

# Travelling in a Cosmopolitan Milieu: An Intercultural Exchange of Two Artists as Educators in Conversation at a UK University

**Beverley Hayward**

Birkbeck College, University of London, England

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## **Abstract**

By travelling in a cosmopolitan milieu in a UK university, pedagogies of possibilities are explored. Over a period of five years the exploration narrates the journeys of, what Clover (2010) calls, “artists as educators,” documenting conversations and creative pedagogic practises. This is despite the closure of the university campus in 2023, due to an overt neoliberal agenda. The findings of two feminist cosmopolitans in conversation, illustrates that when stories require repetition, that is the retelling of a certain narrative as well as stories that are whispered, they are of a particular significance. Represented are resistance, resilience and rebellion. In addition to the tone and context of conversations being important, the findings in the research suggest that by adhering to a feminist cosmopolitan ontology, encouraged is a sensitive, ethical encounter with others. This approach suggests that those marginalised in the academy and the artworld, then are seen and heard. Their voice and artwork are visualised as challenges to the norms of the academy.

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**Keywords:** Feminist aesthetic; artist educator; cosmopolitan; resistance; resilience; art; women.

## **A Cosmopolitan Encounter**

An artist-educator in the land-seascape,  
Sees the strangers,  
As they wait,  
They wait for me,  
On the shores of different lands.

With my vulnerability exposed,  
I escape.  
I escape from the him-ter-land,  
To the promised land,  
To a sea of honey,  
And the sweet embrace of strangers.

Those strangers receive my body,  
Without judgement or question.  
For the masculine, no longer coverts me:  
Accepting,  
Knowing,  
Noticing,  
We are open  
To each other’s stories.

In a cosmopolitan encounter  
We find each other,  
Free.  
We see, one another,

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The (Re)searcher,  
No longer searching.  
The strangers,  
No longer strange.

Hearing their voices,  
Compassion floods my soul.  
As time lapses  
In the suspense of tales to come,  
My toes sink in the sands  
On those expansive shores.  
In hopeful anticipation.  
As ocean waves kiss my face.

(Hayward, 2019-2021)

## Introduction

From a marginalised position of a (dis)abled, working class woman, I understand the necessity for a cosmopolitan approach to research methods and pedagogic practises. Often placed in a space of difference, I notice those that stand on the borders with me in education and the artworld. Sharing those spaces, I am in the privileged position of hearing their stories. It is of vital importance to make those stories heard beyond our borders and take them into the public domain. As Pollock and Parker state: “[w]e, who look at ourselves and our histories through the prism of artistic representations and practices, need to know the whole array of stories, in their difference, complexity, and varied modes of creativity” (2003, p. xxvi). This borderland is a terrain from which socially constructed norms are challenged in cosmopolitan encounters (Bates and Bowman, 2015; Green, 2012).

In the spirit of cosmopolitanism, this paper explores how a continuous conversation was told to me over many years. This particular conversation began when I started working in a UK university as a study skills support worker, where I met Chrissie Peters, a learning support assistant (LSA). In these support roles we assisted those students with learning differences and disabilities. We were both artists, mature, first-generation degree students. We felt like imposters, interlopers in the academy, not able to speak the language of the white, male, academic master (hooks, 1994).<sup>1</sup> However, whilst working together, we took on a cosmopolitan position, as we changed and developed. Now, as the Disability Manager and Chrissie a Teaching Technician, we established a lasting interest in each other’s experiences and practices. These are explored in the stories we told to each other; occasionally we disagreed, but always with conviviality. As Appiah explains:

“Folktales, drama, opera, novels, short stories; biographies, histories, ethnographies; fiction or non-fiction; painting, music, sculpture, and dance: every human civilization has ways to reveal to us values we had not previously recognised or undermine our commitment to values that we had settled into” (Appiah, 2006, p. 30).

Eager to learn and converse about the differences and similarities in our art, family and lives, we also discussed the injustices of our situation, we realised that change was possible by telling our stories and those of others that are marginalised. By actively speaking, presenting and writing, the voices of the oppressed are heard in the stories shown in public exhibitions, and published in journal such as IJTDC.

From this point, the interviews, that is the conversations, as practised in my research and beyond, is defined and considered to be a conversation, a dialogue between two people in a safe space. The conversations explored for this paper initially formed part of my PhD study, completed in 2019. I

<sup>1</sup> In the UK, the academy is a term used for higher educational institutions.

was interested in the lived experiences of a small group of women as they returned to education to study art. On completion of their degrees, they were employed by the university in which they studied, as support workers. The focus of my PhD was the subject positions we performed in the university. The artist-educator-practitioner and the resilient learner were the identities illuminated as I gathered my data. On completion of my PhD, we continued with our conversations, discussing the complexities of the intersections of gender, class, disability, and racial inequality. These intersections further highlighted the need to decolonise the curriculum to reveal different and new knowledges of significance to those groups on the margins.

Our art is created to be read as a form of embodied struggles, resistances and rebellion, where the voice of the oppressed is no longer silenced. Labelled in the academy as the ‘helper’ from the ‘mums army’ (Stevens, 2013), we fought our way into the artworld, moving from student, support worker, to ‘artist as educator’ and artist-exhibitor (Clover, 2010). In our exits from the university during the summers of 2017, 2019, and my departure in 2023 we are ‘newly born’ (Cixous, 1986). Yet, that birth was not easy, and in the words of one of my participants: ‘it [her artwork] was like the only way, I felt I could materialise this voice’ (Interviewee, 2017: 2.10 in Hayward 2019). As producers of power-knowledge we understand the impact of our subjectivity as artist-educators.<sup>2</sup> This paper documents one of many partial, powerful stories, of which the cosmopolitan conversations were plentiful, as is our creative practises.

I was inspired by Chrissie’s stories and the illustrations that she shared with me over the years (Fig. 1). In response to the story that motivated the creation of her illustrations, we created a tapestry of mixed media, specifically to accompany this paper, entitled *Travelling in a Cosmopolitan Milieu*, (2021) (Fig. 2). As a co-construction, the embroidered collage visually expresses how cosmopolitan encounters foster a non-linear approach to narratives, to enable and develop the other’s creative subjectivity. In a partnership, of shared practises (Wenger, 1998), the encounters between Chrissie and I facilitate a feminist praxis of pedagogic possibilities. Being ontologically receptive to others, mutual respect fostered a dialogue of freely shared experiences, and whilst collaborating, we conversed in and outside the academy to create a variety of artworks. Figure 2 is used to explore the intercultural exchange of two “artists as educators”, engaged in cosmopolitan conversations (Clover, 2010). The textile was exhibited at The Halpern Gallery in May 2022, along with the artwork of the eight support workers that participated in my PhD research (Hayward, 2019). The exhibition is a space of resistance for rebellious women to actively destabilise the dominant discourses of the academy and the artworld. Our creativity is the focus of the exhibition; it is an active means to celebrate our work as artist and educators, conversations can flow freely with each other and the viewers.

## Conversations as creative praxis

Often creative imaginations are a product of the many conversations we have with the self and others, both in the psychological and social landscapes. This is suggested by Kwame Anthony Appiah, who considers that conversations do not require literal talk:

“Conversation across boundaries of identity – whether national, religious, or something else - beginning with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from a place other than your own” (Appiah, 2006, p. 85).

Accordingly, his conceptualisation of conversation is broadened to include the “engagement with the experience and the ideas of others,” in ways that are other than speech. So, in the vein of Appiah’s understanding, cultural differences and similarities are part of cosmopolitanism (2006, p. 85).

<sup>2</sup> Subjectivity is taken to mean the differing experiences/acts, feelings and thoughts of the individual. Subjectivity is both externally and internally moulded by forces, motivations and expectations; thereby as the positioning of the individual is fluid and multiple, so too are the formations of subjectivities. Accordingly, those subjectivities are open to change, as we move from space to space, experiencing the intersecting relationships with others (intersubjectivity).

The emphasis is placed upon an open and tolerant dialogue that encourages pedagogies of possibility and creative encounters. What is required of the cosmopolitan is curiosity, wonderment, conviviality, hospitality, and what Stacey (2015, p. 163) suggests, is an “ease of proximity to the unfamiliar”. This is the lens through which I see my cosmopolitan encounter with Chrissie and how she sees her engagement with other cultures. This is embodied in our art and reflects how we resisted patriarchal, Eurocentric ideologies, whilst we journeyed together in the academy, “Making Conversation” (Appiah, 2006, p. ix).

As we participated in those conversations, we discussed complex issues, race, gender and marginalisation. A cosmopolitan stance is not without its challenges, for a white researcher. I acknowledge my white position of privilege in the conversations with Chrissie and you the reader. But not to have difficult conversations is to further the marginalisation of people of colour. Therefore, it is important to recognise my bias in this process and by taking an ethical and reflexive stance, that is often a feature of cosmopolitanism, we can cover much ground. The parochial landscape was left behind as we travelled to spaces that encouraged discourses on de-colonisation, equality, human rights and justice (De Greiff and Cronin (eds.), 2002; Binnie, et al., 2006). Indeed, cosmopolitanism has been part of the landscape for many centuries, influencing the 1789 Declaration of Human Rights of Man, Kant’s league of peace (nations) (1795) and currently, Black Lives Matter.

Appiah opens up this conversation in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006) suggesting, free and equal conversations between diverse and different voices, whilst respecting the cultures of others (2006, p. xv). Therefore, in discussion with others, agreement is not the fundamental objective but rather a conversation that, “helps people get used to one another” (Appiah, 2006, p.85). He states: “[e]ach person you know about and affect is someone to whom you have responsibilities: to say this is just to affirm the very idea of morality (2006, p. xi). There are difficulties in this relationship, as cultures have developed over many centuries of “living in local troops” (2006, p. xiii). Accordingly, “minds and hearts” need to be equipped with “ideas and institutions that will allow us to live together as the global tribe we have become” (Appiah, 2006, p. xiii). There are tensions between the local and the global as well as the ideas we hold as individuals and the institutions in which we work, as this paper illustrates.

Nevertheless, in agreement with Stan van Hooft, cosmopolitanism is a vital tool to aid understanding. More importantly, it is a lens through which the researcher can oppose nationalism and racism, which facilitated colonialism and slavery (van Hooft, 2009). These discourses objectified “the victims of those practices as inherently inferior to their masters” (van Hooft, 2009, p. 6). It is imperative that the cosmopolitan does not take on an elitist, lofty position, which Appiah warns against, as an objectifying stance when encountering the “putative provincial” (2006, p. viii). Yet, in a cosmopolitan encounter those discourses are vehemently rejected in favour of understanding the “foreignness of foreigners, the strangeness of strangers”, the ethics, cultures and aesthetics of others’ identities (Appiah, 2006, p. xix). This makes way for an inclusive ethos, so that those on the borders can feel part of a wider community.

## Cultural contexts

Unfortunately, there are still those in academic institutions that do not follow an ethical, inclusive road. The landscape is a reproduction of a Eurocentric his-story within the discourses of patriarchy, colonialism and the economies of the privileged. In this stifling and stale environment, writing and research reproduces the same old repetitive, monotonous contexts. In the words of Helen Cixous: “We are still living under the Empire of the Selfsame. The same masters dominate history from the beginning, inscribing on it the marks of their appropriating economy: history as a story of phallogocentrism, hasn’t moved except to repeat itself” (1986, p. 79).<sup>3</sup> So instead of reproducing a materiality of the masters’ Selfsame-ness, we seek to create stories of shared experiences of others. Of

<sup>3</sup> Phallogocentrism is defined as a society and culture that privileges the phallus, the dominance of masculinity.

interest and importance are the everyday conversations that make up the messiness of our lives: Cixous considers that writing in this way, can shape a subjectivity that challenges the “machinery’s functioning” (1986: 65). And it is this way, that Chrissie and I write, create and (re)search. We seek to challenge the masters’ old ways to make new knowledges in what West (2016) suggests is a “good story”.

And in the telling, of a good story, we critique the data gathering traditions of early researchers, ethnographers and anthropologists, specifically their interview processes (Chadderton, 2012). Leaving by the wayside the practises of European, white, male researchers, I have problematised my own position of privilege in the poem I wrote to accompany and open this article. Drawing upon the notion that by exposing the vulnerabilities of the researcher, the violence of extracting data and thereby objectifying the participants, can be eliminated or at least limited. By using a democratic methodology, I hope to encourage the voice of those that have been oppressed (Dragomir, 2020; Singh, 2018). This can be achieved by embracing the practice of storytelling, as a “healing tool” (Bainbridge, et al, 2021), specifically by engaging in cosmopolitan authentic conversations.

### **Creating conversations: a methodology**

In breaking and undoing the epistemological research traditions as a feminist cosmopolitan, I am able to create and record academically different knowledges (Jackson, 2009). The different knowledges that are verbalised and visualised in the next section highlight the need to decolonise the curriculum to include the stories of those on the margins. When injustices and inequalities are made evident, Chrissie takes on the subjectivity of the activist and the rebel. However, in an auto-ethnographical context, I recognised the significance of taking heed of what was and is being said and not to translate, interpret, infer and imply what I think is ‘hidden’ in the texts. Instead it is important to be mindful of the stories as they are told to the researcher, not as we think we hear them. Yet, as researchers, it is all that we can do to foster a feminist cosmopolitan encounter, or as Black feminists would call, “Womanist” practices (Etienne, 2016). Even in this connectivity of intersubjectivities,<sup>4</sup> there is a recognition that a degree of violence is present in the process of interpretation, which is why I have included large extracts of Chrissie’s voice as well as her art in the analysis (Richardson in Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 967; and MacLure, 2012).

I suggest that just as conversations that form the data are non-linear, with interesting twists and turns, so too are the art practises, part of which is analysed in the next section. Cosmopolitanism, in this context, is both a method of (re)searching as well as a lens through which the data gathering processes are considered. Consequently, as a lens and a method it critiques the conventions of the linear sequential norms of the ‘monolithic system’ (Moi, 1985, p. 11). Accordingly, my approach to research is the facilitation of organic conversations, which support the processes of art practices and creative possibilities. The new knowledges and creative outcomes might not have been initiated had I not had an epistemological shift. In my PhD research I decided not to use the conventional semi-structured interviews but asked the participants, including Chrissie, to tell me about their artwork. Furthermore, to mitigate the sterile artificial environment of an office, I ventured to their homes to see their studios and art. I took on the subjectivity of the cosmopolitan, eager to learn about their culture in an environment in which they felt at ease.

To continue with this approach, I did not arrange a specific time and place to converse for the conceptualisation of the artwork for this paper. Initially, we met for coffee in the refectory; this was to ask whether Chrissie would consent to share the data I originally gathered including figures 1, 2 & 4 that I wanted to use to create a textile piece. It was during this conversation that we decided to make a collaborative piece, and subsequent conversations are documented in the analysis along with the stages of the artwork in my journal (Fig. 5). As we conversed about the aesthetics and context of the tapestry we created, power-knowledge hierarchies were broken down in the layered and complex use of

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 2

language and imagery. As part of the process we discussed our emotions connected to the conceptualisation and meaning making of the work.

This was not without its challenges, as in the research processes I did have a lingering managerial insider position, being ‘experience near’ (Anderson, 2002, p. 23). I experienced the intersubjectivity of working together, in a similar support role and as a manager. These complex positions have facilitated a space to be reflexive. In doing so, it has enabled me to craft my practices as researcher, artist and educator, forming the subject of the ethical practitioner (West, 2016). The insider position overlaps with the outsider, as I am a foreigner in Chrissie’s culture and as Appiah considers we do share some commonalities but there are also differences. My story is not her story, and her story is not mine. However, we have come together to share our stories as two local artist-educators set in a global context, with the readers of this journal, as partially shared epistemological position makes for relatable and collective experiences.

In the first research project with Chrissie as a participant, I was an inexperienced researcher. I did feel that I might have been seen to be an outsider. She may have seen me as an authoritative figure, possibly feeling the need to please, giving responses that she believed to be correct, what she felt I wanted to hear. Now after ten years of gathering stories, the length of time has facilitated an ease to the process. It would not be an authentic approach to have an interview schedule of questions with a designated interviewing space. Our conversations are impromptu, with an authenticity and openness that builds ‘trust’ and ‘respect’, having developed over time to become part of our everyday working practises (West, 2016).

During this auto-ethnographical process I had the space to think at length about how we are constructed as subjects, where the researcher and researched subjectivities have merged. In sharing spaces in the university, the workplace and visiting her home, she has given me partial access to her every day. In this way I am a subject positioned in her landscape that allows for a sharing of experiences. By having the space to converse over many years, this methodology revealed Chrissie’s transformation from student to practising artist and cosmopolitan educator. By using this longitudinal method, she gradually revealed to me her early childhood, as a “showman kid”, which fostered a cosmopolitan ontology (Interviewee: CP, 2017: 1.59 in Hayward 2019). We both see the world as a place where inclusion can break down cultural barriers. However, the legacy of prejudices was so engrained in and on her body, that she did not see herself venturing into spaces in which she was not familiar. Being told that she was valued less, evoked feelings of the imposter that were difficult to overcome. She did not perceive a reality of travel, as a cosmopolitan might, with ease and with confidence of belonging. Therefore, the shaping of our subjectivities is one of inclusion, as artists-educators and curators is embodied in the text(ile) we created (Fig. 2). Our texts seek to undo, step over, break up those marginalising mastery discourses that seek to enforce the imposter identity (Cixous, 1986, p. 887).

I argue that a cosmopolitan methodology and pedagogy facilitates agency, as artists in conversation do have the freedom to speak (Appiah, 2006). In the development of this agency, in both the location of where I collected the data and how it was collected, a co-creation of practise was encouraged. Furthermore, the power dynamic is disrupted in the use of visual images/objects as this, according to Mannay (2010), challenges the rigidity of the linear interview technique.

Simultaneously and in the vein of Mason (2005) and Packard (2008) the visual element of art makes possible a greater degree of understanding of the subjectivities of the artist as educator. Culture is a lived experience, part of the everyday and embodied in the art we create. This is part of our shared identity, where relations of power produce the subjects in the narrative of a co-construction. It is hoped that in “breaching the rigid separation of knowledge from experience” new meaning making is initiated (Pollock, 2013, p. 23). Journeying to (re)search and discover the new, hidden, subjugated power-knowledges in the shared spaces of the cosmopolitan, our tale(s) of creativity are told. So that in the words of Walkerdine (1997, p. 15), research “provides not only ways of seeing others, but ways of understanding ourselves”. To see others and make our own meanings (Parker, 2007, p. 790), the

ethos of cosmopolitanism is a tool that is essential. It supports a research process that makes for different, knowledge productions to be celebrated and exhibited.

## **Intercultural exchange of two artists as educators: The analysis**

### **Whispered conversations of resistance and rebellion**

Our first recorded conversation was for my PhD study, which is discussed here to set the scene for the subsequent cosmopolitan conversations we had to create the tapestry (Fig. 2). During the conversation, much of which was said in a whisper, I began to understand our cross-cultural similarities and cultural differences. Made explicit in this conversation with Chrissie, was the importance of language and the use of voice in terms of who is listening and who is speaking. When I transcribed the conversation, I thought the recording facility was faulty because in places Chrissie's voice was a whisper and I found it difficult to hear what she was saying. After listening to the recording a few times, I realised that she was whispering when she discussed acts of resistance and transgression, where social and cultural differences subverted the norms of the academy, artworld and cultural practises. This was most evident when she identified as being an artist and her refusal to continue with pedagogical practices that were unethical, those practices that reproduced colonial and gendered oppressions. For example, I asked her with what roles she identified. She replied: "well, I am a mum, I suppose, (very long pause) an LSA (sounded out the syllables), a freelance illustrator, that's an artist (whispering). I was having that conversation recently, but I never think of myself as an artist" (Interviewee: CP, 2017: 25:21).

Chrissie was transgressing the gendered and class norms of the academy, her culture and society. But still feelings of an "interloper" were evident, as certain knowledge hierarchies have value in the academy, so that working-class women were marginalised (hooks, 1994; Houtt, 2012; Reay, 2004; and Reay, et al., 2010). For still the subject of the artist is an ontology embedded in cultural capitals that align the artist and an arts education with white middle-upper class males, the masters of the arts and academia. Undeterred, Chrissie turned to a cosmopolitan ethos of inclusion and equality to highlight the oppressive reproductive discourses of the 'Empire of the Selfsame' (Cixous, 1975, p. 79). The narratives of postmodern and poststructuralist theories, facilitated a different ontology as she entered university as a mature student before becoming a learning support assistant.<sup>5</sup> This jarring of her taken for granted truths occurred, as new power-knowledges were experienced. The subjectivity of the mature student was a way in which to question her positionings, both past and present and in doing so it was a source of liberation. She says:

"the course was great, I learnt loads, absolutely loads, I had a great time, it was a great course. ... the theory totally changed, my outlook on life. ... it was all the feminist theory and the contextual [studies], looking at how we are placed in the home and in society, where they [women] are being pushed this way and that way. I just found it really fascinating considering my background" (Interviewee: CP 2017: 5.00-5.11 in Hayward 2019).

Chrissie, a member of the traveller community, is marginalised in today's 21<sup>st</sup> century society. A society, yet to be accepting and tolerant of others. And then again within her own community, as she identifies that being part of this community reinforces the norms of binary gendered stereotypes. She explains, that, 'till then, when I did the course, I hadn't really thought about it [social systems] ... 'cause it's always been that way. So, I started to question everything, why is this like this? Why are they [women] allowed to do this and not that? (Interviewee: CP 2017: 6.22-8.08 in Hayward 2019). Being a member of an excluded community, and a woman, has motivated Chrissie's desire for a society that is tolerant of others. She continues:

<sup>5</sup> Postmodernism is a period in time that follows Modernism, 1950s to the present day. It is characterised by an inclusive ethos that sees value in the local narratives that have been excluded from the canon of elite Modern art, such as feminism, LGBTQI+ and people of colour. Although some theorists suggest that postmodernism has run its course and society and culture is in the post-postmodern period, the conceptualisation of inclusive practises are still evident.

“Why are people so much taking it [truths] for granted, ‘because we are all brought up the same? This is what happened with Trump. People just don’t know where they are heading. They just don’t see it. That’s what happened with Brexit. This area here voted for out, for Brexit; I was surprised as it is so multicultural, but I think more that the multiculturalists didn’t have a vote. I don’t see why they would vote against it (whispered). The park is spotless, the food shops are cheap ‘cause they are Polish, vegetables are dirt cheap” (Interviewee: CP 2017: 6.22-8.08 in Hayward 2019).

Accordingly, the situation is multi-layered and complex. Although she feels marginalised as a woman, being a traveller was a space to feel part of a supportive community: “I lived on showman sites as a kid; it was a big one where I lived. They are fiercely protective over their rights; so, when, if, you needed help with anything, we would help each other, very community based (Interviewee: CP 2017: 6.22-8.08 in Hayward 2019). She expands upon this need for tolerance, openness and social justice, both in and outside her community. It is reflected in her need to put her moral and ethical considerations over financial gain. She realised that her subordinate positioning in her community and marriage was a space from which resistance was possible. Rather than reneging on her ethical cosmopolitan stance in order to seek creative recognition and financial gain, she shows an inclusive representation of society. The expression of which she is not prepared to dilute (Fig. 1). Chrissie explains that she was commissioned to illustrate a children’s book. She discusses how the characters were to be visualised. She wanted them to be able to produce unlimited multiple subjectivities formed by exploring a diversity of landscapes, metaphorically walking in the shoes of others. She explains:

“So it is about two children who go into a magic library and question all different people, really, about different things; and they get whisked off into different places ... you can do a lot with it. So, they [the company that commissioned the project] were sort of rigid about what they [children] would learn about RE, in schools. ... It was just so prescriptive (whispered); it was just horrible. But it could have been really good. And I really liked it when they told me about it, it really sold itself to me, but actually they didn’t want what I thought they wanted at all, and they haven’t hassled me about doing any more; it’s not what I wanted” (Interviewee: CP, 2017: 11.49 in Hayward 2019).

Being in a landscape of marginalisation and diaspora, Chrissie was enthusiastic and excited about taking on this commission. She was noticed as an up and coming artist at New Designers, for the diversity of her characterisation, the very thing for which she was criticised by the company that commissioned the book. As part of her degree the students enter this competition. She conveys an inclusive ethos, as she talks about the figures (Figs. 6 & 7).

“Ok so these were taken from doodles that I did as part of my degree project. So, we had to take some concept doodles and we had to blow them up and print them for the final show for New Designers. ... And then they got spotted by somebody to be published ... they took my details; and they were the ones that commissioned me to do the children’s books. So, they are my favourite pictures ‘cause I actually got somewhere, just because it’s quite distinctive” (Interviewee: CP, 2017: 0.39 in Hayward).

The doodles are unique and unconventional; it is Chrissie’s conceptualisation of the human form. Her sketches on her website indicate this (Peters, Blog; Peters, Behance). She flouts tradition by transgressing the norms of a Western female child. Crossing those boundaries, figure 1 depicts a ‘quirky’, multicultural characterisation for an illustrated portrayal of a young child; however, as the commission progressed it became apparent that there was a huge disparity in the expectations of the client and that of Chrissie (Interviewee: CP, 2017: 9.31 in Hayward 2019). This is an example of art as a form of embodied struggles, resistance, and rebellion, leading Chrissie to say “no” to illustrating the book. Her approach was in the spirit of the cosmopolitan, where negotiation, compromise and discussion was sought. However, after many conversations a young, white, blue-eyed girl in a skirt



was their expectation, too far removed from Chrissie's characterisation. She tried to find common ground, but ethically, she could not concede on her visualisation of a multicultural depiction. She understood the implications of not complying, especially as that power-knowledge was for the reproduction of colonial histories. The pedagogies were to oppress people of colour in an absence from view. The book was to be used in schools to teach philosophy, or, as Chrissie surmised, it was more likely to be for the teaching of RE. Illustrating a multicultural story with a white normative visual representation and discourses, is a narrative that perpetuates a Eurocentric, imperialistic reproduction of power-knowledges that positions some as marginalised and oppressed. Chrissie explains the challenges of the process:

“the more in-depth it gets the worse it gets. It's quite a problem, and there were some other issues. It was meant to be quite a of sort of multicultural, the characters in it are supposed to be quite multicultural, and they asked for something, quite quirky people, multicultural, quirky. Err quite generic in colour, but very Afro-Caribbean (Fig. 1), (Interviewee: CP, 2017: 9.13 in Hayward 2019).

She pictures the main protagonist as a spritely, almost a fantasy depiction that is not positioned in a racial, or even gendered stereotype figure 1; Chrissie's character complicates and problematises normative gendered, racial presentations. Here the socially constructed gendered and racial identities, that codes the feminine and racial norms, are subverted, as Chrissie plays with these social codings through dress, gestures, hair and colour rendering. Chrissie continues to explain what happened when she submitted the manuscript:

“and then it just came back several times, because they didn't want someone quirky and multicultural, as it turned out. ... they know what they don't want, but they don't know how to say it. So, what they actually wanted was a white girl with blonde hair, quite petite in Doc Martins or converse boots and a green dress (Fig. 4). ... It's not what I wanted” (Interviewee: CP, 2017: 11.49 in Hayward 2019).

## Repeated conversations of significance

This is a narrative that Chrissie repeats, five years later when we were in the process of making, *Travelling in a Cosmopolitan Milieu*, (2021) (Fig. 2.). When I was in the process of creating this artwork, I needed to speak to a tutor in the studio and there I saw Chrissie. As we got chatting, I showed them both the work on my phone, we all conversed about how to proceed with the making. I had got to the point of placing the acetate over the prints, (Journal entry, fig 5) Poignantly, Chrissie reiterated the story, where she terminated the commission and before she finished, the tutor said, “you didn't do it did you”? Questioning whether Chrissie took on the commission, and Chrissie said, “No of course I didn't”. Griselda Pollock (2013) in “Writing from the heart” made the same point. Art matters and it cannot be compromised. She stated that, “art can, [and] must matter, and art that matters is often about doing what is most serious in women's lives”. Accordingly, I felt a certain responsibility to weave Chrissie's art, what seriously mattered to her, into a story. Her resistance to ideological norms came at a cost, both financially and the chance to promote her practice.

She transgresses the discourse, to decolonialise the pedagogical narrative by confronting and challenging her employer, the supplier of literary sources that centres a colonial reproduction of knowledge. Chrissie sees this in the same way as de Lissovoy, (2010, p.284); it is “[t]his systematic blindness to the actual violence of conquest, and to the fact of philosophy's historical complicity in the projects of material, epistemological, and spiritual subjugation”. Chrissie attempts to disrupt the dominant discourses to visualise that the marginalised can be seen in books. She has the integrity to not only resist the dominant discourse, as othered in this relationship, but also she defies the hegemonic norms to take up a cosmopolitan stance and the ‘ethics of the global’ (de Lissovoy, 2010, p.284). Thus, this article goes some small way to make up for that loss and Chrissie's desire to metaphorically touch, see and hear the voice of the stranger in her children's story book. Although this is not a position made consciously available to her, she positions the child as the cosmopolitan, moving easily in strange lands.

## Travelling in a Cosmopolitan Milieu

Chrissie's conceptualisation of the character in her book, as a cosmopolitan, is, partly autobiographical. She identifies as a, "traveller, traveller kid, showman kid; so I didn't really settle in at school, as I was travelling around, in and out of different schools (Interviewee: CP, 2017: 1.59 in Hayward 2019). Therefore, I was keen to weave the narratives of her experiences of a cosmopolitan child into an artwork and spoke to her to see if she would like to meet for coffee and discuss a collaboration. I suggested making some form of tapestry which critiqued the norms of traditional samplers. Once made by girls and women to showcase their skills as seamstresses: the sampler is an embodiment of a system designed to relegate women to controlled domesticity. Yet as Parker observes, the medium is more than "an instrument of opposition ... it is an important source of creative satisfaction" (Parker, 1981, p. xii). We felt that this medium remembers the genealogy of all those hidden women, artists as educators, craftswomen and knowledge producers. Layered with collage prints and sketches, we explored the historicised positions of our gendered, working-class narratives, over lapping with a cosmopolitan psyche. I had been waiting for the opportunity to tell Chrissie's story that weaves the personal with the global.

I stopped by the classroom where she teaches to discuss the words that I wanted to stitch, after a few suggestions we decided upon: cosmopolitan and de-colonisation, and then creative and noticing; I stitched them in the aida. Being influenced by the exhibition that I had recently attended, *We Are Art*, at Somerset House, I resisted the reserved colour palette and limited tones that were my norm (Figs. 8 & 9). Instead we ventured into the cultural differences of a cosmopolitan approach. Chrissie thought "the colours went well with the concept of a multicultural figure". I said that I wanted to integrate her drawings into the tapestry by stitching into the paper. A couple of weeks later I dropped by the teaching technicians' space to discuss ideas about collaging, as I felt the tapestry was too plain and she agreed. I took with me a book of prints from the V&A and we had a conversation about collaging using a messy, torn mixture of prints under the image of the figure. Chrissie suggested that I put her image on acetate to get a layered approach and then the viewer can see the prints under the semi-transparency of her figure. However, as I experimented with the tearing of the images the violence of this technique was not sitting well with me and I decided to abandon this and try a different method. I photocopied another set of prints and carefully cut them up and displayed them on the canvas, putting the acetate on the top and stitching into another layer of plastic. Chrissie said that this was the right decision; "the piece is not about tearing apart, but togetherness."

## Reflections

Once positioned in a landscape of language and culture that is marginalising, dis-abling, gendered, the possibilities of a future full of creativity is imagined by us in the co-constructed narrative we made. The shaping of our subjectivities as the artist, feminist and cosmopolitan is embodied in the canvas; creativity is materialised in the text(ile), an expression of creative transformation. This paper explored an intercultural exchange of two working class women and their meaning making that in the words of Appiah (2006, p. xxi), "conversations across boundaries can be delightful, or just vexing: what they are is inevitable". Our depiction of these conversations is embodied in the experiences of a liberated body, open to other truths and positioned as a text that may be read in plurality, multiplicity and playfulness (Cixous, 1993; Blythe and Sellers, 2004, p.15). Our art embodies difference-othering, an ethical production of a subjectivity that is embedded in an ethos of a democratic sharing of the space and the ideologies of the cosmopolitan. Pollock says "our sense of ourselves comes from the ways that our bodies are animated by the presence of other people's. Sometimes this involves intimate, welcome and unwelcome, both with those with whom we live and work and with strangers" (p. 4)

This was the essence found in Chrissie's conceptualisation of such a book, the reading of which makes for an aesthetic of pedagogic possibilities. In the creative process she writes-illustrates her body, facilitating a turn from epistemological norms. She challenged her own truths of being, engrained taken-for-granted truths to then accord "an ontological switch" (Stacey and Wolff, 2013, p. 4). A different way of thinking affects the facilitation of a space to explore exciting possibilities, where we are able "To test the ethics of borrowing from histories that are not our own" (Stacey and Wolff, 2013, p. 4). In doing so, we reflected on the lines between appropriation and appreciation and

problematised our white position of privilege. However, by connecting to past knowledges that are yet to be heard, we felt we could intergrate the ‘cosmopolitan ideal of being open to others’ (Stacey and Wolff, 2013, p. 9). Although I felt a certain apprehension, there was an overwhelming need to tell her story; it is as Appiah said, I affected Chrissie and she certainly affected me, accordingly we have a shared responsibility to each other, our localities and worldwide communities.



**Figure 1:** Chrissie Peters, (2015). Multicultural illustrated character for children’s book, sketch 1, sketchbook.



**Figure 2:** Beverley Hayward and Chrissie Peters, *Travelling in a Cosmopolitan Milieu*, (2022), embroidered collage with paper and acetate. (photographed by Rob Roach)



**Figure 3:** Chrissie Peters, (2015). Amended multicultural illustrated, character for children’s book sketch 2.



**Figure 4:** Chrissie Peters, 2015. Amended multicultural illustrated character for children’s book, final sketch 3.





Figure 5: Beverley Hayward, (2021-22) Journal Pages: conceptualisation of ideas and preparation.



Figures 6 and 7: Chrissie Peters, (2015). Multicultural characters for New Designers.



**Figure 8:** Beverley Hayward, Sewing Sampler: Home Is Where the Art Is, 2014, tapestry, private collection (photographed by Rob Roach).



**Figure 9:** Beverley Hayward, Mocking the Master Narrative: The Masquerade, 2015-19, tapestry and mixed media, 30 x 40 cm, private collection. (photographed by Rob Roach)

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## About the Author

**Dr. Bev Hayward** is an Associate Lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London, within the Psychosocial Department. She teaches on the master's programme in Education, Power and Social Change. Having a learning disability, she was often marginalised in the UK educational system; accordingly, by exposing this vulnerability she hopes to foster a transformative and democratic pedagogical student experience. During her Ph.D. in Education, Transformation and Lifelong Learning, Dr. Hayward presented her research at SCRUTREA and was awarded the Tilda Gaskell prize for the best student paper and prior to that she won the Laurel Brake award for her master's dissertation. She is a poet, writer and embroider and is interested in the artist as educator. This is drawn upon in the recent exhibition she curated, entitled, *Unruly Women*, which took place at the Nucleus, Halpern Gallery in Kent, May 2022 and her latest publication, a chapter in *Feminism, Adult Education and Creative Possibility*.

### Address

**Dr. Beverley Hayward;**  
Birkbeck College, University of London, England.

**e-Mail:** [b.hayward@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:b.hayward@bbk.ac.uk)