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Title: Interview with Chris Taylor: *Enfolded Journeys*, a mobile exhibition

Short biographical notes

Sreya Chatterjee is a PhD student based at School of English and Sociology at the University of Leeds. Her doctoral thesis looks at 21st-century travel narratives by resident and diasporic Indian women to map generic shifts that result from postcolonialism and globalization. Other than travel writing, her research interests include postcolonial studies, gender studies and popular culture. Her thesis is funded by the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities, AHRC.

Chris Taylor is a professor of fine art practice at the University of Leeds specializing in the field of contemporary printmaking and focusing on the role of the artist's book as primary medium. He previously curated the exhibition *Shifting Borders: Journey to the Centre of Our World(s)* for The Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery (2023), a comparative exploration between historic artefacts and contemporary artists' book works examining how travel and movement by individuals or groups has been documented and illustrated through maps over the centuries within the arts and sciences. He currently co-curates *Enfolded Journeys* with John McDowall. Involving 50 individual artists and makers (co-selected with artists Karen Babayan and Sophie Loss), the new exhibition will travel across the UK and abroad.

Rodanthi Tzanelli is professor of sociology of culture and deputy director of the Bauman Institute at the University of Leeds, specialising on the new mobilities paradigm with particular reference to travel/tourism, new technologies and social theories of crisis, such as climate change. She serves on the RC50 (international tourism) executive board of the International Sociological Association, co-editor of *Hospitality & Society* and is critical reviews editor for *Tourism, Culture & Communication*. Rodanthi is the author of numerous critical interventions, research articles and book chapters, as well as eighteen monographs, including the latest

Planetary Biostyles: Community-Making and Futures Design in the Age of Extremes,
Cheltenham: Edward Elgar (2025).

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Abstract: The present contribution comprises an interview with Professor Chris Taylor in his capacity as one of the curators of the exhibition *Enfolded Journeys*. *Enfolded Journeys* is conceived of as a touring exhibition and themed on narratives of voluntary and involuntary mobility (travel, displacement, geographies of belonging and migration). The exhibition displays twenty-eight new artists' books from different parts of the world, some of which are illustrated and other ones hand-crafted as miniature structures: maps, plates, painterly marks, text, and more. The interview with Professor Taylor is preceded by an introduction to the exhibition's and the interview's connection to the special issue 'Rethinking the biopolitics of hospitality in the 'age of extremes'', which addresses similar concerns about the politics and poetics of mobility in a century fraught with crises of life, human wellbeing and more-than human conviviality.

Key words:

art

biopolitics

enfolding

exhibition

journeys

migration

mobilities

The art of hospitality: beginnings as arrivals *tout court*

As the triple mobility crises of the 21st century unfold (Sheller 2018), newer questions emerge around the uncertainty that lies at the core of journeys. In a world where the meaning of mobility is contentious even just as a concept — what constitutes journeying? Who gets to go on these journeys? What stories do the travellers carry with them? How do the stories change meaning during travel? – art seeks ways to create a safe symbolic hearth for voices of hope and conviviality. This year, Chris Taylor and John McDowall sought responses to some of these questions in their exhibition entitled *Enfolded Journeys*. While it was initially showcased at the Leeds Library, it has been touring through Appleby, Dunoon, Doncaster, and Rome. Its book-cased journeys literally travel various locations to inflect the architectural and artistic designs of an earlier era of uncertainty. Whilst not ‘Bauhaus’ or ‘Isokon’ in style per se, much like these earlier movements that emerged in a world-trodden Europe, *Enfolded Journeys* is also a project of international collaboration. Its style of making hospitable worlds at the start of the 21st century, when political, social and environmental crises tend to fold into ideas of repression, displacement, death and extinction is as welcome as the propositions discussed in relevant critical scholarship.

In this intervention readers will still find reflections on ‘the biopolitics of hospitality in the age of extremes’, albeit in a different style. As a blend of scholarly analysis by two interviewers and an interviewed curator, and artistic intervention by twenty-eight international artists in an exhibition dedicated to ‘journeys’, at first our contribution may seem to pull the special issue back to its starting point. There, Hannah Arendt (1958) and some of her most astute contemporaneous readers, such as Giorgio Agamben (1998), contemplated what happens to human life that has been stripped of its biographical anchoring in contexts of institutional violence. But the exhibition reminds us that humans who have no biographical signature can be both playthings and world travellers, free to reinvent themselves as they choose. Journeys ‘enfold’ their narrative of who they are in distinctive styles, which bring back personal memories or create new ones. So, when the stagers of, and contributors to *Enfolded Journeys* ‘enfold’, they craft their intimate and public cultural-political signatures – as children and grandchildren,

migrants, landscape designers, nature globetrotters, refugees and asylum seekers, map-makers and visualisers of all these fragments of individual and collective movement that intimate a journey *qua* experience.

Depending on where you come from, signatures of this type come with hopeful anticipation, painful recollection and struggle to keep moving, and creating, in varied combinations and volumetric intensities. Experience is the home of memory and anticipation. Several decades ago, Tzvetan Todorov (2003) enacted his own journeying through histories of neglect and violence: from Birkenau and Auschwitz to Pol Pot-sanctioned Cambodian massacres, much like Bauman (1989), he contemplated how not knowing, not being allowed to know and being knowingly complicit in bureaucracies that facilitated genocide, affects the legal and anthropological dimensions of human action adversely (Todorov 2003: 184-186). His reference points are organised by blends of scholarship and literature. A journey into biopolitics is for Todorov what an equally hybrid traveller, Primo Levi imparts in his writings as an attempt to heal the effects of dehumanisation attached to the Holocaust. We will never get rid of violence unless we agree to learn about the world's need for violence, he warns us (Levi 1988: 107). Humans do not just move physically when they travel, they also journey with their minds, their pens and now also their digital prostheses with a view to a better future while contemplating the wounds of the past.

Granted, Levi's and Todorov's discussion of bio-politics (dash intentionally added) belong to an earlier era, in which politics as policing socially endowed forms of life (*bios*) was specifically connected to racism, fascism, populism, nationalism and totalitarianism. But do these modes of dehumanisation not persist to date? For artists, thinking about hospitality's unwritten ethics of sheltering vulnerability, intimate biography and protected otherness has distinctive symbolic dimensions, which are not always prioritised in social scientific scholarship. But it is our contention that, although artists approach things their way, the twenty-eight artists of this exhibition are very attuned to what this special issue has to say about biopolitics in the age of extremes. Indeed, a second, more careful reading of the 28 composite narrative on journeying across cultures, borders, polluted landscapes, majestic mountains and more, reveals the

working of what Clark and Szerszynski (2021: 100) term a ‘speculative planetology’: thinking about the alterity of the earth in its geomorphological, natural and social compositions, not so much like a science fiction but as fictionalised possibilities and hence tentative realities. *Enfolded Journeys* may be tauntingly collage-like in style, but remains very coherent in its mode of communicating experiences of human movements in such fictionalised and tentative realities – physical, psychic and emotional, affected and/or organised by institutions, and personal/family/collective biographies alike. In this sense, the exhibition also pluralises understandings of what is the ‘extreme’, as well as what it means to tread on or (a)cross the border, when one narrates, crafts and pictorializes their own perceived movement through time and space.

The official catalogue of *Enfolded Journeys* states that the exhibition explores ‘travel, displacement, geographies and borders, and migration in recent times and in the past as the effects of such movements of peoples, whether compelled or voluntary’. Journeys can be polysemous. Many of these meanings can get enfolded within one another, years neatly packed into boxes forgotten, left to be rediscovered, remembered. Christ Taylor suggests that the onus is on the viewer to ‘unfold’ the enfolded, to ponder upon the layers of stories embedded deep within the surface. *Enfolded Journeys* showcases multiple formats, media and modes of recounting a variety of journeys. While some displays come in the form of leaflets and booklets, some are intricate collages, three-dimensional maps, needlework and so on. The interactive element of this exhibition ensures an easy intimacy between the art-work and viewer, wherein installations are unfolded, untied, opened, turned around, and uncased to reveal the journeys enfolded within them.

In some instances, the fragility of the materials used for storytelling heightens the sensitive nature of this exploration. The paper for an exhibit is prone to impressions in unheeding hands, the strings are frayed and need to be untied with patience. Stories must be unfolded with care and compassion, because the journeys narrated are often precarious. Many of these stories speak of forced vagrancy, migration and life as a refugee through generations of precarious journeying.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

In the interview below, Chris Taylor provides further context about the showcase, to walk us through the intricacies of *Enfolded Journeys*.

Interview with Chris Taylor

SC & RT: We recall your previous exhibition (*Shifting Borders: A Journey to the Centre of Our World(s)*, Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery, University of Leeds, January-December 2023) and its emphasis on psychic and embodied journeys across centuries and milieux (Tzanelli and Taylor 2023). *Enfolded Journeys* brings together disparate experiences and processes as cognitive and embodied travel, forced migration, as well as cross-generational social and cultural-cognitive mobility. What made you select these particular entries in this exhibition?

CT: To provide context, it's necessary to understand that the *Shifting Borders* exhibition was dependent on the Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery as the site for displaying the selected artefacts from Special Collections. As much as I would have liked to have toured those curated thirty works to other venues, in particular to the locations visited between 1483-84 by the artist Erhard Reuwich and the author Bernhard von Breydenbach of the central piece, *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam (Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, 1486)*, that was never going to happen. There would be too many logistical, security and cost reasons for such an exhibition of rare and unique objects to leave the safety of the archive in the Brotherton Library. Yet I felt there was a need to keep the momentum going in terms of the discussions I'd started both personally and across the broader field of art practice in terms of land demarcation and, in its most basic form, who is allowed to go where.

So, the obvious way forward was to curate a touring exhibition of artists' books that responded within the *zeitgeist* to the themes of travel, borders and migration. By having an international call out for specifically new works would hopefully generate proposals that responded to current situations and issues regarding the movement of people locally

and globally, or reflected on historic events which are ever present in people's consciousness. As with *Shifting Borders*, the responses would be through the actions of artists working within the book format in its broadest sense, but with limitations on size to allow for the easy transportation from venue to venue, this being 30cm in any direction when folded.

I worked with my long-term research colleague, Dr John McDowall, on the actual wording of the call out for proposals, and to help inform the final selection we engaged Armenian-British artist Karen Babayan who was born and grew up in Iran, and Polish-Jewish artist Sophie Loss who grew up in Israel, both now living in the UK. What we ended up with were twenty-eight proposals which we all agreed spoke to the project themes 'relating to travel, displacement, geographies and borders, and migration in recent times and in the past as the effects of such movements of peoples, whether compelled or voluntary, may resound through generations'. These responses covered such topics, histories or occurrences from public rights of way, to border control, to present day wars and displacement, to the Holocaust.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

SC & RT: We find your observation that times of 'uncertainty and jeopardy' (brochure p. 1) host or generate 'unique creative environments' (ibid.) intriguing. We can see how this is inflected in the content of particular entries. But from the perspective of *Hospitality & Society*, which is currently hosting a special issue of relevance, your composite initiative also sheds new light on the problématique of the 'Age of Extremes' as debated from different angles by Eric Hobsbawm and Mimi Sheller. Could you comment on the ways that uncertainty and jeopardy shaped *Enfolded Journeys*' narrative?

CT: The quote from the exhibition brochure – 'uncertainty and jeopardy' – is amongst other things, an acknowledgement of what was happening in Germany during the 1930s and also what we are experiencing now with the proliferation of far-right political movements and populism around the world, not just in Europe. *Shifting Borders* had

already picked up on this in the notebooks of playwright Tony Harrison who, whilst documenting his way across the Balkans when undertaking research for his modern interpretations of Greek tragedies in the 1990s, was faced with the atrocities and ethnic cleansing occurring during the Yugoslav Wars. But it was also a problématique as displayed in the triumphalism of the colonial mapping of the British Empire in artefacts such as George Bickham's *The British Monarchy: Or, a new Chronological Description of all the Dominions Subject to the King of GREAT BRITAIN* (1749), or observed more subtly with my inclusion of the passport of British-Russian double agent Kim Philby which details his border crossings in and out of Spain during the Spanish Civil War when employed as a correspondent for *The Times* newspaper. Each of these writers and documenters produced something creative and purposeful out of extreme situations and experiences.

When considering our intentions for *Enfolded Journeys* and how the many different artists' responses might be assembled as a touring exhibition, John suggested I visit the Lawn Road Flats and its gallery in Belsize Park, London. These were the first modernist block of flats constructed in Britain and were completed in 1934. The architect, Wells Coates, and designer Jack Pritchard also developed a furniture manufacturing company eventually known as Isokon, which specialised in curved moulded plywood with which they furnished the Lawn Road Flats. With the rise of the far-right in Germany, the building soon became a sanctuary for artists and designers escaping pre-war Europe, including Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer and László Moholy-Nagy, enabling the Bauhaus ideals of collaboration and Internationalism to continue and spread. It was this unique creative environment – a community of *émigrés* – that not only formed a source and inspiration of our initial thinking for a historic and positive aspect of immigration and exile, but also provided a template based on the building design itself for the display units we constructed from shaped plywood which now house the exhibition art works – a community of ideas and book works.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

SC & RT: This time the call for submissions was ‘open’. As Hospitality & Society ‘ambassadors’ we see in ‘openness’ a form of hospitality – of welcoming the ‘other’ in one’s safe hearth. The call resonates with an invitation to shelter personal and transpersonal experiences of mobility that often relate to lasting psychic traumas, individual and/or collective. In your opinion, what is the value of issuing such an open ‘call’ to potential contributors?

CT: From experience, rather than taking the easy option of approaching artists we already know are working in areas that simply ‘fit’ the theme, or choosing book works already in circulation, it is far more interesting to us as curators and researchers to put out an idea to the global network and see what comes back. However, this approach can have its challenges as we were selecting from proposals, not the finished artefacts, so the individual artist had to clearly communicate their concerns, cares and intentions, and persuade the selection panel that their intended method and format of production would speak equally with clarity to the viewer.

Enfolded Journeys is the fourth touring exhibition that John and I have worked on together over the past twenty years, but in this instance, we focused on what the artist wanted to convey and question in relation to the theme, rather than their professional standing. It was about their relationship, or the relationship of others past and present, to the places they were travelling from, through and to; their experiences within particular environments and a sense of acceptance or rejection, or the recounting of familial narratives in a time when histories are once again repeating themselves, or at least, reoccurring in diametrically opposed contexts.

The openness of the call allows voices to be heard that may not normally get the exposure of more pre-determined selection/curatorial procedures which rely on established track records in the visual arts, rather than the relevance of content and originality. Since establishing the final twenty-eight artists’ books for the tour, we’ve discovered that we have exhibitors who are currently undertaking Masters and PhDs alongside internationally renowned playwrights and designers, and from as far afield as Poland, China and Puerto Rico.

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

SC & RT: Could you comment on why you decided to use the notion of ‘enfoldment’ in the title? What journeys do you anticipate will get enfolded within the exhibition in these instances of travel?

CT: I feel the act of enfoldment is synonymous with the book and its various formats. The book – its cover, its folds, its slipcases – is a container for the stories and narratives we devise or encounter and want to speak about, though in a more restrained form of presentation than you would get from say a singular painting or a film. On one hand there is an intimacy and protectiveness in this act of enfoldment, and a desire to document past and present conflicts, whilst on the other, a need and urgency to share these moments more broadly. Whilst the concerns of the artist are enfolded into the materiality of the object, it becomes the prerogative of the individual viewer to ‘unfold’ the content, its meaning, and to reveal the story, but in whatever timescale they choose. Some of these stories are based on extremely personal experiences, whilst others explore situations that may affect a broader collective as in *LAMMAS: COMMONS* where communal land use and migration are brought together by participants now living in East London whose cultural heritages span multiple traditions of global systems of shared resource management.

FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

SC & RT: Being exhibited physically rather than online, the entries blend together a variety of formats. This creates an interactive experience for the visitor. What did this interactive dimension add to the exhibition?

CT: The majority of the works have a complexity of enfoldment, not only in the layers of history, knowledge and intention of the artist, but also in their design and structure. Yet there are instances of unequivocal simplicity, such as with *RUBICON* (Joan Ainley and David Ainley, 2025) which is printed in uppercase bold type on a strip of thin card

and folded between each letter to produce a zig-zag ‘book’. Whether it falls within the acceptable notion of a book is for others to decide – it has no covers, pages or images – but as we hold either end of this concertinaed strip between our thumbs and forefingers and gently pull, we slowly expose the boundaries between each letter to take those decisive and irrevocable steps across the Rubicon and towards a point of no return. Each viewer of this book will be reminded of their own experiences, life changing moments and near misses. It could be an analogy for those trying cross no-man’s land from East to West Berlin 60 years ago or Women carrying babies and stepping into a rubber dinghy on the beaches of Calais not knowing whether they will survive or drown. Rather than present a story, *RUBICON* provides a template on which the audience can project and remember.

In contrast, Batoool Showghi’s *A Visual Reflection on Displacement* (2025), does just that. Through collaged family photographs, passport scans and drawings produced with a sewing machine, Showghi weaves her journey with multiple pages and inserts, and binds together a story of dislocation, the result of the Iran-Iraq war. Frances Day’s *Carrying All That They Are* (2025) is a good example of interactivity and complexity, the ‘book’ an 8-sided construction in the shape of a Mongolian yurt with pages that fold out from the centre to form the supporting walls of a canvas cover. Each page contains images and text relating to current nomadic ways of life in different parts of the world and remind us that for the itinerant, travelling is still a normal way of life.

FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE

SC & RT: This time the exhibition will travel widely. We caught it in its first ‘stop’, in one of the libraries that features as a heritage spot at the centre of Leeds. Did you plot the exhibition’s itinerary with the histories of its ‘stops’ in mind?

CT: In the early stages of planning I did approach a number of galleries and venues that might form a tour around the country from North to South – a type of travelling library which could stop-off for a day or a week and engage with a diverse range of audiences – where migration might be seen as either a multicultural success such as in Brimingham,

or a controversial social and political issue, as in Boston. I was also interested in taking the exhibition to border towns such as Carlisle and Berwick-on-Tweed, places with an ingrained, if invisible, history of shifting borders, and even places of sanctuary such as churches and cathedrals. However, this garnered little response, which I can only assume was by having no actual physical material to entice prospective venues. At that stage it was just an idea.

The ‘stops’ which currently form the tour started with The Leeds Library (18-21 March & 31 March-4 April 2025), a Georgian architectural gem founded in 1768 that sits quietly in the centre of Leeds’s shopping quarter, the entrance nestled between the Co-op bank and Ann Summers. You could easily miss the entrance if it wasn’t for their more obvious sign promoting their ‘Word of the day’. Though it is a subscription library, it has daily periods when any member of the public can make an impromptu visit, explore the rooms and browse the bookshelves and, of course, see the temporary exhibitions such as *Enfolded Journeys*. As well as members and local researchers, it attracts many curious tourists from all walks of life.

Our second stop is the Tourist Information Centre in the 16th century Moot Hall in Appleby-in-Westmorland (3-14 June 2025), the town in Cumbria in which I have lived for the past 16 years and notable for the annual ‘Gypsy’ horse fair. This transient event is a coming together of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities from across Europe, and we felt that our gathering of books, accommodated in its bespoke plywood modular display structure, designed as easy to transport and reconfigured to suit diverse sites, acts as a timely reminder of the continuing movement of people across continents, whether through choice, necessity or forced migration, and the stories to be told. From here it will travel across land and sea to reach Dunoon Museum of Contemporary Art in Scotland, and in 2026 we currently have Danum Gallery Library and Museum, Doncaster and Scuola Grafica di Internazionale, Venezia on the itinerary. This latter stop is relevant in as much that Venice was the starting point for *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam*, and I felt it pertinent to connect at some level with that earlier project which became the catalyst for *Enfolded Journeys*.

FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE

Some afterthoughts on the interview

The biopolitical has long been confined to statistical and institutional analytical frameworks. Yet for us, its liberatory potential lies in its revival as a critical deconstruction—one that transcends conventional discourses of escape or non-belonging. The loose ties that shape the artistic community of *Enfolded Journeys*—and the project as such—depend on the rhizomatic spread of other entanglements: with the state, with family archives, with diaries of migration and travel, some of which necessarily traverse or require institutional channels to be realized as projects.

In this interview Chris Taylor offers a counterpoint, describing the exhibition's spirit not as an effort to reproduce a global network of artistic producers, but as an invitation: 'put out an idea ... and see what comes back.' From our perspective, this bold refusal to overdesign a public narrative on mobility and belonging gestures toward a more generous ethos. Hospitality, in this context, is not a policy or a structure, but the world we choose to make—if only temporarily—in the company of other makers.

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