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Atmospheric Memories: affect and minor politics at the ten-year anniversary of the London bombings

Abstract

This paper addresses how the ten-year anniversary of the London bombings was made present through political affects and atmospheres on 7 July 2015. Although the anniversary of a terrorist event forms an opportune moment for invoking the nation as united in feeling, we are interested in how people attune to political atmospheres of memory and trauma in multiple ways, which do not always cohere to sovereign narratives about unity and certainty. By focusing on these events through an attentiveness to the atmospheric and affective, we examine how these events were recalled, memorialised, felt and sensed in the small-scale ceremonies taking place across London on that morning, by way of a multi-authored sensory auto-ethnography. As such, we are led towards various moments of encounter, which involve 'minor gestures' (Manning, 2016), and imply ways of responding to acts of terror that rub against the unifying forces of the state. In contrast to the 'rolling maelstroms of affect' (Thrift 2004: 57) pursued by the state and media following a terrorist attack, this project is attentive to multiple, uncertain and ambivalent encounters. These matter because they suggest other ways of being political and of responding to both terrorist and state-led violence.

Keywords Atmosphere, London bombings, sensory auto-ethnography, affect, minor gesture.

Introduction

7 July 2015 was the ten-year anniversary of the bombings on London's public transport system. Many experienced these bombings in tragic and devastating ways and hundreds more were exposed to this disaster as it resonated throughout London, the UK and the world. The 2005 London bombings were intensely personal events for some, yet they were also major political events that took place as part of the global War on Terror (Graham, 2011; Gregory, 2004). In this paper, we engage these anniversary events by presenting a sensory auto-ethnography of the affective atmospheres, bodily experiences, and encounters (Wilson, 2016) between the materials and bodies that we witnessed, felt and experienced at these commemorative events taking place at the four locations of the bombings - Edgware Road station, Tavistock Square, Aldgate station and King's Cross. An attentiveness to affective atmospheres becomes another route into the politics of memory and trauma – one that facilitates an analysis of the 'microhistories' and counter-histories to 'officially sanctioned historical accounts' (To and Trivelli, 2015: 306) as well as of how not all manifestations of remembering can be reduced to 'intentional and conscious articulations' (Tumarkin, 2013). It means attuning to forms of remembering that exceeded the large-scale ceremonies held on this anniversary in St Paul's Cathedral and at the public memorial now situated in Hyde Park.¹ In this paper, we are particularly interested in the minor ways in which people engaged, recalled and affectively encountered the histories of these events.²

Our interest in atmospheres builds on a body of work in Geography (Bissell 2010, Anderson 2009, McCormack 2008), Design and Architecture (Böhme, 1993; Degen, Melhuish, Rose 2015; Zumthor, 2006), and the Geographies of National Identity (Sumartojo 2016, Edensor 2012, Closs Stephens 2015, Jones and Merriman 2016). Approaching atmospheres as 'something distributed yet palpable...that registers in and through sensing bodies whilst also remaining diffuse' (McCormack 2008: 413), we were interested in how we came to feel,

¹ The London bombings forms the first attempt to publicly commemorate a peacetime bomb attack in the UK (Heath-Kelly, 2015), and this memorial does not include the four men who killed themselves.

² Two further thoughtful, aesthetic engagements that we weren't able to engage with in the space of this paper, but which shaped our response include: 'A Song for Jenny', a BBC drama screened on the anniversary based on the memoirs of a mother, Julie Nicholson, who lost her daughter Jenny Nicholson, a musician, aged 24, in the bombings. The second was an art exhibition, 'Memento', held at City Hall, exhibiting paintings and pastels by Miriam Hyman, a picture editor who also died in the bombings, aged 31.

engage and embody these events through a combination of material and immaterial elements - including infrastructure, people, colours, lights, built environment, rhythms, noises and material objects. We suggest that drawing upon the concepts of affect and atmosphere enabled an approach that rubbed against the unifying narratives of the state. For example, it made it possible to ask: how were these events affectively transmitted across various urban spaces and among different publics on this anniversary (To and Tivelli, 2015: 307)? This brings into view the plurality of voices and forms of remembering taking place – against attempts at narrating the events as part of the history of the nation-state (Edkins, 2003). Furthermore, in examining the dispersed and multiple publics that were brought together through these events, we were reminded of the ‘viscerally local’ (Smith, 2011 on the events of 11 September 2001) nature of what took place as well as how the events assembled people from many different parts of the world. Finally, other people, who might have a loose, non-familial, or *indirect connection* to these events came into view – those who were working in London around these sites on that day, or those who also travelled on the trains and bus who survived. Put another way, addressing these events through atmospheres and affects reminded us of the unseen everyday geographies of the War on Terror (Amoore, 2009).

Having written on political responses to the London bombings in their immediate aftermath, Angharad was keen to examine the multiple ways in which the events were being remembered on their ten year anniversary. She invited Sarah and Vanessa, both PhD candidates at the same Department as Angharad at the time, and Shanti, whom she had just met through a Royal Geographical Society annual conference, to collaborate in this small project with her. To enable the work, we undertook a sensory auto-ethnography (Pink, 2009; Pink and Morgan 2013; Rhys-Taylor, 2013). We paid particular attention to sounds, music and silence; visual cues; gestures, touch; as well as to our orientation with the built environment. We looked for the ways in which the past intervened and communicated as layers in the present, through invitations to remember including posters at underground stations, newspaper articles, hashtags and tweets on screens. Accordingly, the first section of this paper asks what the concepts of affect and atmosphere do in the study of a political event, whilst the second examines how we went about studying something as nebulous and vague as an ‘atmosphere’. We then consider the various ways in which we came to encounter these events by feeling our way in and out of different atmospheric spaces, and how we became

attuned to ways of feeling and acting politically that operate beneath the radar of dominant accounts of remembrance. In contrast to the ‘rolling maelstroms of affect’ (Thrift 2004: 57) that typically sweep across cities following a terrorist attack, and which are often mobilized into claims about ‘us’ and ‘them’, these minor gestures (Manning, 2016) were ambivalent, uncertain and did not carry any particular ‘meaning’. We argue that such moments matter, because they affirm or gesture towards alternative and non-statist ways of being political (Isin, 2012; Squire and Darling, 2013). That is to say, they refuse to accept the state’s way of making sense of terrorist attacks, by distinguishing between order and disorder, war and peace, a state of norm and emergency (Taussig, 1992). Instead, they invoke the everyday ways in which relations of empathy, care and fragile resilience exceed accounts about a unified, fortified community.

Politicising Atmospheres

Questions of affect, emotion are foundational to debates around fear, belonging, terror, as well as racist and moral geographies (Crang and Tolia-Kelly, 2010b: 2318). Yet the question of what exactly these concepts might offer critical approaches to the study of terrorism are only just being drawn (Heath-Kelly and Jarvis, 2016; Holland and Solomon, 2014). Engaging the affective register means addressing the ‘ways in which flows of emotion coalesce to form a social phenomenon that is beyond individual subjective responses, feelings, and sensibilities’ (Crang and Tolia-Kelly, 2010a). Affect therefore orients us towards the relational as well as the phenomenological.³ It is to be found ‘in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves’ (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 1). Likewise, atmospheres may be ‘manifested as intensities or turbulence that derive from their constitutive elements, but yet ‘[exceed] lived or conceived space-time’ in unpredictable and varied ways’ (Sumartojo, 2014: 60, drawing on Anderson, 2009). In this context, the concepts

³ For example, Jonathan Flatley (2008) traces the history of the concept of affect through Silvan Tomkins’ work and how he displaces some of the key terms used in psychoanalysis e.g. drive, instinct, to think instead about affect as an autonomous force, that attaches to bodies or parts of bodies as well as to objects.

of affect and atmosphere help loosen the grip of debates about a national and/or urban / cosmopolitan group - that is brought into presence through terrorist events (Closs Stephens, 2007; Weber, 2006). Instead, we were able to ask – how are different publics assembled and disassembled through the marking of a public event such as this one? And, in paying attention to resonance, for example, how were the events of the London bombings experienced through various major *and* minor acts of remembrance that took place on this day?

In the paper, we claim that an attentiveness to affect and atmosphere goes hand in hand with a political concern for ‘minor gestures’ (Manning, 2016, see also Katz, 1996)⁴. Manning describes the minor gesture as ‘the force that opens experience to its potential variation’ (2016: 1). This might involve a shift in tone or a difference in quality. She explains that whilst the minor moves alongside major keys, it has a different rhythm. For example, we might expect that many rituals and performances deployed as part of the anniversary of a terrorist attack in the UK would affirm the status, narratives, and metrics of the state. However, what we found in the small-scale ceremonies, organised by the London Assembly, and designed for family and friends in the first instance rather than the broader public or media,⁵ was that these included many other modes of encounter – which were innovative, fragile, but inherently affirmative – and composed of other ways of living. For instance, in the public ceremony of remembrance held on 7 July 2015 at the public memorial in Hyde Park, Emma Craig, who survived the bomb on the train at Aldgate when she was 14 years old said: ‘Quite often people say, ‘it didn’t break us, terrorism won’t break us’. [But] the fact is, it may not have broken London, but it did break some of us.’⁶ This statement offers an example of a minor gesture – in that it refuses to reproduce accounts about unity. Instead it courageously activates ‘new modes of perception, inventing languages that speak in the interstices of major tongues’ (Manning 2016: 2). As part of our fieldwork, we sought ways of working that would be open to following such moments. Beyond this short speech by Emma Craig, we were alerted us to non-speech acts, including bodily gestures such as a nod or small movement; to

⁴ Erin Manning’s account of minor gestures draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the minor as well as the radical empiricism of philosophers including William James, Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead.

⁵ Interview with Senior Events Officer, London Assembly, 23 July 2015.

⁶ See also, ‘7/7 bombings: London remembers’, by Wallop (2015).

touch, including between bodies and matter through the fabric of the urban infrastructure; and to refrains such as a line from a song cutting across the morning air and changing a mood or ambiance. Whatever their form or content, we describe them as minor because they exceed the dominant ways of understanding what it means to be political at times of remembering.

Thus whilst we could have engaged this study by beginning with the concepts of memory and trauma, we propose that an emphasis on affect and atmosphere lends a slightly different starting point for engaging with the politics of these anniversary events. For example, trauma studies has traditionally drawn on productive engagements with psychoanalytic discourse, leading to analyses of how part of a subject remains 'missing' in relation to any social or symbolic order (Edkins, 2003) and powerful political questions about how some lives are grieved more than others (Butler, 2006). Yet Ann Cvetkovich is critical of the ways in which trauma gets used to reinforce nationalism, as well as towards medical definitions of trauma, and seeks to expand the ways in which we think about it, to show how trauma can produce 'all kinds of affective experiences' (2003: 19). This appeared relevant for our project, as we looked to unpack other, improvisational and minor ways in which people engaged these events around the ten year anniversary. We therefore use the term 'atmospheric memories' to name an attempt to think about memory not as something that is individualised in bounded persons, or as belonging to a group – activated at times of remembering - but as something that is transmitted through affective forces and comes to presence through the orchestration of official and more improvised events. As To and Tivelli affirm, bringing questions of affect and memory together allows us to examine how events are affectively transmitted across various spaces (2015: 307), how they are made present in some parts whilst they subside in another, suggesting a plurality of ways of remembering.

Writing atmospheres

Sarah Pink's work on the sensoriality of experience (2015) proved a complementary methodological toolkit for the kind of enquiry we wanted to carry out. The subjective, embodied, contingent and intimate writing of auto-ethnography allowed us to use our 'own

experiences as a route through which to produce academic knowledge' (Pink 2015, 94; see also Dauphinee 2013). We do not seek to make claims about how others might have experienced these events, which in this case, would have involved trespassing on very personal moments. Rather we adopted this approach of recording our own attunements to, and envelopments within the affective aspects of the experience as a way of 'feeling our way' (Ahmed, 2005) into the politics of these commemorative events. Following Pink and Ingold then, we consider sensory experience as central to the ethnographic encounter, and that the senses are not a vehicle through which we *access* the world but are rather central to the ways in which we come to *know* the world (Pink 2008, 12; Ingold 2011, 99). The aim was not only to study our own responses but to consider how feelings pass between bodies, become contagious and ripple out through a crowd. This is not a straightforward task when we consider that at politicized anniversary events such as this one, there is an expectation to '*feel something*'.

Part of this methodological process was to write on the move – we sat writing and sharing our experiences in cafes and at the roadside. We experimented with a range of critical pedagogies – 'writing, talking, seeing, walking, telling, hearing, drawing, making', all with the aim of writing our way into this event (as well as into the city), becoming attuned to its atmospherics, and pairing the subject and object of the research in novel ways (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, 352). Through the work, we were also getting to know each other - by way of a new collaboration with Shanti – and for Sarah, Vanessa and Angharad, by working together outside of our roles as Lecturer and PhD students at the University. We all had the chance to think about our impressions as we moved away from London and reflected on them from Durham, England and (in Shanti's case) Melbourne, Australia; we developed these thoughts in conversation with each other as we talked via email, drew maps and exchanged them; shared photographs and academic articles through a Dropbox folder (see Pink and Morgan 2013). Accordingly, what has emerged is not a complete account, but one that is formed from different vantage points (Amin and Thrift 2002). Recalling Ingold's (2011: 237–8) remark that 'every place holds within it memories of previous arrivals and departures...places enfold the passage of time', our walking and writing was a form of wayfinding our way around the events and their imbrications and reverberations in the sites of the city and of 'productively engaging

our memories' (Carlson, 2006). It allowed us to discuss our experiences and bodily responses, as well as our different personal memories of the 7 July bombings.

To conclude this section, writing about affect and atmosphere presents many challenges. An atmosphere 'is characterized by a certain ontological and epistemological vagueness, which means that it does not easily lend itself to becoming a subject (or object) of social analysis' (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015, 32). It occupies a space 'between presence and absence, between subject and object/subject and between the definite and indefinite' (Anderson, 2009, 77). How, then, to write about our experience of atmospheres, as well as affect, without naming these as a single and coherent thing (Anderson and Ash 2015)? To grapple with this, we have used our first-hand accounts in multiple texts, to demonstrate how we used field writing to try and reflect textures and feelings, sensory experience and affective memories without freezing those experiences into solid things – although acknowledging the paradox that writing inevitably fixes those moments and feelings to some extent. If atmospheres are both vague and name a vagueness, and ordinary affects register as 'intensities' (Stewart, 2007: 9), then working with these concepts lead us away from deterministic statist explanations of these events, mostly narrated as a story about the west and the rest, the nation and its enemies, civilization and its discontents (Closs Stephens and Vaughan-Williams, 2009) – and encourages us to stay with uncertainty (Stewart, 1996). In the next section, we begin with one such account, a passage from Shanti's notes that explain what she did and how she felt just before the commemorative event at Kings Cross station, most of which she wrote directly following her time there.

Anticipation

The open brief of our joint research on the 7 July bombings meant I felt I needed to orient myself in King's Cross and its various stations, platforms, tunnels and open spaces before the planned events at 8.50. Where were the 'significant' places? What made them important, what would be happening that was unusual or specific to these commemorative events? Would there be controls or prohibitions on what I could do? Would I feel intrusive or inappropriate? This uncertainty about the spaces and my own

behaviours in them made me feel a bit unsure about the task ahead. I slept badly the night before, a combination of jet lag and nervous anticipation.

I arrived in plenty of time at King's Cross station, walking along busy Euston Road and entering the large, newly developed forecourt opposite the main rail station's symmetrical arched entrance. I sat on a low bench amongst the smokers and noticed a handful of camera crews setting up. A young woman in a London Transport hi-vis vest hovered around (I found out later she was from the press office), and one of her colleagues set up a temporary barrier to demarcate where the press could set up their cameras. It seemed unnecessary as there were only three or four media crews there, and the scene looked completely everyday. In wondering what they expected to happen I felt a sense of heightened awareness and scanned the area repeatedly as I sat there.

I walked into the underground station, following the tunnel along to the location of the official memorial, a small, unprepossessing plaque on the side of the wall. The space felt functional and not particularly pleasant, with low ceilings and florescent lighting, people moving through quickly or queuing to buy tickets. Travellers with suitcases stopped at the stairs and hauled their cases awkwardly up or down. It was a pretty unremarkable space, but there were a few wreaths of flowers laid on the floor in front of the plaque in a roped-off space, and some people were milling around.

There were at least half a dozen visible police officers, on the stairs, near the memorial itself, and on the walkway opposite and above the memorial. The police officers made me nervous, so after a quick loop, I left to go and check out the plaza again. As 8.50 approached, I went back down to the plaque, where about fifty people had gathered, including those I assumed had a relationship to those killed there, as they were a bit dressed up, and were carrying flowers and embracing each other. I found a place to stand that looked down onto the concourse below, but a pane of glass prevented me hearing what was being said. I took a quick photo, but a few moments later, the press officer I had seen on the forecourt came along and told me and several other people standing there that photography was not allowed. She was concerned for the feelings

of the participants in the ceremony. This suggested that the event was being treated as a moment of personal remembrance for them, rather than a public spectacle. [Shanti]

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Figure 1: People moving past the commemorative plaque at King's Cross Tube station after the morning ceremony. Photo: Shanti Sumartojo.

We all began the day by travelling individually to the four sites where the bombings took place: King's Cross station, Aldgate station, Edgware Road station and Tavistock Square in London. We were not sure what we would find, as very little was announced publicly in the run-up to the anniversary, which we learned later was a deliberate strategy.⁷ As in Shanti's account, we each got to know the sites 'on the move' – they were made up of our circling and pacing, trying to figure out where the most 'important' bits would be by physically investigating the layout of each location and asking ourselves where atmospheres might pool or coalesce. Our conversations with our chosen research sites were made through moving, pausing, watching, listening, smelling and attuning to our surroundings. Our movement through the sites was also a way to test our comfort levels and find spots to observe or take notes that felt unobtrusive. For example, we were wary of police who might question what we were doing, but were also at times reassured by their presence. We were also mindful of our own positionalities in relation to the work, as we considered the ethics of 'memory-work' and its relationship to practices of social responsibility and place-building (Till, 2012, 22).

Shanti's account of her activities before the ceremony at King's Cross station provides a way into how this felt to her. Her surroundings acted as a way to know them and orient herself, even as she tried to figure out 'what to do' in a busy and complicated environment. She described her movements as a way of describing the space itself – and how she perceived its sensory elements along with the things and people in it. This shows the uncertainty, contingency and small decisions that shaped her paths and timings, how she sought to 'get to know' an atmosphere, and the sensory and affective dimensions that accompanied the

⁷ Interview with Senior Events Officer, London Assembly, 23 July 2015.

movement of her body and thoughts about the research. Indeed, we all drifted around the platforms, tunnels, entries and exits, and streams of other people. For all of us, this process of bodily orientation in the space was a form of anticipating and preparing for the potential intensity of the events we planned to witness. Shanti's description of her heightened awareness, of walking around the station and her nervousness at the presence of camera crews and police, reveals an attempt to attune to her surroundings, to remain open to the sensory and affective as part of a research 'task', but also to guard against doing something 'inappropriate', as if this would somehow be obvious. At the same time, her description of King's Cross Tube station has echoes of a vague sense of disorientation, with people moving quickly in all directions, unpleasant lighting and the almost casual feel of the roped-off space directly in front of the memorial plaque.

This account shows the beginnings of an iterative orientation, 'in which the traveller, whose powers of perception have been fine-tuned through previous experience, feels his way (sic) towards his goal, continually adjusting his movements in response to an ongoing perceptual monitoring of his surroundings' (Ingold 2011, 220). Part of this process of orientation was an ongoing process of testing what felt 'normal' and attuning to how affects that are forever on the boil in our surroundings - 'rising here, subsiding there' (Thrift 2004, 57) - as we made our way through London. This helped us consider what we knew and anticipated of the events before joining them, and how this might condition our awareness or experience of atmospheric political events. Here, our previous experiences included a combination of our thoughts about the bombings, our existing knowledge of the sites and our feelings about the research task at hand. In Shanti's case, she had followed the events from her home in Australia, but was not in the UK when they happened, and did not feel a strong personal affinity with the victims or their relatives. Her knowledge of the event was based on news coverage from a distant country. A regular visitor to London, but never having lived there, Shanti was familiar but not intimate with the city, and this was also reflected in her reaction to the 2005 attack which was emotional but not visceral. Angharad, Sarah and Vanessa lived in the UK at the time, and thus had a different connection to the events.

The iterative process of orienting, attuning and attending reflected in Shanti's account unfolded for all of us in the spatial and material environments of the city. In terms of

atmosphere, by adopting this form of auto-ethnographic writing, we were able to recognize the events as connected but distinctive, as having some shared attributes but not uniformly distributed, experienced or perceived - as sharing some things in common without being single and coherent (Anderson and Ash 2015). At the same time, unifying elements cut across and pulled together the anniversary, creating moments that, while ostensibly shared experiences, were also individually encountered. Accordingly, in the next section, we begin to examine some of the ways in which we encountered the events through the staging of a minute of silence, through sensing the state and through feeling part of a community of strangers, respectively.

A Minute's Silence

My journey to Aldgate station takes around half an hour; I walk to Loughborough Junction, take a ten minute train and then a ten minute tube, arriving at Aldgate at quarter to eight. I'm early and regret being overly cautious with time when I realise how small Aldgate is – too small a space to linger when everyone else has places to be. Not sure what to do with this spare time and not really knowing where I was headed, I follow the flow of people who exit the station and cross the road to a row of shops - Aldgate High Street. We're channelled into narrowed, temporary walkways made from metal fencing and orange, plastic barriers because of the roadworks taking place all around the station that sits like an island in the middle in amongst them all. I retreat for a while into a café and then take a walk around the station.

Behind it, I find a bench outside some offices and take a seat. A security guard makes conversation with me and we talk for a while about why I'm there and the research that I'm doing. He says he's surprised London hasn't been bombed again since 2005 and that he thinks London is more at risk than ten years ago. I'm sat behind the station where the platforms are and where people would have emerged from after the bombing. I think about how things might have been on that day.

I head to the front of the station with these thoughts in my mind. It is 08.45 and a small crowd has gathered outside the station in anticipation of the minute silence. This makes me feel reassured - others are present and I do not feel out of place. The station shutters are down, the station is closed – itself a remarkable thing on a busy Tuesday morning. Four police officers and one station staff are standing outside.

Streams of people are filing in from the back of the station into the crowd that has gathered for the silence. Most look confused as they emerge into the stationary, silent crowd. Their pace is slowed and they look up from the floor and at the crowd; some pause to take their headphones out and one person asks someone what is happening. Some linger at the edges of the crowd and others continue on. In the silence, it's here that the trauma that today makes present hits me. I can read concern, pain and sadness in people's faces. I have no real connection to the events; I was a teenager at school in Leeds when they took place and they had no direct impact on my life at that time, but in this moment I feel the sadness that looms in this small space, amongst this small crowd.

I find myself staring at the station building like others around me and this prompts me to think back to what I'd read about its history – it is built on top of a plague pit of unidentified bodies.

A few minutes later, a small group of people emerge from the station. The shutters are held ajar for them to exit but the station remains closed. They are holding onto each other for support and their physical expression of grief is hard to watch. The crowd remains quietly assembled. Soon after, the station gates reopen; the crowd remains momentarily but then quickly disperses as people head back into the station to travel. [Vanessa]

The concept of a minute's silence has become an established ritual in the UK⁸ and was invoked several times on this anniversary. A nation-wide minute's silence was organized

⁸ Originally a practice used to mark the death of King Edward VII in 1910 and the victims of the Titanic tragedy in 1912, in the UK, this is largely a way of publicly recognizing and remembering British citizens killed in the First World War (Winter 1999; Brown 2012), but also invoked for several other events e.g. at midday on 3 July

for 11.30am BST and was initiated at the main remembrance ceremony that took place at St Paul's Cathedral. This was televised live by the BBC, observed during the Wimbledon tennis tournament, and it was reported through the performance of silence and stillness at key buildings across the UK on the evening news. At 14.38, a further minute's silence was organised at the ceremony held at the permanent memorial in Hyde Park, which was followed by reading aloud the names of the 52 people killed. Each ceremony at each of the four stations also observed a minute's silence at the exact time that the bombings had taken place; these were much more localized in their organization and were designed primarily for the mourners at each station and not as something to be observed and filmed across distance. But what happens during the course of a minute's silence? Whilst we may read a minute's silence as an attempt at pulling us towards a common response, by asking us to feel the same way together, Vanessa's interaction with the localised ritual at Aldgate station suggests something different. It reflects on how these moments in time open onto potentialities that interrupt attempts to secure hegemony. Although familiar and prescriptive, the invitation to remember and reconnect to a traumatic event evokes difficulty and uncertainty which interrupts the ability to engage in the sharing of a common present. In this instance, Vanessa's body sought to disengage from the uncomfortable feeling of sadness that filled the small space, leading her gaze to wander and seek distractions to occupy her mind. The station building became interesting and occupied her attention; this subtle bodily refusal to enable the mind to engage in the collective ritual – the movement of the eye, reflected a minor interruption to being in a common time.

Shanti and Angharad observed the national minute's silence held at 11.30am from a balcony overlooking the main thoroughfare at King's Cross/ St Pancras International station. The 'silence' only amounted to a small reduction in noise in this busy environment, and was signaled visually as much as audibly, in the noticeable sight of Transport for London staff standing still, bowing their heads or looking in one direction, as well as through people changing their bodily routines of travel – either by slowing down or speeding up, and as the

2015, four days before these commemorative events, a minute's silence was organised for 38 victims (30 from Britain) of a terrorist attack in Sousse, Tunisia.

distinctive sounds of shoes treading on tile and stone became more or less audible. Before people had necessarily understood or processed what was taking place, their bodies had been engaged and affected by sensing the change in atmosphere: they appeared 'poised in anticipation', 'expectant of incoming events' (Goodman 2012, 189). The shift in sonic climate and gestures of stillness signaled the sense of a collective event and created the feeling of a shared space. The sheer effort required to co-ordinate a pause in activities in a site of such complex and intense circulations itself marked the moment as striking, as Vanessa also noted at Aldgate.

[Insert Figure 2.]

Figure 2: A minute's silence in St. Pancras Station at 11.30am. Photo: Shanti Sumartojo.

By asking us to think back to the bombings, explosions, and loss of life, the event of the anniversary links our bodies and movements to the eruptive force of global political events, such as the London bombings. Yet we cannot legislate for how people might behave or respond when invited to *feel* loss. People are often steered away from experiencing *ambivalent* feelings 'in the face of something unrepresentable like war' (Lisle, 2006, 843). Demonstrations of a minute's silence can therefore form occasions for the performance of 'respectful feelings', but they also invoke feelings of boredom, puzzlement and indifference – people checking their phones or munching food very quietly. The concept of a minute's silence has become routinized in British political culture, and so risks losing some of its political force. Yet in engaging moments of radical upheaval, that are often too excessive to make sense of (Harrison, 2007), it remains an open political gesture: it may involve attempts at invoking unity and coherence – especially when co-ordinated over a large territory, but it also invites various, non-scripted ways of being political, made possible by a shift in an atmosphere brought on by the temporary attenuation of movement and noise. In the minute's silence organised at the four stations at the time of the bombings, and not scaled-out nation-wide, we suggest that the more intimate gatherings offered the potential for

minor gestures to emerge, scripting the events as having very different meanings and memories for different people.

Sensing the State

I arrive at Edgware Road tube station at 8am, having decided to walk there from King's Cross. I feel a bit guilty at choosing to walk; it seems privileged and a little at odds with how Londoners were encouraged to carry on as normal in the wake of the attacks. I used to live in London and I've regularly commuted to work on the tube, yet today the combination of the date, location and probably the fact that I'm doing research on the bombings has culminated in a conscious decision to walk to the tube station on foot.

The first thing that I notice when I entered Edgware Road station, is a police officer standing by the oyster card barriers. This isn't unusual in London, but today for me it is a stark reminder of what took place at this station ten years ago. The officer's presence makes me a bit nervous, although I'm not entirely sure why. I walk across a bridge over the tracks to the platform to sit and think about what happened in this place 10 years ago. After a little while I head upstairs to the main station entrance. I emerge up into more significant 'state' presence, with police officers, Transport For London (TFL) staff and large signs stating 'London remembers'. A small cordon has been placed around a memorial plaque etched with the names of the victims, and buckets of water have been placed beside it in the anticipation of flowers. A few smartly dressed people are standing by the cordon and station staff are speaking quietly to them.

I feel a bit out of place, so I follow some commuters and stand silently by the buckets and plaque. I note that a couple of bunches of yellow flowers are already in the buckets, and the London ambulance service have placed a wreath on the floor by them. The woman next to me starts crying; one of the TFL staff comes over and asks if she is a relative. She replies that she isn't, but found the whole thing very moving. The TFL lady murmurs her apologies and then asks me if I knew anyone involved. I explain that I am doing research, and she is fine with me being there as long as I keep out of the way. I find being here, and thinking about the bombings

upsetting. I want to take time to remember all those involved, and yet this 'official' space delineated by the plaque, police and TFL staff makes me feel as though I shouldn't be there.

I walk out of the station concourse, down the tiled corridor and arrive at the crossroads by the station. In the entrance to the station a group of people surround a man using a wheelchair and they all carry flowers. I pass by them and head out into the grey morning. It has started to drizzle, and I can smell the tarmac and hear the busy traffic on nearby Edgware Road. I am struck by how there are police everywhere. Two large police vans are parked by the entrance, and two officers dressed in black stand on all four corners of the crossroads. They stand still and silent, not speaking to anyone. I find it all bit unnerving. Opposite the entrance, a TV crew is setting up; a reporter stands in-front of a camera drinking an M&S coffee, silently mouthing words from a printed-out script, whilst the crew fiddle with their equipment. This now feels like an orchestrated event; the security of the police officers, vans and the media presence all signal to me that something is about to happen.[Sarah]

Encountering the presence of the state was, for Sarah, a way into feeling that something was happening that exceeded the space of the tube station. Of course, noting the presence of the state in the figures of police officers and police vans represents a very traditional understanding of security, whilst reading power, sovereignty and authority through ambience and mood might mean looking beyond 'guards and gates' (Allen, 2006; Adey et al., 2013). Yet the figure of the police officer, and objects of security such as the police van, the heavy, dark uniforms, the gleam of identifying badges and numbers, alert postures, the carefully coordinated spacing between officers, all created feelings of official control and surveillance. As Sarah noted, the police officers made present the event of the bombings. These objects, figures and their postures held an affective charge, which operated as a form of governance where police manage bodies through touch, 'without [their movements] offering or threatening any clear designations, cautions, sanctions, or penalties' (Dixon and Straughan 2010, 457 cited in Woodward and Bruzzone, 2015).

These 'soft' forms of governing did not in our case include any examples of touch in the sense of skin to skin encounters but ambiguous, minor gestures, such as a nod or glance. Take for example the following encounter which Vanessa witnessed:

There is no audible announcement that a silence is taking place at 8.50 but the crowd, that is already quiet and still, naturally falls into silence. The noise of the traffic and works are audible but peripheral. The atmosphere is consuming my attention. One man walks up to the station gates holding two white roses. He touches the floor and walls and then sits cross legged on the floor to pray. One of the police officers next to him nods to him as he leaves. (Vanessa, Aldgate)

This gesture of a nod suggests a form of ‘touch without touching’ that manages bodies, movement and dissent in what has been described as a form of ‘touching like a state’ (Woodward and Bruzzone 2015, 451). It was not clear what was being suggested, observed, allowed or not allowed. Through such visual and tactile encounters, attending to touch returned us to the ‘viscerally local’ nature of the event (Smith, 2011) – notable in the importance for some people to be able to return every year to the site where families and friends died – and suggested in the minor gesture of touching the floor and walls at Aldgate station.

In another gesture of touch, Angharad watched several commuters and walkers passing Tavistock Square on this morning stopping to touch the simple plaque which features the names of the 13 people who died at this site (omitting the name of the bomber who also died), by the British Medical Association’s headquarters. This repeated haptic engagement with the material of the plaque conjured a sense of the many people who were indirectly touched by these events - beyond the families and friends grieving on this day. It contributed to an atmosphere that evoked and drew in many other mourners who were both diverse and connected in their shared experience of the Tavistock Square bombing. This gesture cannot be understood within a political frame that casts this event as one about the nation, the united city, or about trauma, as it is not clear what this gesture might have represented, or what touching the plaque might have meant to be the different people who did so on this morning. It suggested to us that there were several people in the city on this morning who for different reasons, were touched and moved by the anniversary and who engaged the event in subtle, micro-political ways (Sharpe, Dewsbury, Hynes, 2014), that run alongside

more recognizable forms of political 'action'. Here, the minor gesture of touching the plaque opened up ways of experiencing and being moved by the world (Manning 2016) that connected people to each other, to the material fabric of the city (Coward, 2012), and to the commemorative moment.

Affective Urban Communities

I start the day walking up to Bounds Green tube station in north London having stayed nearby with family. Outside the station there is a stand selling the Watchtower, a Jehovah Witnesses' magazine, with the headline: 'How To Deal With Anxiety'. There are two Transport for London signs at the station, one saying what to do in hot weather - it's been an unusually hot week, with health alerts in force for many parts of England - and the other announcing the planned tube strikes on 8 July. There's no mention that it is the anniversary of the bombings at this station. I wonder how many people are aware of it at this point in the day, on this particular line – the Piccadilly line that runs through King's Cross and Russell Square, and which I remember from the time I lived here at the time of the bombings, had to close down for more than 3 months.

I sit in the tube carriage and I'm aware that I need to be able to stay here until Russell Square without feeling overwhelmed. All the seats around me are taken. About half the passengers are reading books, including The Benn Diaries by Tony Benn; A Man Called Ove by Fredrik Backman; June by Gerbrand Bakker. The other passengers are playing on their phones; one woman's applying mascara; a young boy sat in school uniform is reading a big red book titled, 'Oxford Latin Course'.

...As I arrive at the southern entrance of Tavistock Square Gardens, I notice that the park is open and a police officer is standing by the gate. I hear a helicopter above; cars passing; the murmur of commuters walking to work; and the rhythms of the traffic stopping and starting at the traffic lights. On walking into the Gardens I see that there's one police officer at each of the four entrances. There are also other officers wearing a different uniform – light blue

overalls and matching gloves - who walk around the park in pairs, occasionally stopping to search the bins.

There is a gazebo in the northern end of the park, suggesting that something will be taking place. I sit on a bench and feel better that I'm here, in this park, rather than at a tube station. There are media representatives from LBC, ITV and BBC; most are on their phones.

I remember that these are Peace Gardens and I walk around the different memorials – there is big statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the centre of the park where bunches of pink and white flowers are laid as well as candles. At the furthest end of the park is a big stone laid to remember all the conscientious objectors of military service and which reads:

*TO ALL
THOSE WHO HAVE
ESTABLISHED AND
ARE MAINTAINING
THE RIGHT TO
REFUSE TO KILL*

I walk out of the north gate and over the road to the permanent memorial – a small plaque with the names of the 13 people killed here - which is on the gates of the British Medical Association at Woburn Place. Bunches of flowers have been laid, messages written, some people have started gathering, and there are two police officers present. This feels like both a very public and deeply personal space this morning. The noise of the traffic continues; red buses make their journey up the street as they would have on that morning; I catch the sounds of a news reporter filing his report into a dictaphone: 'Families are paying their respects here before going on to St Paul's Cathedral where the nation will...' [Angharad]

[Insert Figure 3.]

Flowers left by the commemorative plaque near Tavistock Square on 7 July 2015. Photo: Angharad Closs Stephens.

Whilst sitting at the park in Tavistock Square, Angharad watched a young local school pupil practicing her rendition of 'Make Me a Channel of Your Peace' (a Christian prayer song, widely attributed to St Francis), which the young girl would later sing in front of the small crowd at this ceremony. As her voice cut across the morning air, and intercepted the familiar traffic noises of any morning in a large city, passers by slowed down their journeys and on occasion, paused at the park to listen. This rehearsal drew people into the park, and the sense of collective energies gathering signalled that an event was about to take place. Although there was a small marquee and seats placed out, those people who stopped in the park to listen sat behind the cordon and chairs laid out neatly for families and friends. Different publics were gathering – those who were invited to be here, and whose presence would have been organised over several months – as well as others who sat outside the designated space for remembering, but nevertheless appeared to want to be part of the events, albeit from a distance. This ceremony, co-organised by the London Assembly and Camden City Council, included speeches by a Rabbi, an Imam and a Priest. But it was followed by a second, much smaller ceremony, and featured speeches by some of those who were working nearby on this day ten years previously. It was at this ceremony that Jacky Berry, chief librarian at the British Medical Association, spoke of the improvised communities that assembled together to care for strangers on that morning, as well as about the many hundreds who might not be remembered at the permanent memorials to 7 July 2005 but who continue to live with the effects of physical and mental injuries from that day. She said that there were around 20 doctors at the BMA on that day, but attending a conference, and so without medical equipment. Instead, they used 'table tops as stretchers' as they 'had little more than first-aid kits, table cloths and tea towels. They lacked the most basic equipment, but there was so much they had, and were able to give, to the passengers of the Number 30 bus'.⁹ What we heard in Berry's speech was an account of everyday affective relations with strangers in the city.

The 'London bombings' have mostly been narrated, in the UK at least, as an attack on the city and diversity of London (Jabri, 2009; Massey, 2007). But Berry's account – together with the scenes of mourners, passengers, workers and urban publics assembling, and deciding to

⁹ Reproduced with permission.

gather together in the morning ceremonies as well as at the main ceremony in Hyde Park - carries a different tone to claims about a common identity that unites London against the 'other' (Closs Stephens 2007). This community of strangers, brought together under violent, extreme conditions, is understood beyond a framework of 'social connection' (Amin 2012; Coward 2009). These relations of care and empathy between strangers – as Berry narrates it - drew on background and advanced knowledge as well as improvisation, innovation and imagination, making a disastrous situation marginally better (for some). It necessitated purposeful, deliberate decisions and actions as well as unintentional, preconscious acts and impulses. Berry's speech invokes 'the unpredictable force of affect' and how that 'might produce empathetic identifications which exceed the moorings of social and geo-political location or subject position' (Pedwell, 2013, 24). Such relations are political, but in ways that exceed accounts of subject positions, identity groups or a nation travelling together in time. They suggest another kind of affective community, and a being-with-others that is formed both through 'our vulnerability to loss' (Butler, 2006, 19), as well as the ways in which we are related to each other 'through the material fabric of the city' (Coward, 2012, 469). This park and these few streets - on this morning at least - seemed far away and almost disconnected from what had happened and what was now happening at King's Cross, Edgware Road or Aldgate. In contrast to statist accounts of the London bombings as an attack on a pre-existing national or urban community, this work reminded us of the intensely local nature of these events, as well as the ways in which they pulled various global publics together.

Conclusion

In studying how we came to sense these events anniversary affectively and atmospherically, we have unpacked alternative routes in to the study of memory following terrorist attacks, by starting not with a pre-defined subject or community but with collective affects and the ways in which the past is felt and emerges in the present, across bodies and in excess of any individuals' body. Here, our experiences of the event show how a focus on the affective and atmospheric offers the potential of destabilizing monolithic accounts of a stable collective and shared memory that so often enjoy official support on a range of commemorative occasions. We have sought to prioritise questions of feeling, sensing and affect, and to refuse

statist ways of making sense of terrorist attacks by scripting distinctions between order and disorder, the state and its emergency (Taussig, 1992). This enables political thinking because it creates a space to re-encounter those events, mindful at the same time of the difficulties of doing so, and the risks of intruding on highly sensitive and personal moments. The point of doing so was to contribute towards ways of resisting the familiar responses that follow terrorist attacks, which 'secure the authority of the state, reinforce the narrative of the nation and produce closure in the face of events that had thrown all three into question' (Edkins, 2003: 103, speaking about 11 September 2001). Instead, our emplaced wayfinding and dispersed note-taking formed an attempt at being open to moments that we have described as involving 'minor gestures' (Manning, 2016), and as such, suggest other ways of being political, as well as other ways of coming together as political collectives at what have become more routinised demonstrations of violence across Europe. Even as we ourselves felt uncertain about what different gestures or responses might mean, and how we were positioned in relation to them, this work led us to all the ways in which these events were, and continue to be indirectly experienced, as well as towards fragile and improvised relations of care and empathy in the city. In an example of how these events exceed sovereign accounts of loss as nation-building: it remains striking that none of the victims - whose names are listed on the four small plaques at the four locations where they were killed - share a surname. These are names that take us to all parts of the world, but that are also now inscribed into the very local geographies and histories of this city. In considering how affective memories coalesced around small gatherings, and how a particular atmosphere then folded back into the everyday life of the city, what has emerged in this work are various demonstrations of not forgetting the London bombings.

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