

Affect and the response to terror: commemoration and communities of sense

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Abstract

This article examines affective responses to terror and the emergence of communities of sense in the commemoration of such attacks. We challenge the predominant framing of responses to terror which emphasise security and identity. We focus on the singular response by the city of Manchester in the aftermath of the 2017 Arena bombing, drawing on fieldwork conducted at the one-year anniversary commemorative events. Our discussion focuses on the ways improvised, transient communities crystallised around the cultural significance of music during these events. The article explores these communities of sense through two case studies: those drawn together around the figure of Ariane Grande; and those assembled through a mass singalong. In contrast to national or municipal responses to terror which orchestrate affect to establish narratives about security, borders and identity, we argue for the importance of paying attention to the improvised, affective ways in which people respond to terror. These plural affective responses suggest another form of collective subjectivity. They also demonstrate the transient, plural, and everyday ways in which politics is practiced, assembled and negotiated by different publics in response to terror.

Keywords: Affect, Ariana Grande, Commemoration, Communities of Sense, Manchester, Security, Singing, Terrorism.

Introduction

The question of how we respond to terror is often framed within a security register. Responses by scholars, commentators and politicians mostly focus on questions of the cause, meaning and prevention of terrorism. There is, however, another register in which public responses to terrorism take place which is not as widely discussed in the academic and public debates. This affective register is epitomised by the expressions of grief, shock, sadness, anger, empathy and love expressed at spontaneous gatherings in urban and digital spaces after terror attacks. These

shared feelings provide an affective register through which communities are constituted and political responses materialise. For example, in response to the 9 November 2015 Bataclan attacks in Paris vigils took place in cities from Berlin to Melbourne (Green, 2015). And in the aftermath of the 7 July 2005 attacks on London, Londoners - stranded at work by the attacks on the public transport system - walked home together. On the ten-year anniversary of the 2005 London bombings many Londoners decided to walk together again, suggesting the force that this sensation of collective motion had in constituting an improvised community (Merrill, 2017). These gatherings operate apart from citizens' perceptions of security threats (Stevens and Vaughan-Williams, 2016). In this article we claim that these gatherings operate in a different register to that which prioritises security and represent an important way in which politics is practiced, assembled and negotiated in everyday life.

In order to address affective responses to terror, we examine the events commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Manchester Arena bombing. On 22 May 2018 Manchester staged a number of events to remember the 22 victims of a suicide bombing at the end of an Ariana Grande concert one year earlier. To mark this anniversary, Manchester City Council organised a series of events including: a temporary memorial in St Anne's Square; a "Trees of Hope Trail" through the city centre; a formal service of remembrance at the Cathedral; and song lyrics projected in coloured lights on the city's pavements and St Anne's Church. The city council also planned an evening sing-along in Albert Square, mirroring and revisiting the spontaneous vigil that gathered there in the immediate aftermath of the bombing. In what follows, we argue that alongside and parallel to these orchestrated events, improvised, transitory and plural senses of togetherness emerged. They emerged both in the urban spaces of Manchester and in digital platforms such as Twitter. These improvised moments of togetherness suggest a different politics of belonging to the organised expressions of civic, municipal and national identity orchestrated by the city council, UK Government and religious authorities including Manchester cathedral.

This article makes three contributions to thinking about the affective register of responses to terror. Firstly, we use the concept of "communities of sense" (Hinderliter et al 2009), to describe the improvised gatherings we observed. This allows us to conceptualise the ways in which these forms of togetherness comprised a shared sensorium that generated a sense of belonging. We argue that such communities emerged in this case through visual and auditory experiences. Secondly, we suggest that improvised gatherings can be identified alongside and in the middle of national and municipal attempts to channel or amplify affects. As such, they are transient, heterodox and unpredictable. Thirdly, and building on the previous two points, we argue that the affective register of response involves more than a manifestation of unitary national or city

identity. We claim that these informal communities suggest politics involves more than securing shared identities. They show how politics involves transient and plural experiences in which togetherness is felt in and through shared sensations (be that auditory or visual). We resist indicating whether these communities of sense are politically progressive - indeed, their plurality suggests they may be many things to many people. Rather we want to suggest that we should recognise affective responses as politically relevant and, in doing so, highlight their potential to express a politics beyond security and identity.

Our argument begins by discussing affect and the affective register. We then explain what communities of sense are and offer some thoughts about the methodological considerations necessary for attuning to an affective register and communities of sense. This leads to a discussion of two cases which examine the emergence of communities of sense through the significant force of music. The first case focuses on the figure of Ariana Grande and the way in which her visual and auditory repertoire shaped the lexicon of improvised commemorations in Manchester. The second addresses the sing-along held in the early evening in Albert Square. In the conclusion we draw out the politics of the forms of togetherness that we saw across different urban and digital spaces around this anniversary. By reading these moments through the framework of communities of sense, we suggest they are of a different order to the narratives of national or civic remembrance that are familiar in many responses to terror. Indeed, we contend that national security narratives largely fail to take seriously the kinds of communities of sense we delineate. This is because they indicate a form of acting politically that is rarely part of national or governmental narratives. However, they are no less significant in indicating the ways people develop different articulations of community and resilience. In their plurality and transitoriness, the gatherings that emerged in Manchester around this anniversary demonstrate some of the ways people organise creatively, resourcefully and democratically both alongside and apart from security responses to terrorism.

Locating an affective register

As Ahmed (2010, 30) notes, affect is a sensory relation in which “we are touched by what we are near”. Affect is thus an impression, or trace of the contact between the world and the body (Ahmed 2014, 6). Understood as such, affect refers to “bodily capacities to affect and be affected” (Clough 2007, 2) in and through such a relation. The sensory relation of affect is responsible for variations in the intensity of bodily states. Often described as autonomic or “nonconscious, nonsubjective or prepersonal” (Ahall 2018, 4), affect represents the manner in

which the body registers its sensory relation to the world. These “visceral forces” operate “beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing” (Gregg and Siegworth, 2010: 1, see also Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012). As such affect is understood as something that precedes emotions and is “contrasted with personal, conscious, emotional experiences often identified as “feelings”” (Åhäll 2018: 4). Rather than strictly distinguish affect from emotion however, we follow Ahmed’s observation that in practice “the distinction between sensation and emotion can only be analytic” (2014, 6). This means that affective relations are already mutually imbricated with feelings (sensations that have been “checked against previous experiences and labelled”) and with emotions (“the projection/display of a feeling”) (Shouse 2005). In contrast to analytic accounts, sensations and feelings are, therefore, largely inseparable in practice.

Affect, or a sensory relation, is central to the politics of community, or the politics of being together. This implication in sensory, affective relationships is captured well by Teresa Brennan in her discussion of atmospheres. Brennan notes that an ““atmosphere”...literally gets into the individual...physically and biologically, something is present that was not there before” (2004: 1). In other words, a sensory experience affects the body and, by changing the intensities of bodily states, implicates it in an experience of that affective relation shared with others that are similarly affected. This does not mean that - in the context of a mass vigil or memorial service - everyone hearing music, seeing an image or touching a memento understands it in the same way. But we can say that, insofar as they are collectively affected by the sounds, the proximity of bodies, and the action of singing, they have a shared affective relation. This experience of feeling part of something comes prior to any reflection on the meaning this relation or shared experience may have. It comes before any attempt to name it as belonging to a particular identity. This is precisely what we mean by a community of sense. It is the “transmission of affect” (Brennan, 2004: 51) that brings communities of sense together at, or around, collective commemorative events such as those at Manchester.

Whilst there is currently a burgeoning interest in questions of affect and emotion in global politics (Åhäll and Gregory, 2015; Bleiker and Hutchison, 2014; Heath-Kelly and Jarvis, 2017; Holland and Solomon, 2014; Solomon, 2018), much of this literature focuses on the ways emotion and/or affect might be a resource for techniques of power. This is an important consideration. Indeed, as Anderson notes, affect provides an “object-target”: that is, “States, institutions and corporations...target and work through affective life ...by setting up possibilities for action [and acting] indirectly on subjects by shaping the affective quality of” environments (Anderson 2014: 26 & 31; see also Ash 2012). In this vein, scholars have examined the ways affect and emotion are orchestrated by states or other centres of power. Masco (2014: 18) documents a “[n]ational

security affect...based on fears that are officially sanctioned and promoted as a means of coordinating citizens as members of a national security state.” Van Rythoven (2015, 2018) has looked at the way that scholars of international relations have assumed that states can utilise fear as a mobilising force. Likewise, Adey (2009) examines how the modification of material environments shapes affect in order to securitise particular spaces. These interventions focus on affect as part of the governmental technologies of the state. This is perhaps most clear in Holland and Solomon’s discussion of the Bush administration’s response to the events of 9/11, and their claim that “affect is what states make of it” (2014: 263). In this case affect is seen as something subordinate to state techniques of governmentality, and as a resource that is utilised in techniques of power and security.

Such scholarship focuses on the organisation and manipulation of affect associated with attempts to govern life (Anderson, 2014: 15). Affect is taken to be the excessive sensations that can be trained and to a certain extent prompted, but are, ultimately, unpredictable and mark the excess of life over discourses seeking to organise that life. We might refer to this as a tension between the *orchestration* and *improvisation* of affect. More than simply a reworking of the distinction between top-down and bottom up dynamics of organisation, “improvisation” captures the way in which “there is no script for social and cultural life. People have to work it out as they go along” (Ingold and Hallam 2007: 1). Improvisation is thus “continually attuned and responsive to the performance of others” (Ingold and Hallam 2007:2). As such, improvisation is not an opposing principle to, say, top down governance. Rather it is the way that individuals construct their sense of togetherness as they go along with whatever resources there are to hand. This may lead to novel repertoires of togetherness. The tension between orchestration and improvisation thus captures a distinction between those affects that are scripted and planned in advance and those that exceed such attempts at organisation insofar as they are spontaneous and transitory. It is, if anything, a temporal, not a spatial distinction – signalling a form of acting in the moment rather than scripting action in advance.

In Manchester this tension manifested in the multiple ways communities of sense inhabited the events planned by the municipal authorities, sometimes accepting the terms of togetherness offered by the city, and sometimes improvising responses that repurposed elements of the events. This can be seen in the range of ways that music comprised an affective focus for events: as an orchestration of affect (a sense of togetherness manufactured in singing along, karaoke-style to pre-planned iconic lyrics projected on big screens); as something repurposed (seen in the spontaneous sing-alongs at memorials where lyrics designed to orchestrate affect were imported into new contexts to express a transitory togetherness); and as something that can provide the material for an improvised community of sense (for example, ephemeral chalk graffiti of song

lyrics at memorials to the victims that speak to those who will comprehend the gesture and imagine a transitory community of sense).

The unique responses shown by the city of Manchester in response to the events of 22 May 2017 and on the one year anniversary made us want to examine affect as an improvised, as well as a powerful political experience. In this sense, we do not seek to think about how affect might be used, but rather what affect can “do politically” (Ahall 2018: 3). We follow the argument that affects and associated emotions “lie at the core of how communities are organized and function politically” (Hutchison 2013: 128). In modulating bodily intensities, movements and shared sensory relations, affect forms a central aspect of community formation. It also allows us to prioritise the everyday elements of different forms of being together, which largely exceed orchestration by institutional centres of power. It is these aspects that we want to capture with the concept of “communities of sense”.

Communities of sense

The sense of belonging inherent to these commemorative events cannot be fully captured by the conceptual register of identity politics. This is because the events commemorating the first anniversary of the Manchester Arena attack were not simply an invitation to identify with, or imagine oneself as part of a discourse of national or municipal identity. They formed an improvised sense of togetherness constituted by and through responses to the sensory and affective stimuli of the music, as well as visual signs that comprised the repertoires of remembrance. In order to name such instances of transient, improvised and plural togetherness, we use the concept of “communities of sense” (Hinderliter et al 2009; Shapiro, 2018). This concept suggests a togetherness that is more fragile and ambivalent than the politics of certainty suggested by identity. Identity, borrowing from Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) is either something that each individual possesses or a common substance that members of a collectively embody. Identities are imagined communities (Anderson 2016), often associated with political projects such as the nation, ethnicity, a region or a city. Communities of sense, in contrast, name a sense of togetherness that operates below the threshold of an identity. They are a sense of togetherness formed through a shared experience of the intensification of affect. Accordingly, “communities of sense” names a mode of “being together in a community whose coherence is no more than a...potentiality” (Hinderliter et al., 2009: 2). As a concept, it reminds us that “there is not *a people*; there are only coexistent *peoples*” (Didi-Huberman, 2016: 66) whose togetherness is constituted through a shared experience of sensory affects.

As Hinderliter et al note, the concept of a community of sense brings together two strands of thought – on the one hand Rancière’s idea of the “distribution of the sensible” (2004) and on the other hand, Jean-Luc Nancy’s influential recasting of the concept of community (1991; 2000). Such communities should not be thought of as moments of unification in which a plurality becomes one. Indeed, communities of sense are distinct from community as a political project of unification under the figure of a particular identity or ideology. Following Nancy, community is understood as always already being-with others. Community thus refers to an irreducible plurality that unworks any projects that seek to establish singular identities. A community of sense thus identifies “a politics of collectivity beyond collectivism or identity politics” (Hinderliter et al, 2009: 2). As such it speaks to a togetherness that is felt rather than a form of identification with a narrative of imagined community.

The key to understanding how such communities of sense are constituted lies in Rancière’s concept of “the distribution of the sensible”. For Rancière the distribution of the sensible refers to the way “variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies...take hold of unspecified groups of people” (2004: 39). In these moments “sense perception simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (2004: 12). It is this “partition of the perceptible through which bodies find themselves in community” (Rancière, 1998: 26). This understanding of sense perception can be read as similar in tone to recent writing on affect that sees the latter as the capacity of a body to be affected (Anderson 2014:9). While Ash (2015: 125) draws a distinction between “sensations (the organization of forces) and affects (what those sensations can do)”, for Rancière “perception” and “the sensible” are not so clearly separable from affect. Indeed, insofar as sensible intensities “take hold of...groups of people” they are affective. Communities of sense are thus affective communities.

The concept of communities of sense articulates togetherness and affect into a single concept for understanding the gatherings that emerged at these commemorative events. It “acknowledges politics to contain a sensuous...aspect that is irreducible to ideology and idealization” (Hinderliter et al, 2009: 2). This echoes Sara Ahmed’s (2004: 30) observation that “sense perception and emotion take place in what I would call the contact zone of impressions; they involve how bodies are ‘impressed upon’ by objects and others”. For Ahmed, it is in and through our sensuous perceptions of the way that objects and “others impress upon us that the ... collective begins to take shape” (2004: 34). Indeed, it is in such “processes of [affective]

intensification” and our perceptions of the sensuous impression they leave on us that “the bodies of others are both felt and read as ‘like me’ or ‘not like me’” (Ahmed 2004: 38). This suggests that togetherness is a sensible relation with objects and others before it is reconstructed as ideology or identity. Indeed, it is the significance of the sensible in constituting a sense of being together with others that we seek to capture with ‘communities of sense’. In the next section, on method, we turn to the challenges of addressing, studying and observing these communities of sense and the affects that bind them.

Attuning to affect in Manchester

Arriving in Manchester on the eve of the commemorative events there was a sense of anticipation in the air. A huge banner had been hung above the door of the McDonald’s restaurant in St Ann’s Square with the words “We ☺ MCR”. The same message was reproduced on postcards left in our hotel rooms (owned by a British multinational company). Throughout the city centre, hundreds of bees—a longstanding symbol of the city that became a ubiquitous identifier of its civic identity in the wake of the bombing—had been painted on the doors and windows of both independent and franchise restaurants, bars, shops and cafes. At Primark—a fashion retailer that sells clothes at low prices—Manchester Bee T-shirts were selling for £5. Some of the cleaners and bar workers at cafes in the city-centre and again at our hotel opted to wear a Bee t-shirt. Signals of the event were omnipresent.

These multiple, but not necessarily coordinated signals, initially had us feeling uneasy. The remembrance events seemed entangled with commercialisation and brand culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012), and our own curiosity, empathy, and interest as visiting-researchers felt at times perilously close to voyeurism. In her research into responses to terrorism, Emily Gilbert discusses the importance of remaining critical in the face of initiatives that seem “unequivocally good” (2017: 2). This seems to us important in the context of discussing state compensation schemes to victims of terrorist attacks, as Gilbert does. However, in this situation, we felt that remaining “critical” could also manifest as ungenerous cynicism. It risked suggesting that these initiatives were all being orchestrated from above, when it was clear that the image of the bee especially was being taken up and used in new, improvised and non-commercial ways. It also risked failing to appreciate life as it unfolds. We therefore needed to avoid an account of power as all-encompassing or fully successful in its impact on people, places and things. We looked for something other than narratives of ideological manipulation, as we made sense of the unfolding, plural atmospheres around this event.

Accordingly, our approach needed to appreciate the multiple reasons people might have been at the commemorative events, and to acknowledge that “choosing to participate” might be too strong a term to capture last minute decisions, contradictory reasonings or affective allegiances that led people to find themselves there. Although many of the communities of sense that emerged during the course of the day were orchestrated, planned and rehearsed, so many initiatives to remember and gather were highly improvised and transitory and might have gone unnoticed by the media’s main representations of the day. We wanted to make sense of these improvised communities of sense. This was motivated in part by a sense of wanting to affirm empathy and solidarity. But it also arose from wanting to grasp the plural ways in which people were involved in a lively “negotiation of the terms in which politics is staged and its subjects are determined” (Hinderliter et al., 2009: 7). Grasping the improvised and transitory sense of togetherness thus required a generous and attentive mode of attunement.

Given how many of the commemorative initiatives - such as the decision to stage a sing-along in the public square – were untested, attending to these events, and doing justice to them, would require refraining from rushing to establish their different meanings. To achieve this, we found it useful to draw on Eve Sedgwick’s understanding of the difference between a “paranoid” and a “reparative” method of doing critical theory, which has been widely discussed in Queer and Feminist theory but less so in Politics and International Relations. Sedgwick argues that a “paranoid” approach leads us to anticipate the ideological over-determination of events. The paranoid critical theorist positions themselves as outsiders that can expose different logics at work, diagnosing the present by “unveiling hidden violence” (Sedgwick, 2003: 130). Whilst of course there are hidden violences that require exposure, Sedgwick’s point is that this kind of critical approach remains unable to “glimpse the lineaments of other possibilities” beyond the ideological manipulation it assumes determines all events. It also struggles to account for the role of critical work when so much violence is already visible and manifest, and so requires more than unveiling it. In contrast, Sedgwick argues that a reparative approach refuses to decide in advance what will be significant, and involves being open to of surprise (2003: 146). Such surprise is captured by anthropologist Jane Guyer when she refers to a “receptive attentiveness to phenomena that declare their own existence” as a way of “attending to... “more life” than the one we already know” (Guyer 2013). It was precisely such a generous and open attunement to events that we sought in our encounters in Manchester, whilst acknowledging that our paranoid impulses remain stubborn.

In practice, this meant immersing ourselves in the different events taking place and attending to our own feelings and impressions alongside those of others. We took part in events at several sites throughout the day, paying attention to the movements, flows and gatherings of bodies across the city and how these were formed, positioned and held together through a relationship with the built environment, technologies (phones, screens, light projections), the weather, and the design of the city as well as key anniversary sites and events. We supplemented our own insights and short conversations with collection of key Twitter hashtags used during the day and tweets sent by prominent accounts. This combined approach allowed us to reflect on the circulation of affect and the communities of sense that emerged and dissipated throughout the day as well as capture the potential surprise of improvised events. In what follows we examine two particular ways in which communities of sense emerged.

Ariana Grande and the affective repertoire of commemoration



*Figure 1 The bunny ear ribbon as part of the one Love Manchester Concert Logo
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:One_Love_Manchester_Logo_2.jpg#/media/File:One_Love_Manchester_Logo_2.jpg*



*Figure 2 The bunny ear ribbon: as twitter ribbon (or twibbon)
<https://twitter.com/TeamAriana/status/867074451262717952?s=20>*



Figure 1 The bunny ear ribbon as flower arrangement at memorial event (image © The Authors)

Ariana Grande is inextricably entangled with the Arena bombing and comprises a figure around which a community of sense cohered at the commemorative events. According to Dawney, a figure is “an emergent accretion of images, ideas and association that resonates within each of its iterations. At once material body, media image and cultural signifier, it is both subject and object, indeterminate container for meaning, and affective conduit” (2018: 122). We examine three ways in which the figure of Grande constituted a community of sense at the first anniversary of the Manchester Arena bombing. We start with the sensory assemblages composed out of Grande’s visual iconography. We then turn to the affective impact of the auditory and lyrical cues provided by Grande’s music. Finally, we show how the digital presence of Grande served as a focal point around which communities gathered. Overall, we show how a fragmented, fragile but significant community of sense emerged around this figuration across the events of 22 May 2018. Far from being an apolitical gathering, it formed a key way through which many people made sense of these events as well as expressing solidarity and resilience.

During our fieldwork, we observed that the memorialisation of the Manchester bombing was suffused with images and sounds derived from Ariana Grande's visual and musical repertoire. Grande's bunny ear headband, which was part of the visual grammar of her *Dangerous Woman* album and stagemusic, was transformed into a ribbon resonating with the sense of defiance and remembrance that has characterised other ribbon campaigns (e.g., AIDS awareness (red), breast cancer (pink)). The ribbon first appeared in the logo for the *One Love Manchester* concert 10 days after the bombing (Figure 1). At the commemorative events outside the cathedral as well as in Albert Square, we saw people with T-Shirts printed with the ribbon. On digital platforms, the ribbon was transposed into Twitter messages and profile pictures, as well as a twibbon (Figure 2). On the eve of the anniversary some Grande fans began encouraging the temporary use of this image as a profile picture or Twitter ribbon/twibbon to mark solidarity with those that had been killed, injured, or affected by the bombing. The ribbon was also reproduced in physical objects at the memorial sites such as flower wreaths (Figure 3) and in written messages. Through a shared sensory relation to the visual lexicon and tactile materiality of these commemorative icons, a community of fans felt their togetherness.

Grande's digital presence also played a role in the remembrance events. Early on 22 May 2018 Grande tweeted to her followers (Figure 4). This tweet was a visual signal that the event had arrived. But interestingly, the tweet was free of hashtags. This meant that the message flew under the radar of algorithms and searches associated with the most popular hashtags linked with this event (e.g. #prayformanchester and #manchestertogether). Her message was instead aimed at those followers who would normally read her Twitter feed. Whilst hashtags serve to articulate a community by assembling followers around an event, theme or idea (Rambukkana, 2015), tweets without a hashtag speak to an already established community. It would have been easy for Grande to reach out to wider communities by borrowing the common hashtags linked with this event but instead she chose to affirm and acknowledge an extant community of followers. That said, the bee motif included in her tweet – ubiquitous in the visual repertoire of the anniversary and wider sense of Manchester's city identity - spoke beyond her followers, drawing in a wider community. The day after the event, Grande would reveal on Twitter that she had a new bee tattoo, an act that resonated with the commemorative gesture made by hundreds of Mancunians in the aftermath of the bombing (Binns, 2018). These digital messages were another element of the visual repertoire associated with the figure of Grande and the affective capacity it had to constitute communities.



Figure 4 Ariana Grande tweet, 22.05.18. Accessed 5 June, 2019. <https://twitter.com/ArianaGrande/status/998788066629300224>

At the improvised memorials Grande t-shirts were a common sight as were lyrics written onto cards or chalked on the pavement. Some of those attending the memorials left homemade collages of tickets and photos from Grande’s 2017 Arena Concert. Through this heterogeneous assemblage of visual and tactile elements, the presence of Grande was established as a common thread at the different memorial sites across the city – including in a space set aside behind a cordon at Victoria Station, and at the statue of Richard Cobden in St Ann’s Square. As well as an attack on a city, the iconography suggested it was an attack on a fan community. When these visual cues were seen, we felt this wider community of fans and families it implied. As such the visual iconography established a common sensory reference point, reiterated throughout the various commemorative events. This assembling and reiteration of multiple visual fragments was constitutive of a common repertoire of remembrance and shared associations. It was echoed further in the role played by Grande’s lyrics and music in the shared repertoires of commemoration - including at the sing-along in Albert Square, discussed in the next section. Grande’s music – heard from shop speakers, mobile phones or sung by individuals and groups – was ubiquitous during the commemorative events. The lyrics of two songs in particular became a focal point around which communities of sense crystallised.

After the 2017 bombing, Grande’s song *One Last Time* was re-released to raise funds for the victims in the aftermath of the attack. The bittersweet chorus lyric of *One Last Time* (“All I really

care is you wake up in my arms/One last time/I need to be the one who takes you home”) became a refrain for the sense of loss and disbelief the attack had called - a plea to extend lives suddenly cut short and to give survivors closure. The lyrics were circulated extensively on Twitter as a way for her fan community to express the sense of shock and sadness that generated a common sense of togetherness:

All I really care is you wake up in my arms one last time I need to be the one who takes you home. I can't stop crying #prayformanchester

That video of Ariana singing one last time with the crowd breaks my heart

|

Because for some of them it really was their one last time ☹️

|

When it says 'I promise after this I'll let you go' or 'all I really care is you wake up in my arms' 🤔🤔🤔

However, in the year after the concert, Grande had been largely silent. Her return to releasing music in the period before the one-year anniversary of the Arena attack compounded her status as an icon for the tragedy. *No tears left to cry* appeared to capture the emotional state of the city with its lyric of renewal after grief: “Right now, I'm in a state of mind/I wanna be in like all the time/Ain't got no tears left to cry”. As such it seemed to draw a line under the year that had followed her concert on 22 May 2017. At commemorative events we heard fans singing lyrics from *No tears left to cry* or playing the song on their mobile phones. The lyrics served as an auditory object towards which the affected communities could orient themselves (Ahmed, 2006) and thus be together (in their multiplicity).

As such, the lyrics and music - tweeted, spoken, or sung - served as an auditory assemblage similar to the visual lexicon of the bunny ears. At the sites of commemoration, the opening bars and lyrics of *One Last Time* or *No Tears Left to Cry* served as affective cues stimulating a sense of belonging to a community of sense that had a shared understanding of the mutual imbrication of the music and the event it was commemorating. Standing in the crowd at the evening event and hearing fragments of *One Last Time*, it was clear from the sounds of recognition and karaoke-style sing-along that it was mutually apprehended as an auditory cue affirming a sense of commonality.

As a figure Ariana Grande is not simply, or only, a person, but a heterogeneous ensemble of visual and auditory elements that together - through their sensory effects over a number of iterations - generate a particular set of associations - with grief, resilience and solidarity. This assemblage can be seen as a distinctive distribution of the sensible. This distribution is not only “a partition between what is visible and what is not, of what can be heard from the inaudible” (Rancière 2001) but also “the perceptual coordinates” (Rancière 2004: 3) that determine how the visible and audible will be received and reiterated by those who can see and hear them. The figure of Grande - the heterogeneous visible and auditory elements associated with her style and music - thus establishes a community of sense. What was seen and heard in the ribbons, flowers, lyrics and music was “a distribution of ...forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution” (Rancière 2004: 12). It establishes a common repertoire of commemoration that constitutes a particular community of both victimhood and solidarity, acting as a signifier of togetherness and simultaneously helping to constitute a particular community of sense and suffering.

To conclude, Grande was a catalytic point around which communities of sense condensed in the aftermath of the bombing and at the first-year anniversary commemoration. As an affective object she shaped the shared sensorium of those affected by the Arena bombing through image, sound and text. Pictures of her tattoo, the visual lexicon of her tour costumes, the text of her tweets and lyrics and the ubiquitous melodies from her music all impacted on the sensory apparatus of those engaging with the bombing, giving them an object to orient themselves towards (Ahmed, 2006). As such, Grande was both a person and a distributed set of affective fragments. While fans imagine a subject composed of these fragments, the communities of sense of the Manchester bombing commemorations were often constituted in relation to one or more of the fragments – a lyric, bunny ears, a melody. These visual and auditory cues “work by aligning subjects with collectives” (Ahmed 2014: 1). Individuals became part of a community by using a twibbon, by sharing a moment of collective grief while singing *One Last Time*, or by knowing they have similar tattoos. Sometimes, these fragments reached beyond her existing fans to draw in others, including us, by way of the many offerings and messages that reflected her visual and musical identity, stretching from flowers and cards in St Ann’s Square to many Twitter posts. Such communities of sense are transitory, condensing around an affective cue such as an image or a sound and dissipating shortly after. They are an orientation to the object that also constitutes a mode of togetherness. But they are also significant, not only for the communities that they assemble, but for the way they have to provide a common repertoire for gestures of solidarity, resilience and hope. While such gestures appear mundane, they shape understandings of who we are and our relations with others and thus contain the potential for novel political formations.

Ariana Grande provides a way into thinking about the moments and modes of togetherness witnessed at the commemorative events.

Singing as a form of togetherness



Figure 5 Manchester Together – With One Voice, Albert Square, Manchester, 22.05.18, © The Authors.

The early evening of 22 May 2018 saw a large public sing-along staged in Albert Square to remember those killed and to affirm a sense of civic resilience. This initiative was organised by Manchester City Council as a way of harnessing and responding to the multiple emotions flowing across the city in the wake of the bombings, which impacted people to greater and lesser degrees. Yet as this section discusses, this event involved more than a choreographed concert. It formed an experimental way of commemorating the victims of terrorism in global cities. From the occasional display of uncertainty and hesitation - as well as delight and appreciation - shown by the evening's hosts, it seemed to us that the organisers knew they were taking a gamble.

Music was once again an affective object around which communities crystallised. But in contrast to the community of sense discussed in the last section, this sing-along invites us to consider a more plural community – not fans, but a diverse gathering with nothing more than a contingent experience of music and singing generating their sense of togetherness. This section is similarly organised around three themes: first, the sensory assemblages organised around the act of singing; second, the role of music as an affective force; and third, how this form of togetherness enables multiple, improvised communities, summoning an experience of being in common that is not founded around an agreed identity or common purpose, suggesting the possibility of other forms of understanding who we are and our relations with others.

Manchester Together – With One Voice (Figure 5) recalled aspects of the *One Love Manchester* concert held on 4 June 2017 to raise money for the families of those killed and injured.. But whilst that concert featured a range of famous pop acts, this event was much more low-key, and was not broadcast live on the BBC, in the way that *One Love Manchester* was. We noticed that people arrived as families and as groups of friends, often wearing t-shirts declaring: “We are Manchester”, “I ♥ MCR”, “Choose MCR”, Ariana Grande t-shirts, and Bee t-shirts. The first part of the concert featured local choirs, including some of local school children, and the Manchester Survivors Choir (made up of people who survived the Arena attack); the second part invited everyone to sing pop songs together - including Ariana Grande’s *One Last Time* and hit songs by bands with links to Manchester including Elbow’s *One Day Like This*, Take That’s *Never Forget* and Oasis’s *Don’t Look Back in Anger*. But overhanging both parts of the event was the strange disjuncture between how good it felt (or appeared to feel to many) to be singing together with others and the reason why people had gathered together. The auditory and visual cues of the bunny ears and the bee were present at this sing-along too. We felt that the sing-along offered another example of how people were improvising forms of coming together that drew on established repertoires whilst also inventing new conventions, demonstrating this city’s singular way of responding to a terror attack.

The concert opened with a specially commissioned music video *Together (This is the Place)* by New Mount City Breakers, featuring Tony Walsh’s poem to Manchester.¹ This was one among many echoes of another improvised moment of coming together – that of the vigil held on 23 May 2017 in the same square. Whilst there were aspects of the evening that spoke to established ideas, about Manchester as a major northern city with a proud musical heritage (Haslam 2000), we were more interested in how the communities of sense that gathered through this event also

¹ *Together (This is the Place)* can be seen at <http://www.togethermcr.com/> and <https://youtu.be/2zQGZUQtZM4>

exceeded such geographies. These included mothers and children, fathers and children, groups of middle-aged men. Those who had decided to attend threw themselves into signing pop songs. The cross-section of ages was striking: children, young people and adults brought together in response to violence but also through a shared knowledge of the rhythms and affects of popular culture. These plural communities were not organised around consensus: we noticed how at one point two of us stood next to a man wearing a t-shirt that read “England Victorious” who in turn stood next to a woman waving an LGBT pride flag (the latter similar to that in Figure 5). These were not identity positions that we would expect to be standing next to one another and we had a visceral response to the one or two signs of white nationalism. But we wonder to what extent the image of the bee as well as the idea of Manchester were *potentially*, or at least *temporarily*, holding nationalist identity markers - common in responses to terrorist attacks - at bay. In order to guard against the increase in violence against minority communities that regularly accompanies terrorist attacks in Europe, several longer standing charity initiatives made prominent efforts to build social cohesion. For example, We Stand Together, a charity (<https://www.westandtogether.org.uk/>) founded by former Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, Peter Fahy, after the Charlie Hebdo attacks used the hashtag #westandtogether on police vehicles following the Arena bombing. Likewise, the “We ♥ MCR” logo of the I Love Manchester Charity (<https://ilovemanchester.com/>) which was set up in the wake of the 2011 riots to orchestrate a plural sense of togetherness in the city (Pin Fat Unpublished ms) was ubiquitous. These led efforts at the commemorative events to orchestrate a sense of togetherness that contested nationalist and exclusionary identities, though they did not eliminate them.

The decision to arrange a sing-along or to convene choirs in response to trauma is not original, and nor is it straightforwardly a good thing. As Cree notes (2019), there has recently been a fashion for choirs, with examples ranging from choirs in the workplace as a way of combatting stress to choirs for people living with dementia. Butler and Spivak (2007) also discuss an example of non-citizens singing in street demonstrations in California in 2006 as a public expression of community and freedom and a demand for inclusion in the nation. In discussing the case of the “military wives choir”, briefly a television series in the UK and now a film, Cree argues that these choirs of (mostly) women must be read as performing very familiar, gendered understandings of war – that is, of women remaining strong at home while men are away fighting. However, Cree (2019) argues that the women participating are often aware of those representations and are also capable of disrupting the narratives being told about them. Following Cree, we argue that the act of singing together in Manchester exceeded governmental accounts of identity, security and resilience. For singing is also an experience that engages sound, touch, breath, nerves and diaphragm and vision; it forms another example of a community of sense.

At the sing-along, we listened firstly to what the sounds and the words might represent – as we did with Ariane Grande’s lyrics, for example. But secondly, we tried to listen in broader terms, to the “grain, matter, shape, mass and volume” (Chion 2016: 267) of the sounds and music. In the context of heightened political emotions, a choir can easily serve as a symbol of reconciliation, continuity, identity and good citizenship. This made us wonder about those affected who might not have been able to bear the affirmative tone or who did not feel comfortable making sense of horror in this way. Yet although some of the music experienced on this evening had an overdetermined form, there was another experience of singing at work, which was less about translating grief into meaning and more about the sensory aspects of being in the moment with others. This experience of singing cannot be interpreted as necessarily good or bad, negative or positive. It is about the process of engaging voice itself, of moving with rhythms and beats, recalling lines, emphasising some phonetic sounds, and establishing a tone whilst breathing with others. Put another way, drawing on Hinderliter et al. (2009), this is not a community in the sense of an identity that precedes the act of singing. Rather, this community of sense emerges through singing and forms no more than the act of gathering, sharing and singing for singing’s sake – without presuming a shared identity or political position. Listening to this experience of singing required something other than establishing the meaning of the words. Recalling Sedgwick, it entailed being open to surprise.

We can read this act of singing, and the mobilisation of the senses and emotion involved, in the context of other deeply embodied practices. For example, Straughan’s work on the experience of scuba diving allows us to read singing through an affective and sensory register (2012). On this occasion, singing in public and in the open air involved a combination of regulated breathing, feeling the warm air, and the acoustics enabled by the semi-enclosed nature of this urban space - surrounded by tall, imposing Victorian Gothic and neo-Gothic sandstone buildings. Straughan’s focus on touch allows us to consider how different senses (the haptic, aural, and visual) work together and to consider touch beyond external touch (brushing against someone to get to a good place in the crowd) to also address “nerve endings in the muscles and somatic receptors” (2012: 21). These may include vibrations in the throat, the inner sound of drawing a breath, using our lips, tongue and teeth, and the combination of hearing our own voices in our ears together with the voices of others. A community of sense was in this way pulled together, temporarily and contingently, “through the division and distribution of sensation and signification” (Hinderliter et al., 2009: 15). That is to say, the binding and unbinding of a community of sense was formed through the transmissions between sound, breath, pressing bodies – of small people and adults, warm air, voices, technologies such as phones, the stone of the buildings and the metal barriers

that temporarily held us together in the square. Attuning to the affective dimensions of this experience of being together necessarily then, involves acknowledging its multiplicity: its political dimensions were lively, improvised and unpredictable.

Considering the role of the senses and the body invites us to appreciate the differences between a sing-along and a choir. For example, if we consider the relationship to words, there is no expectation in a sing-along that lyrics have to be learned or correctly recited. People can join in by mouthing similar noises, hum, or just shout the odd word that they know. It is too simple to call this a democratization of music, but pop music both includes words and can be sung wordlessly. It allows people with very different capacities to remember words and lines, or very different relationships to the good behaviour required to join a choir, to participate and express some looser understanding of being together. A focus on the words and representations alone would miss the ways singing is also an aural, tactile experience, involving the embodied work of pulling and pushing air in and out of the body, the contact with other people's skin, and the rush of feeling the ties between us by way of the sounds that resonate between mouths, bodies, and buildings. Our point is that it would miss the communities of sense such affective relations constitute.

Overall, there were very few guidelines as to what people should be feeling at this sing-along, which is precisely what made it interesting. The singalong exceeded an orchestration of affect, and as such, felt like a forceful example of people improvising new repertoires for commemorating terrorist attacks, and navigating their ways through strong emotions of loss, anger, love, fear, sadness and kindness. Our focus on the affective register suggests that the sense of togetherness formed through this sing-along involved a transitory form of community – fashioned through the senses. Such communities of sense do not replace a set of political demands that might be made to the UK Government, Greater Manchester Police, or Manchester City Council (e.g. for an inquest, prosecution or permanent memorial). But in this moment of togetherness, what was present were the conditions described by Bonnie Honig as necessary for a democratic politics: that is, plurality, a “shifting coalition”, and a “willingness to put oneself at risk” (2009: 7). This temporally contingent community of sense expressed togetherness beyond a univocal political demand. It is this dimension of response to terror, this unequivocally affective dimension, which exceeds the prevailing focus in studies of security.

Conclusion: the politics of togetherness

In this article we have argued that it is important to acknowledge affective responses to terror. We have argued that this affective register runs parallel to and exceeds responses in a security register. Through recognising affective responses to terror, such as in the commemoration of the anniversary of the Manchester Arena attack, we can see the novel communities of sense – forms of togetherness constituted by shared sensory experiences – that emerge in such events. We have argued that these communities are transitory and plural and exceed municipal or state identity projects that seek to produce or protect more unitary and exclusive forms of togetherness. In other words, these collective formations amount to something different to the identities claimed and championed by different authorities (municipal government, national government, religious authorities and the police) in responses to terror and which are mostly framed in a security register.

The events commemorating the anniversary of the Manchester Arena bombing are thus an exemplary instance of a response to terror formed in a distinctively affective register. What we have drawn out here are the plural and transitory communities of sense that appeared around and in parallel to the anniversary events, in which municipal authorities sought to orchestrate a civic identity and resilient city. We have shown the ways in which improvised communities of sense emerged in and through everyday experiences of shared auditory, visual and tactile perceptions. And we have argued that improvisation comprises an unscripted assembling of available resources - digital and non-digital - that people do “as they go along” (Ingold and Hallam 2007: 1). Improvised communities emerge in parallel to the orchestrated efforts to inculcate municipal identity or resilience. Being together in these communities of sense is transitory and irreducibly plural. These senses of togetherness have diffuse boundaries often associated with a particular temporal duration and a shared repertoire of what we have called elsewhere, “more or less digital” practices (Merrill et al 2020). In attuning ourselves to these communities of sense, we can see how togetherness is constituted beyond security responses, and its political potential. This potential is plural and uncertain; it may contain expressions of solidarity, resilience and hope as much as it may contain ugly and exclusionary dimensions. Whilst we cannot assume that music, lyrics, ribbons, flowers and singing amount to a progressive form of solidarity, we can say that unless we attune ourselves to these other ways of being together, we will fail to understand how improvised communities of sense emerge around shared sensory and affective experiences. More significantly, we will miss being open to their political potential.

Another politics is already at work in these loose communities of sense operating alongside, and exceeding, narratives of identity and security, us and them. This other politics of togetherness

suggests forms of belonging that are contingent and plural, and often open to novel, disjunctive and unexpected articulations of togetherness as well as new responses to terror. They demonstrate the potential for non-violent responses that prioritise what William Connolly has called a “presumptive generosity for the plurivocity of being” (2002: xx). They do not purport to overcome fear and anxiety but they demonstrate ways in which communities of sense emerge to explore and share collective feelings including grief, indignation and fear, and how they support forms of solidarity and resistance. As such, these are not opposed to the homogenising identity politics of security-oriented responses to terror, nor are they immune to the force of those discourses. However, we suggest that these affective, improvised, plural and transitory ways of being together should form a central aspect of the study of security. Attuning to them involves expanding our understanding of what politics is and where it takes place.

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