that moment. It's like picking the ripe fruit when you've climbed the tree. That moment where the individuals almost dissolve, and you have this kind of like, almost like an electric current moving around the body, and people move together into this feeling of oneness, what the Buddhists would call oneness, where you're feeling each other as one. You're feeling the forest as one. And Sawada says, sometimes in these moments, you see people staggering out of the dance circle, intoxicated. And nobody's been drinking. They're intoxicated on energy. They're intoxicated on the beauty of sharing the same body, feeling the same pulse. And there's effort in that because if you look at the juntoi material as well in the healing dance, you might have danced three days and three nights without stop

to get there right to that point. But when you feel it, when you've shared it, then you realize this is what we're capable of. It's worth then, you know, turning it into a life principle to constantly keep the door open back into that. And that was my sense of the short time that I was at Tumbula, everyone was making that effort, even the smallest kids, the smallest children. But I've said this before, in particular, the ones that really terrified me were the grannies, the elder women, because that was just their kind of their purpose in living almost was to harangue anybody into sharing. And they were a force. They were a real force. That's the other thing. Yeah, and you know, Pamela, when we talk about all the, in a society that has kept the full range of the body available, so you have the trickster, you have the spirits, you have the children, you also have the grannies, you know, and the grannies are formidable here. We were talking in the last conversation we had about the witch and the witch persecutions, which was essentially trying to remove the grandmother.

Camilla: Eradicating the grandmother, but also eradicating joy because of all the knowledge of song, dance, ritual that those women would have.

Morna: Yeah. So it's really just finding ways. I mean, I think finding ways to make space in our own lives, individually, whatever shape our daily lives take, to keep the door open, a bit like the Ben Jelly, keep the door open to touch, to the power of the musical and, you know, to dance, to creativity. I've noticed a lot recently that the people who are really helping sustain me through this period where a lot of folk aren't allowed to come in my home anymore, are people who are, you know, quite creative. They're sending poems, they're sending pieces of music, they're creating new music, you know, dance groups that I started to go out with Just a local dance group that goes out and dances in a big garden in Edinburgh, barefoot every Wednesday morning, pumping out some really nice beats, and doing it in a way that doesn't break any rules. Keeping the door open, you know, in yourself and around you. And I'm not forgetting the good news. which is that we have that possibility always, despite the architecture of separation and privatisation, the human capacity for, you know, motion and for joy and love and all the good stuff that makes life worthwhile, it's amazingly resilient. So it's not just the... I think to use the ethnography on people who do that consistently to remind ourselves.

Jonathan Chadwick: Thank you.

Jacob Fishel: One thing that watching the Ngoku ritual, one thing that impacts me the most, or at least initially, was that the men are holding space, the men are holding audience, and that they don't have the privilege to walk away. And the thing that we're faced with, at least in this country with white male privilege, is that they can walk away from the conversation. And we do constantly. And something about Ngoku, when the women seize power of the camp, the men sit there and they take it and they don't like it. But when Jerome asks them, like, if you don't like it, why do you stay here? They say, first of all, well, they're so beautiful. And then they say, Well, it's okay because we have our dance next. Because they do this, then we're going to take this and we're going to reassert through dance our worth. And so you have

this pendulum happening because there is no privilege. And so for me, I live in the theater. And so I do have these men sitting quiet for 2 1/2 hours every night. And then I'm in an industry that's about entertainment and not about ecstasy and not about the ecstatic movements and not about joy. It's about selling something pleasurable for these men. And I'm in that conflict of they come here, they pay and they shut up for 2 1/2 hours. What else can we do? while they're here, because when you started off, you said that they said because it's good. Why are you doing these dances? They don't say because it's true. And the cognitive revolution of like it's either provable and true and therefore it's real, and we're losing wider concepts of, I think, of is it true, is it good, is it beautiful? that if anything's going to come through creatively, it has to match those three principles. So E equals MC squared might be true, but we might not be in a culture that can deal with it in a good way. And so maybe that doesn't come through. And when the Bayaka men say, But they're so beautiful, I see this as a massively complex ritual system that works. And the end result is a culture that keeps working egalitarian flow for thousands of years. And that that's truer than literal truth. So, but when I come back here, I hit privilege and then I don't know what to do. Because they can leave the conversation. They can walk out of camp. And they maintain power and the military and the money. So, the resources.

Morna: Yeah, I mean, I guess, oh, I know what I'm saying. I'm not sure how we address this on a large scale, but I think the reason they can walk out of camp, the reason they can walk away is because in a certain sense, culturally and politically, they're in their comfort zone. They're walking through a social landscape that has come out of one type of body, and in the worst ways, because it's not about, dishing the male body here. It's about the fact that male, it's almost like what I'm saying has happened in reverse. So I'm saying Benjeli women take the female body and the child body and they push that out into culture. It's like there's this explosion where it fills the cultural space and then everybody gets access to it. including people who aren't women and children, everyone gets access to it. becomes available. And a lot of stuff, the tension and the repression is lifted in so many ways. But it's as if in patriarchy, the opposite happens. Then instead of all the wonderful, sophisticated material of human culture, you have the biological male body. kind of almost punching its prerogative through the society. And when we look at this, it's not just a nice idea of mine. Territory, warfare, you know, defence, the amount of money spent annually on the military budget is disgraceful.

Camilla: Whilst children are starving in this country.

Morna: That's as if, you know, the chimpanzee alpha male, body prerogative is driving culture for the rest of us. And it's the worst part of the male because you also have the wonderful, the male dancer, the male healer, the male, the hunter, the brilliance of the hunter, you know. And so we're getting the worst part of 1 aspect of the social group. And I think some people can walk away because they're comfortable with that. And they're what we kind of almost like, I think what we have to do if we want to create radical change is we have to start making it uncomfortable to walk away.

You have to start pulling people back to their moral responsibility as members of a social body. And one of the best ways to do that is to kind of rather than threatening, rather than lecturing, it's to reach in and touch the soft part. You know, touch the heart, touch what is there that wants to have a really joyful life, a really rich life. Not a life, you know, where you coast on your privilege while being just as stressed and depressed as everyone else, but real joy, real beauty. You know, finding ways to push these things back out into the public world anywhere you can. Theatre is a brilliant platform. And I think the more we try to do this, the more potential there is for real change.

Hussein: There are two issues that I wanted also to say. I always like, I am an activist, so I always want to take an action after. any talk. So number one is I am a researcher working on what's called de-urban design and it's actually decolonizing the urbanization and trying to bring a new imagination of cities, defending city life, I mean kind of intense human life together as a society. And what we do, what we talk always is actually the similarity of city as one organism. So we see city as one organism and all of us as part of that organism. So what you today mentioned as this one body, you know, was, I mean, gave me a big, big, yeah, about, you know, how I can connect this idea to the hunter-gatherers and the calendarian societies of that time and seeing it as, yeah, all together being one body was a great, great concept that I really enjoyed it. And the second thing that I wanted to emphasize, actually, in the last one week, I was thinking about, I mean, one of the things that we do in academia is we call it co-opetition. We are many of us we are designers and in the design world we have lots of competitions that you know they announce you know let's design something and then the people come and fight with each other and nobody win the prize. So we organized some co-opetitions so it is we bring some main problems to the and different concepts are produced and then all together work on it and develop it. And so at the end, we have a few or more ideas, but all of them creative and helps in the solving of the problem. And in the last one, I mean, in the last two, three weeks, actually, Marzia is also here. Marzia is coordinating these series. And in the last two, three weeks, I was thinking, what should be the next one? And in the last week, I came to the idea of play in the city. And basically, not only playgrounds, but also the idea of playing, but including playgrounds, what the one that children are doing, but kind of de-urbanizing, decolonizing this idea of play in the city. And today with what Chris said and what you said, actually I was going to talk to, I mean, Isias and to Camila maybe to see, how we can collaborate on this idea. So today, I mean, it was it was really, really amazing to see how I mean, I learned a lot about this and I hope we can we can collaborate on this idea of competition about this playing in the city and decolonizing the play play areas in the city, actually. So thank you.

Morna: Thank you. That's I mean, that's evidence for what we're saying of, you know, the ways that you can turn these ideas into something tangible and actually find ways to play with them, you know? And that's, I mean, if you listen to anyone who's writing on egalitarianism, one of the main things they're saying is that competition

is considered, you know, the devil. You never, ever get kids competing against one another aggressively, because that, again, introduces the idea of imbalance, And it's antithetical, really, unless it's theatrical, unless it's performed and danced with fun. It's antithetical to what egalitarianism wants to do. So that's a nice idea of, you know, bringing something more playful.

Chris: Can I just say that in Reclaim the Streets, we were working towards an idea of... temporal architecture, the architecture of time. So borders in space aren't very good, fences aren't good, borders aren't good, you know, but you actually, in music, of course, you need borders in time. And in ritual, you need borders in time, because if you don't have borders in time, you don't know what you're doing. You're all doing things sort of cross purposes. So just to cut a long story short, you need the moon as well as you need the sun. And we were working towards the idea of making it possible for people in all the different tower blocks and council estates in the London and other parts of where we went, where Reclaim the Streets went. So that when you have a party, when you have a huge street party, of course you have to sort of warn people and sort of say, by the way, there's going to be a big party. over the weekend, it's going to be, maybe quite late. Like with any party, you invite people to join in, you make people feel part of it. But once you've had the party, of course, you all kind of know each other. And so the effects of having a huge street party, more or less at the same time, using some clock, preferably the sun or the moon or maybe both, the more likely it is that after the party, when you're clearing up, when you're preparing for the next one, all the different people who didn't know each other, and of course, modern architecture, and I don't have to tell you this, so many of you are architects in academia, is actually designed to imprison people in their little compartments. They're actually the whole way in which architecture is invented. by Le Corbusier and others, was to prevent revolution, to prevent community. There's a whole wonderful book by Le Corbusier called The Architecture of Tomorrow, and he makes it absolutely clear. His concluding words are, it's architecture or revolution, by which he meant to stop revolution, we need to get people off the streets, we need to organise, we need to make tower blocks, we want to make sure that when people, somebody lives next door to somebody else, they don't even know their neighbors, because you've got a lift and then you're down the lift to the other side before you meet them at the bus, you don't even know they're So the street party idea was precisely to use a clock and to start having regular street parties, regular joy, but intimate with a rhythm. You don't want too much joy in the sense of, there's more of a say, you can have too much of a good thing. You want to go back to some kind of mundane activity, which is still pleasurable, but you want to sort of peaks and troughs, peaks and troughs. And so the idea of borders, but in time, I think it's very, very necessary. But that's one of the ideas of the Russian revolutionary, Vilimir Klevnikov. He said he doesn't want any borders, but you have to have borders in time because otherwise you're not doing things together.

Morna: Yeah.

Camilla: Which comes back to decolonizing time and linking up time to women's and children's bodies since our bodies evolved under the sway of the moon. So the beauty of what Morning's idea is this kind of low-key, constant, simmering motion, but that wants to come out and really connect to women's biggest husband, the moon, to bring the moon as the force at our back and to say if we're going to have this street party, if we're going to crash the cars on the street and just put sand there, it's because the moon's come down and the moon is there and we're dancing our bodies with it. So we do need to link it to the cosmos, of course. as well as just carrying on. And we have had a little low-key intervention recently that we're hoping will start to spread by having dark moons as singing events to trees. So anybody can do this anywhere. We just find a tree with whatever neighbor you are and sing to that tree. Singing for our lives. Singing for our lives at the time of dark moon. So that can be an event for whatever joy is, whatever you can. bring to it. So this is one thing that could potentially do this kind of knitting across the landscape. Connects you to the sky, to the earth, to the tree, to each other at the time.

Chris: Just a bit of humour here. It's just Jerome Lewis was reminding me the other day because we're trying to work this book about laughter together when Eve laughed. And he was just reminding me that woman's biggest husband is the moon is a huge joke, of course, because It just means the woman's biggest husband is not you, it's not a man, And what happens is that the Ben Debbie men are genuinely jealous of women's other husband. There's a real sex rivalry between a man who's got his partner and his other partner, the moon. And what happens is when a man, like a mortal husband, is not the biggest husband, when he finally gets his wife pregnant, I've got one over on that moon, because she's not going to be coming down anymore. She's not going to be menstruating for a while. I've beaten him. He's at least nine months. I've got her all to myself. But it's so lovely. It's exactly what Mona was saying about how Now, the moon is a person, and the trees are, the word spirit is kind of all right, but it's more than just spiritual, it's bodily. The moon is a real force, genuinely comes down to Earth and causes women to bleed, and that's a hugely potent, powerful thing. But I hadn't quite, until Jerome kind of explained to me, I hadn't quite worked out the how literally it's taken. Now the men really feel quite jealous of his other husband. Beautiful.

Morna: It's society. It's, you know, the society doesn't stop at the edge of camp. There's so many other social beings involved. And that's kind of also, I suppose, the hardening thing when you look at this idea of strength errands, for example, male collectives will always use the males at their back. They'll always fall back on muscle if they have to. But you think, OK, that's fine. But if you have the cosmos, if you have the thunder god, if you have the trees, if you have the grannies and the children, the trickster. And I think for us, one last thing I'd like to say is there's a slight embarrassment among a lot of people So the privately, I see a lot of people immersed in the forest near where I live. they'll walk there a lot. They're very connected to it and they love it. But God forbid anybody should see them hugging a tree. I think we

also have to get over ourselves a wee bit here because we've been raised to live in this individual ego that's intensely self-aware of what everybody else is thinking of it. And sometimes that actually prevents us from reaching out and touching in ways that are seen and healthy. So even challenging yourself, to be allowed to, put your brow against a tree or, to touch things around you, to make contact in all these different ways, to be dancing barefoot, you know, in the rain. And to get over this individual ego that keeps so many of us boxed, the architecture of oppression isn't just physical, it's also psychological. And, you know, it's finding ways to get out of that, which is why I think that anthropology is really the way to go in terms of opening doors, to have at your fingertips evidence of whole societies that work on that basis. I mean, that's really is radical. It gives us examples, it gives us alternatives.

Chris: Which is why anthropology has been suppressed and turned into an odgy. and where it's not even taught at schools, where most people think it's something like entomology or virology or something rather, as opposed to what it really is, the study of what it means to be human and which connects up all the different sciences, the natural sciences, the cultural sciences and everything. Why is anthropology, I mean, just, I don't know, just censored. It's so, it's such a, It's fairly clear. Why? It's because, as you're saying, one, it's such dangerous. If people knew that another world was possible and that there's countless other ways of living other than this one, lots of different worlds, of course, but the ordinary people will be tempted to rebel. But the whole point about schooling in the West is to is its initiation right to make kids at the crucial age of 13, 14, 15. There is no other way that, as Thatcher said, there is no alternative to capitalism. So I mean, I'm sort of making an appeal. Can we, whatever we're doing, architecture, anything else what it is, can we do it with an anthropological framework? Because that's the only way it connects up. But I will say I've never heard anyone connected up quite so, I don't know, so movingly and intuitively as you've done. Somehow you've just, whenever you speak, you somehow put everything together in a way which just seems absolutely compelling. And it is theoretical, but you don't, you never make it seem like theory. You make it seem like, well, of course. Of course.

Morna: Yeah, So that's there for all of us, isn't it? I think that has to be the kind of mission statement. Get anthropology out-of-the-box. Get people using this material and really thinking about it. I'm going to have to—.

Cicius: Sorry, Morna, say it.

Morna: I need to go.

Cicius: Oh, OK. Justin had the question, I think. I was just going to have a thought I had.

Morna: I was thinking that there's a vulnerability in being able to share joy and humour with others. And a large number of adults don't even actively maintain a single friendship. It's like they forget how to share enjoyment. I think that we need to create new spaces, temporary and permanent, where sharing and vulnerability and joy is encouraged and normalised. Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, absolutely. But if you don't, because I mentioned at the start, and this is something I'm really, really interested

in, having come from Northern Ireland in the '70s, the nature of the kind of really traumatized society or social body trying to recover its joy, trying to remember how it feels to connect in healthy ways that are not about, you know, war and, repression and survival. And that thing of making sure there's space for people to do that, one of the things that frightens me with this virus development is that it seems to be getting used. Whether it's, I'm not into conspiracy theories either, Chris, but what I notice happening is that for a society that already didn't have enough public spaces for happiness, you know, for fluidity, for connection, we now have even less, like drastically less. So again, there is also this thing of needing to find ways to do that. I think Camilla and Chris's thing where they're going out and singing to trees. Lots of people, but very carefully not being seen to be lots of people, I think, being individuals together while serenading a tree. You know, anything that makes you feel good in your bones, anything that makes you feel like you're touching another living being, it doesn't have to be another person. You know, you're sharing how good you feel with a tree. You know, sometimes whenever I'm feeling really all over the place, I pick up my cat and I just sit with Ginger. Okay, Ginger, as long as you exist, and you're warm and you respond to my touch and I can feel you with all these nerve endings, then, okay, I'm here. Remember what's important. So we have these capacities all the time.

Cicius: Thank you, Morna. Beautiful ending to this talk of today. We learned a lot. It was a beautiful presentation.

Mariam: And you brought us beautiful, your beautiful understanding of joy and connectivity. Also, we felt, at least I felt the joy. I feel more joyful now. Thank you very much.

Cicius: Yeah, I wish you everyone a wonderful evening and see you soon, hopefully.

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