

Research report

About field notes and art: Santa Claus' suicideCarlos Estellita-Lins, Arlinda B. Moreno, Veronica
Miranda, Hélio da Rocha Neto

Abstract. *Visual anthropology and visual studies became sensitive to recent developments in contemporary art. Springing from ethnographic tradition, health qualitative research (suicidology focused) shows growing interest on image production. Research problems have been aroused on these overlapping frontiers. This paper describes an unintended experiment performed collectively - the construction of a strange Christmas tree inside the office during fieldwork research at an emergency facility, motivated by Christmas time. This tree sprouted spontaneously from team immersion in stressful fieldwork. The entire décor reminded the gap between Christmas symbols and suicidal behavior - simultaneously putting them together. The bizarre iconographic object (including a hanging Santa Claus) produced amazement and turmoil among research team and colleagues who shared the working environment. The suicide Christmas-tree allowed focus on the "transformation" of field notes into rituals and artwork. The circulation of iconographic references seemed more relevant than the image production itself. It materialized a theme for reflection, discussion and shared construction of preventive practices in suicidology that might challenge the relationship between art and psychiatry.*

Keywords: Mental health, suicide, Christmas, iconoclasm, art, creativity, suicidology, image wars.

**WCPRR September/December 2015: 298-310. © 2015 WACP
ISSN: 1932-6270**

INTRODUCTION Bronislaw Malinowski's seminal work showed how social sciences practice data collection according to systematic everyday ethnography. Social medicine and public health research try to emulate this standard in qualitative research. The importance of qualitative research in suicidology has been progressively acknowledged nowadays. It should be required among many preventive research efforts. There is strong evidence suggesting that affective disorders (depressive spectrum symptomatology) are closely associated to suicide attempts. Nevertheless epidemiological research design cannot deny anymore that suicide is an outcome intertwined with social, economic and cultural health determinants (Joe *et al*, 2008). Prolific suicidology researchers believe that qualitative approach is important in suicidology (Colucci & Lester, 2013; Hjelmeland, 2010; Hjelmeland & Knizek, 2010; Lester, 2010; Robinson *et al*, 2008). Qualitative research has been useful in suicide prevention. More recently, interest has shifted and spread in many directions from adolescents, survivors, suicide and imprisonment to special cultural groups in Uganda, Sri Lanka, India and China. Kirmayer (2007) believes that cultural competence is required for anyone working in suicide prevention actions, while Hjelmeland and Knizek (2010) stress that human beings and their cultural context should replace purely analytical focus on discrete elements. Ethnopsychiatry and transcultural psychiatry are emerging disciplines concerned with the gap that tears apart medicine and social anthropology.

It is remarkable that routine fieldwork can launch considerable stress and tension on everybody involved. Such "effect" is usually pervasive and barely recognized as such. There are some analogies with psychoanalytical process, which shall be considered and taken for granted (Devereux, 1979;

¹Correspondence to: Carlos Estellita-Lins, MD, PhD
Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ). Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

² MD, Fiocruz

³ PhD, Fiocruz

⁴ MsC, Fiocruz

mailto: cefestellita@gmail.com

Csordas, 2012). Insofar anxiety, fear and mourning are constitutive of psychic development, we might also cogitate that creative process goes along the same way (Estellita-Lins, 2005; Faria, 2003; Guyomard, 1998; Loparic, 1999; Winnicott, 1990). A common background for anguish and creativity has been postulated in many ways by continental philosophers such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Heidegger. The idea of chance, game and fun in social research is already present in the very beginnings of sociology and can be spotted in suicidology research strategies with young people (Colucci, 2007) and art discussion within the discipline (Bronisch & Spreti, 2009).

Some ethnography describes residual experiences that emerge during fieldwork remaining concealed into sparse notes, fieldwork diaries and sketches. Malinowski's diary (1967) in the strict sense of the term is a classic example not to mention many visual anthropology files that remain out of sight. An intricate process springs out of description protocols. It brings legitimacy to qualitative research. How should we manage these archives or concealed data? It is important to bring awareness to their particular status. This task relates to the scope of art. New trends in contemporary art allow the merge ritual and creative processes; immaterial art experiments like performance art, "happenings" and installations fused pervasively into rites and myths. A subtle shift in transcendence realms allows manifold attitudes concerning creative process itself (Baumgarten, 2011; Didi-Huberman, 2012; Latour, 2002; 2004; Souty, 2011). After painful and distressing experiences during fieldwork, the working-through is usually productive. It springs as an intricate creative process that selects, represses, destroys or censors ethnographic sets of images (icons). We suppose this drive is not usually materialized into creative work pieces but can show itself into careful hand notes and casual record keeping. Research and publication criteria should enlarge enough to encompass these by-products.

According to Bruno Latour's reasoning on image-wars, we can accept that a production-destruction image regimen has become very common (Latour, 2001; 2004; 2008). Image fluxes became more important than image conservation (museums) or even destruction (iconoclasm). The problem with religious symbols has emerged strongly after 9/11. Latour's *iconoclasm* essay is very instructive concerning these image circulation problems from John of Damascus to the contemporary art scene (Latour, 2002). Science wars, image wars and religious wars defy the very idea of modernity.

A strange Christmas tree was involuntarily built inside the research lab, during fieldwork research on suicide in an emergency facility, motivated by the proximity of Christmas. This paper describes an unintended and spontaneous experiment performed collectively by some research group members – trying to discuss mismatches and roundabouts. Along with its potential role as a methodological teaser in qualitative research, we tried to unveil a strong reflection theme that struck the whole research team – iconographic violence.



Picture 1 Sketch drawn afterwards on field notebook (**Note 1**)

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Issues about the research from where the experiment sprouted

Research team

A small research group based at Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ) and funded by Research Support Foundation of Rio de Janeiro State (FAPERJ) was constituted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with the objective of studying suicidal experience through qualitative research. This group worked together for some time, including the period during which the present investigation occurred. The group members were medicine, epidemiology, psychology and social anthropology graduates. The participants' diversity demanded a training period focused on the methods and strategies of qualitative research. The team came from a multicultural background. Each member considered themselves respectful of other peoples' religions. It was compulsory to be aware about ethnocentrism and to be concerned with cultural differences among fieldwork natives (patients and hospital staff altogether). All participants were acquainted with ethical issues from social anthropology and other research with human beings – the institutional research ethics committee approved the project. Such background is relevant to understand our profound hesitation during the experience with “the ethnographic object conceived” (Day, 2002; Jacelon & Imperio, 2005).

Setting and population study

We undertook fieldwork at a psychiatric emergency facility for almost two years (2008-2010), in the Rio de Janeiro municipality, Brazil. The original research project aimed to improve understanding of how adult outpatients from both genders perceived suicide risk. The sampling process was a naturalistic recruiting strategy (ecological design within a large Emergency Room [ER] facility). We performed 27 focus groups with patients attending ER consultation and 12 in-depth interviews with psychiatrists, nurses and social workers. Indigenous communities or immigrants from abroad were not comprised in the group studied. Health literacy was very low and literacy itself incomplete therefore most people could only write their name and read just a sentence (Oliveira, 2011). Books were seldom read but the holy bible was mentioned as one of them. Almost everybody had a color plasma television set and watched open TV daily (average TV daily exposure in Brazil is about 4 hours). Religious beliefs ranged from Catholics and Evangelic-protestants up to African-American religions and ritual practices such as *Umbanda*, *Candomblé*, *Quimbanda* and hybrid *Kardecism* (Bteshe *et al*, 2010; Csordas, 1987). We also recognized a very expressively represented neo-Pentecostal group, a fact that is coherent with recent Brazilian census data. Some preliminary results suggested manifold therapeutic pathways and inconstant or variegated religious pertaining with considerable circulation in-between (Bteshe, 2013). Suicide attempts were strongly prevalent within lifelong trajectories. Belonging to any religion corresponded to stronger social networks and better support in crisis.

Strategies and instruments

We worked on semi-structured interviews, focus groups and ethnographic experience, collecting data according to a triangulation strategy (Estellita-Lins, 2012a). Participant observation schedules were scattered along many sub-units or different facilities within the hospital. Every group member was also continuously collecting data along field exposure. Besides strict research design, everybody produced field notes and an ethnographic diary. As an additional task, we took pictures and shot videos during the vast majority of meetings and research activities. Field immersion comprised the entire experience.

Follow-up of data collecting

Weekly discussions about these data were held on regular basis. The approach of image production out the field was careful but sometimes copious and considered exaggerated. The immersion in fieldwork routine brought tension, concern and stress. Some people felt distressed and sometimes experienced frustration or loneliness. Death, violence and social exclusion are difficult to endure, but they are nevertheless very frequent in such a poor community. Therefore, these questions had to be dealt circumstantially during group meetings.

Ethical considerations

When considering mental health issues things turn on much more reserved, therefore the vast majority of recorded files were kept out of any publication scope. Suicidology brings some extra image interdicts, which had to be carefully considered. There are always decisions involved when registering and cataloging images that belong to research ethics and human dignity.

The experiment: X-tree experience

Some special material was produced during Christmas time (2008-2009). At that moment, it was certainly useless and purposeless. It sprung from nowhere during a work break. It happened to be a very spontaneous collective production that never intended to be shown to anyone but our small group. A medium sized cheap and easy Christmas tree was picked-up and fixed by some group members. It was not a daunting task. The tree had a plastic foot as a support device. We probably bought the tree in a 99 cents store. It looked as a very artificial greenish device with no blinking lights on. We figured it as an involuntary group response to a very well-known tradition. Brazilian offices usually have a Christmas tree inside, just as one could expect to find at home. Urban sociologists that studied the public sphere in Latin America and Brazil have observed a characteristic merge involving the private and public sphere interests in the country. More often we found it confusing and disturbing. All participants were definitely aware of such drawback (DaMatta, 1997). The reception desk in emergency facilities tends to show how disorganized has the public sphere been built among us – personal, “sympathetic”, avoiding rules or protocols (Estellita-Lins, 2012b). We shall make it clear that no group member had ever done it before and the Santa Claus devices were considered an out fashioned mistake or a gag. Our Portuguese post-colonial tradition, just like the entire catholic Europe, favored the nativity scene instead of Santa Claus. Anyhow, the tree apparatus took its place along post-war years as a widespread Christmas icon.

Picture 2 The factory. Elements assembled for the original Christmas Tree (2008-09)





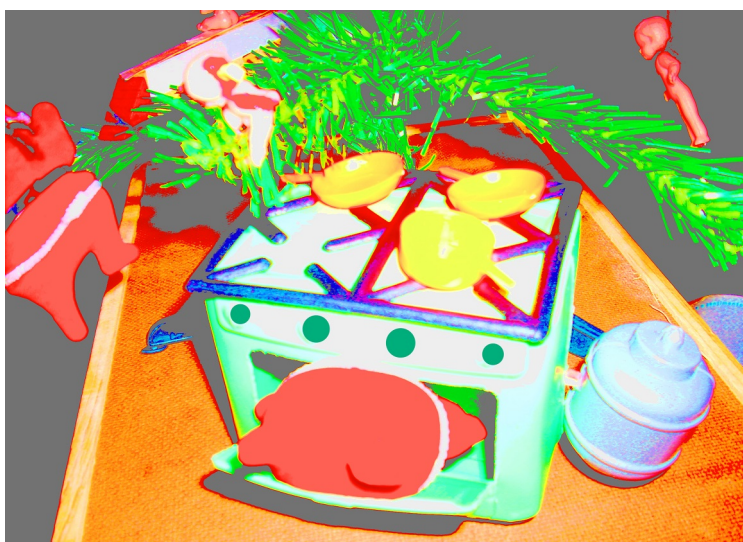
Picture 3 Jumping, poisoning, hanging. Image from the original Christmas Tree (2008-09)

Our research team called it “the suicide tree”. It came up as a wholesome weird and very kitsch object. Along the whole week, it was planned, fixed, disposed and carefully decorated - the décor became a very important task. Such purposeless work enhanced a subtle kind of frenzy among everybody. Not any shiny balls but many baby-angels hanging, not even a *presepio* (nativity scene or manger scene) at the bottom but three fat and awkward Santa Claus performing nasty suicide scenes along with some *putinhos* (angel babies). On the top of the tree, where the Christmas star should be, we assembled a tiny small bridge wherefrom a little angel doll was jumping. A larger Santa Claus stood with his head stuck inside the oven. Displayed on the tree basis could be seen a large array of means of self-extermination (according to forensic literature) disposed in allegorical fashion. Little toys made of wooden blocks; fancy parcels and medicines with poison labels on were displayed at the bottom; plastic toy figures stood there immolated, shot, poisoned. A series of Christmas monotonous personae were

soon hanging on the branches: strange fruits evoking the famous blues. As soon as the tree was finished, we become proud of it. It was

immediately considered of utmost bad taste and almost regretful. Nevertheless, we recognized the very powerful drive that oriented its collective assembling and mounting. This creative process was definitely achieved in a very committed mood (Bostock, 2002; Gumbrecht, 2010).

We started to face it as an eruption of something that reflected the heaviest times of field ethnography although shy and very subtle at the beginning. The group accepted it as an experiment that was certainly controversial. Concern and protest were available just like what might have happened with a tag or graffiti on a forbidden wall; a leak in the happy *pax romana* of research facilities in Christmas days. The result was never planned or foreseen. Until the assembling stopped we could not estimate



Picture 4 Tree bottom showing the oven scene with poisonous parcels. New picture of the original object

what was going on neither how it would take part among the other research efforts. A feeling of achievement came about. For some time it was assumed as a task and fulfilled in detail. Some cathartic effects could be assumed and they were really recognized. The regular fieldwork discussion brought it up through consensus. The hypothesis of a “mourning tree” was also considered. How to deal with suicide themes along Christmas time was a challenging question. We interviewed many subjects that told us about despair and loneliness during this particular holiday period, namely a

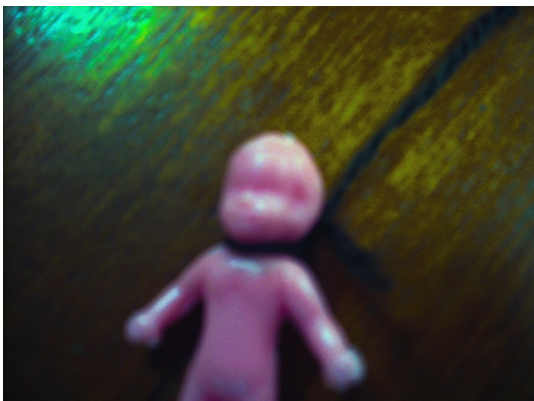
worldwide celebration of birth and renewal. The hidden motivation in the working group towards Christmas themes could be highlighted if we listened to clinical and epidemiological data.

Picture 5 Task-force working each day with diligence and care



RESULTS: WHAT HAPPENED THEN? Our research unit is placed about 10 miles away from the hospital. The team was visiting regularly that research field. Interview and focus groups agenda were very intense at that time. Undoubtedly, the Christmas tree begun without any particular meaning or purpose, just as a pause before reports, interviews, meetings. Its assemblage boosted us as if it were a game. Later on, we learned to re-evaluate the gesture beyond the ritual. This latency is probably the main reason for its scarce traces and remains – just a few “slightly out-of-focus” photographs and some field-note sketches.

The “performative patchwork object” had progressively awakened interest inside the public health department and research facilities. During late December we got acquainted with “casual visitors” strolling around the lab. Nobody inside our facility belonged to any hospital or was in touch with either emergency staff or subjects under suicide risk. People gathered around the tree were not patients, neither staff included in the qualitative study. Reactions were heterogeneous and manifold, usually ranging from curiosity to some kind of malaise. The suicide tree crystallized a bizarre initiative that seemed to demand at least a short peep (with or without an acid comment). Also remarkable, were claims such as – “you guys study suicide and become kind of morbid people...” It was not uncommon to hear that we were dealing with heavy business, either inside the Lab or “outside the field”. Our colleagues into epidemiological or communication sociology research who worked roundabout were uneasy. Some scholars looked grim for our involuntary performance; it was difficult to figure out whether they envied the trick or just regretted such bad taste. The ambiguity of the ritual became clear: who could tell if it was a Christian tree or an evil one (suicide being an alibi in this case). Some Afro-American rituals resemble closely voodoo in Brazil. Sacrificial offerings are popular in larger coastal cities. They are surreptitiously performed in the streets after dawn and called *macumba* or *despacho*. The commercial habit of Christmas trees unfolds a ritual that might have been concealed. Through an iconoclastic gesture, the group gathered around an ironical “art” object, which could be considered ritualistic in many ways.



Picture 6 Putinho hung with Santa Claus



Picture 7 Young people on their way to the abyss

A precious field note written by a young research team member reads: “I wasn’t there when our tree was first seen, not even when gossip burst after other senior researchers could see it. However, I heard that it was a great shock for everybody. I even heard about a horrified lady who said that we were going too far. When I heard about it, I was very glad that the girls had forbidden me of hanging some Santa Claus puppets in the halls and passageways. It would have been seen by much more people in research teams and could certainly bring some institutional embarrassment. I still think that the roof’s framework was quite tempting for someone suicidal and was a hint to study architecture and health prevention.”

Considering visual anthropology standards, everything that was undesired was just happening there – enhancing curiosity, cheap publicity, risking disdain for the cause. It might have ruined our efforts and reputation. Such strong commitment to field work was considered unusual and maybe suspicious. The group was eager to dismantle the tree on January 6th, the proper date to do it, following *Reis Magos* tradition (biblical Magi or three wise men). The hypothesis originally investigated assumed that suicidal experience was silent. Enhancing communication was considered absolutely necessary - but certainly, there was too much noise. Although we felt unable to give up the on-going experiment, we were obliged to minimize the scandal for the audience. We could figure that it was not “too much ado about nothing”. Although some of us were art enthusiasts, contemporary art devotees or museum performance lovers (Marina Abramovic’s fans), nonetheless we regretted profoundly the tree and started to evaluate its repercussion onto ourselves and others. Any performance became undesirable at that very moment.

Picture 8 Voodoo simulacra and suicide means



Picture 9 Poisonous gifts are suicide means



Picture 10 Santa and the oven. Reconstruction of the original scene

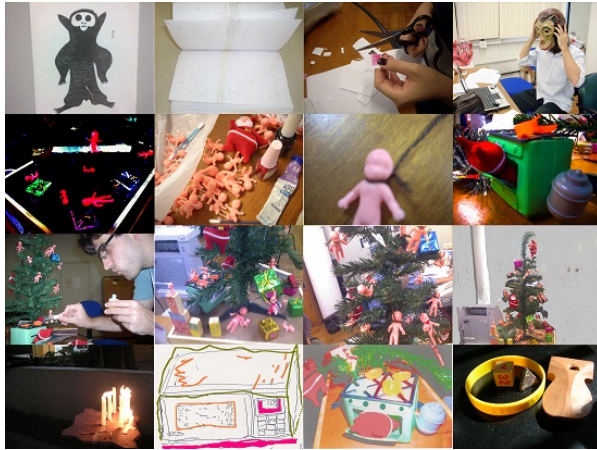


Meanwhile something unexpected did happen. A young person left a note after visiting our tree. It was a very simple gesture. He produced a message on a yellow sticker maybe in the fashion of any suicide prevention slogan. Soon others followed him. By the sixth day of Christmas the basis of our bizarre intervention-tree was covered with yellow stickers, heart-shaped small sheets of paper and shiny-tiny little notes (**Note 2**). The effect was surprising for the entire group of tree builders. Who could tell it was not Santa Claus usual series of letters demanding gifts and maybe grace?



Picture 11 “That very kitsch tree” and one of the messages. Original photo

In Brazil, neither children from upper class nor from lower have any tradition of socks or shoes, but simply write a letter to the old man. On the other hand, there are well-disseminated Christian traditions involving communication with transcendent world through messages (left somewhere in a church). Jewish people also endeavor written messages. Both religions along with Islam are very fond of their Sacred Book (reading and writing is closely tied to religious experience). Nevertheless, *spiritualism-kardecism* in particular, which has become progressively important in Brazilian society (springing



Picture 12 The whole and part of it

also looked like Santa Claus post-office in Finland, stuffed with child letters asking for no more suicides. It was astonishing because some of us were interested in suicide notes although our research was not supposed to deal with this subject. This very particular “literary gender” could be placed on a boundary created by suicidal intent itself (strong ambivalence) – a thin line between living people and the dead. Suicide notes are so genuine because they are performative in Austin’s sense: messages coming from someone who crossed that border. The gesture or act matches the proposition. The enunciation depends closely on performativity. We could not avoid a chill when reading our suicide Santa Claus messages. They were spontaneous. They echoed qualitative results. They sounded ambiguously as advice, as a will or just farewell. Probably that funny *qui pro quo* could only take place among our own concerns and was reflexively exposed by means of the X-mas tree experiment.

DISCUSSION The history of ethnography unveils many trends and approaches. We tried to overcome a dualism between integrative ethnography and narrative ethnography within qualitative health research (Dodier & Baszanger, 1997). Our description emphasizes attitudes related to fieldwork depicting field notebook metamorphosis in a shamanistic way. We mean specially its transformation into an object which mimics on-going common rituals. This approach joins “multi-integrative ethnography” endeavors (Weber, 2001). The whole activity seemed purposeless or fun oriented. Some moves were involuntary or ‘automatic’ while others might be considered unconsciously motivated. This ambivalent intentional shift might be taken in psychoanalytical sense (divided or subjectivity unconscious motives), not to mention Pia Arke’s ethno-aesthetics drive (Arke, 2010) or other cross-fertilizations between art and ethnography that discuss agency. The involuntary utilization of some image sets (and imagery intersections) made possible *pathic* fluxes of ritualistic interventions (Didi-Huberman, 2001). Some of us took pictures but we scarcely faced it effectively as a document or an art-experiment. The aesthetic process was most ambiguous, but certainly granted in a positive way. Retrospectively we could assign a very important place for art in this pervasive attempt to reconfigure field notes. Description and re-inscription might allow us to take the tree-experiment as a particular kind of field note.

The effort to understand the phenomenological dimension of reflexivity was paramount and must be clearly admissible. The feedback effect aroused by pure chance was probably desirable. It is not the point to decide whether the performance was rite, fake ritual, artwork itself or just an acting-out that generated some visual and written recordings. This discussion touches the immaterial face of art production, either as conceptual art or as performance. Further investigation exploring this hypothesis is advisable.

The concern with Catholic community and the possibility of sounding as some kind of unintended offense or research misbehavior was authentic. The team had to handle it carefully. This apprehension suggests that Claude Lévi-Strauss’ text on Santa Claus was out of mind, particularly considering that

he focused on myth and ritual transformations (Lévi-Strauss, 1952, 2008; Perez, 2009). This may seem quite strange because *Le Supplice du Père Noël* is exactly about a sacrifice that Catholics from Dijon made, “executing” Santa Claus during Christmas in the early fifties. Actually, the French article from *Temps Modernes* was unknown to us. The great anthropologist’s paper was translated and published in Portuguese just in time for becoming a Christmas gift, therefore contemporary to our Father Christmas’ sacrifice. It must have been very influential but nobody could recover any link between the Christmas tree and the text or remember mentioning the article at that time. We found it very welcoming and encouraging afterwards. At that very moment, it would be easier to recall images of the Buddhas of Bamiyan as an iconoclastic gesture of religious intolerance.

As the tree became an experiment, it naturally raised the question of being re-submitted to the committee that previously examined our protocol and informed consent sheets. Our field experience suggests that researchers produce large amounts of records that belong to ethnographic diaries, which remain in privacy. Pictures, images, jokes, performances and art can help to bring them out of a shadowy zone towards the kind of visibility that these records deserve. This question is legitimate whenever it succeeds to capture (or helps to produce) a careful description which might sound transgressive. Field experience in qualitative research should remain uncensored whenever we can stand for it. Such rich experience is always productive even when it looks exorbitant or fits no report. It was relevant to follow interpretative hints, which branched into phenomenological, psychoanalytical and aesthetic hypothesis. Should we consider that tree as an awkward field note in itself? On the other hand, should we understand that its spontaneous provocative act was by itself another piece of research? To what degree did we forget about the original narrative concerning Santa’s execution? After all, we mocked at Santa Claus and he took his revenge leaving us some ambiguous gifts in response. Somehow Santa Claus became a religious icon once again and promoted a communicative circuit with different sorts of messages.

The fake tree worked as a fortunate pun that produced malaise. The factitious object sprung as a rite and ritualistically conveyed notes that looked like presents. The “miracle” of small notes displayed under the tree allowed perspective changes. It made possible our subtle move from adults to children or from living to dead according to Lévi-Strauss discussion. Receiving unexpected gifts, as children did, we were able to know better the people who committed suicide (to get in touch with them) exactly because we could occupy their structural position. Suicide brings about the matter of perspective exchange in the same way as anthropologists postulate shamanistic perspectivism in Amerindian thought (Viveiros de Castro, 2004). Reading those notes (not anymore as researchers), we could only read preventive ideas, suicide notes, and exhortation to the living: words from deceased people negotiating personae, social roles, perspectives. When looking backwards we recognized a deep necessity of mediation concerning “natives” which was experimented otherwise neither in fieldwork nor in the office. The construction of the suicide tree led to a rite embedded on Christmas rituals. There was a strange suicide ritual concealed within a catholic ritual. The whole move has to do with reflexivity, which could calm down the dead and bring us back to our research roles. Involuntarily re-creating a rite within a ritual became possible only by means of creating a series of objects in an art-like “arty” way. We shifted from a kitsch draft into a symbolic structure.

The suicide tree was far from a preventive advertisement or campaign motto. We crossed a line there, and exactly because of that, we could feel embarrassed or even guilty. However, it became part of the efforts to thrive. The quality of mental health care in our health system is poor. Weekly dealing with people under intense suffering was tough. The subjects would scarcely talk to anyone about suicidal experiences but took their chance when intimately exposed during interviews. Researchers and subjects felt mutually implicated. Suicide remains a forbidden subject in these communities.

Later we became aware about some other motives hidden backstage. Government data suggests very low literacy level in the community while open TV and cell phones are widespread (cable TV is expensive). Notorious lack of mental health information or any suicide prevention initiatives in Brazil is deceiving. Health campaigns are a profitable business almost exclusive to marketing professionals. Scholars seem withheld from the preventive task. After some efforts during SUPRE-MISS turn in Brazil we worried about suicide prevention strategies (WHO, 2008). Although large propaganda efforts were boasted in media, they failed beforehand (circa 2007). Some relevant social actors became

pessimistic and reticent. Our own difficulty to promote a small part of these agendas during Christmas times may have upset us. Everybody knows Christmas time is a business-oriented, commercial and exuberant advertising period. Things might have suddenly looked very unfair. We could not spot any mass communication effort concerning suicide prevention although the Ministry of Health has had a very expensive marketing agenda in recent years (1990-2010). Probably the group felt a gross contrast between preventive rationale and exuberant media resources, namely during Christmas. This context is relevant to figure why we “tortured” Santa Claus in the same fashion that religious intolerants promoted the “iconoclasm” that Lévi-Strauss discussed (which seems a typical iconoclasm move as Bruno Latour posed). Religious issues are important. Both researchers and patients are affected in many ways. We suppose that form became more relevant than content at that moment.

Even though the suicide theme remains a problem in some societies, talking about suicide is talking about life facts that should be faced by anyone. We assumed that speaking about it, in any way we could was a hit against the greatest barrier for those patients to achieve some kind of relief or engage in treatment. The latent dimension of violence that pervades our image-saturated world deserves more research efforts. Understanding and counterbalancing its effects might be relevant in preventive health policies. Working together with social anthropologists is therefore very important (besides re-evaluating domains such as medical anthropology, transcultural psychiatry, ethno-psychiatry, ethno-psychoanalysis, etc.). Once our “arty artifact” was produced, it brought to light violent images that we avoided but unconsciously enacted. Researchers should be aware of strong but pervasive links between suicide research and violence issues.



Picture 13 Suicide Tree during Christmas 2008-2009.

The work with hanging Father Christmas remained “private” until we drafted this article. It gave us some special feedback, which could not be replaced by any regular data collection procedure. The experience made its way towards a real ethnographic incursion in the world of emergency visitors living suicide experiences. More conventional writings and reports were written and do relate to this work in many ways (Bteshe, 2010; Estellita-Lins, 2012a). Those research efforts seem relevant but remain difficult to enlighten or even to be perceived by people involved. The set of working place-lab images that surrounded the group corresponded to our shared imaginary that merged with field data in many different fashions (**Note 3**). We hope our outburst will be accepted as some residual testimony remnant of theoretical reflection and discussion (**Note 4**).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS Ilma Noronha for warm welcome in the Institute; Mariana Bteshe for help during data collection.

NOTES

1. The original article authors are exclusive owners of copyright of all pictures apart from **Picture 1**.
2. On the small heart shaped notes we could read: “I am dead now”; “Yes, you can be happy”; “Prevention is possible”; “Sorrow infinite sorrow”; “We support suicide prevention research!”; “Love for the ones that are gone...”; “Merry Christmas dude!”, etc.

3. Another visual ethnographic research began later on but few from the original group took part on it. Its subject was a XIX century folklore tradition named *Folia dos Santos Reis* (Mage Kings Party or Folly). The original Portuguese celebration was called *Reizado* and is quite different from Spanish commemorations around the *Roscón de Reyes*. There are no gifts or trees involved. This traditional Christmas celebration covers the same period of our tree and is strictly related to Mage Kings and manger scene. The ritual is based on home visits to sing special songs facing the *presepio* and finally a generous huge meal offered by mage kings to the whole community at January 6th, St Nicholas day. Songs, prayers and holy meals are organized and performed by different groups within the community. There is rivalry concerning best performance. Some of them are more than 90 years old, comprising three generations of the same family. It can be considered an after effect.
4. The terrorist attack on Charlie-Hebdo happened just a few weeks after the editors accepted this paper for publication. This event left many people in deep perplexity. It has to do with the so called “image wars”.

REFERENCES

- Arke P. *Ethno-aesthetics/Etnoestetik*. Copenhagen, (Denmark), Kunsttidsskriftet ARK, 2010
- Baumgarten J. *Sacrifício, mártir e imagem*. In: Campos M, Berbara M, Conduru R, Siqueira VB (Eds). *História da arte: ensaios contemporâneos*. Rio de Janeiro, EdUERJ, 2011, pp 97-111
- Bostock WW. Collective mental state and individual agency: qualitative factors in social science explanation. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3: Art.1, 2002
- Bronisch T & von Sprei F. *The role of paintings in suicide treatment and prevention*. In: Wasserman D, Wasserman C (Eds). *Suicidology and suicide prevention. A global perspective*. Oxford/ New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp 445-453
- Bteshe M. *Experiência, narrativa e práticas infocomunicacionais: sobre o cuidado no comportamento suicida* [Dissertation thesis]. Rio de Janeiro, FIOCRUZ, 2013
- Bteshe M, Oliveira VM, Clébicar T, Estellita-Lins C, Salles I. Suicídio na literatura religiosa: o kardecismo como fonte bibliográfica privilegiada. *Revista Eletrônica de Comunicação Informação & Inovação em Saúde*, 4: 37-50, 2010
- Colucci E. “Focus groups can be fun”: the use of activity-oriented questions in focus group discussions. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17: 1422-1433, 2007
- Colucci E & Lester D. *Suicide and culture: understanding the context*. Cambridge/Göttingen. Hogrefe Publishing, 2013
- Csordas TJ. Health and the holy in African and Afro-American spirit possession. *Social Science & Medicine*, 24: 1-11, 1987
- Csordas TJ. Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology. *Ethos*, 40: 54-74, 2012
- DaMatta R. *Carnavais, malandros e heróis: para uma sociologia do dilema brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro, Rocco, 1997
- Day E. Me, Myself and I: Personal and professional re-constructions in ethnographic research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3: Art.11, 2002
- Devereux G. *Psychoanalysis as Anthropological Field Work: Data and Theoretical Implications*. In: Devereux G (Ed). *Basic Problems of Ethnopsychiatry*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp 305-320
- Didi-Huberman G. Dialektik des Monstrums: Aby Warburg and the symptom paradigm. *Art History*, 24: 621-645, 2001
- Didi-Huberman G. *Imagens apesar de tudo*. Lisboa, KKYM, 2012
- Dodier N & Baszanger I. Totalisation et altérité dans l'enquête ethnographique. *Revue française de sociologie*, 38: 37-66, 1997
- Estellita-Lins C. *Winnicott e Canguilhem*. In: Bezerra B & Ortega F (Eds). *Winnicott e seus interlocutores*. Rio de Janeiro, Relume Dumará, 2005, pp 220-239
- Estellita-Lins C. *Trocando seis por meia dúzia. Suicídio como emergência do Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro, Mauad & Faperj, 2012a
- Estellita-Lins C. *A recepção da emergência médica como dispositivo info-comunicacional: semiologia de balcão*. In: Marteleto RM, Thiesen I, Fernandes GC, Saldanha GS. (Eds). *2ª jornada científica internacional redes e processos info-comunicacionais: mediações, memórias, apropriações*, Rio de Janeiro, FIOCRUZ, 2012b, pp 97-114
- Faria FDM. *O suicídio na obra de D.W. Winnicott: elementos para a formação de uma teoria Winnicottiana do suicídio* [PhD dissertation thesis]. São Paulo, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2003
- Gumbrecht HU. *Epifania/presentificação/Dêixis: futuros para as Humanidades e as Artes*. In: *Produção de presença: o que o sentido não consegue transmitir*, Rio de Janeiro, Contraponto & Ed. PUC-Rio, 2010, pp 119-164
- Guyomard P. *La jouissance du tragique: Antigone, Lacan, et le désir de l'analyste*. Paris, Flammarion, 1998

- Hjelmeland H. Cultural research in suicidology: challenges and opportunities. *Suicidology Online*, 1: 34-52, 2010
- Hjelmeland H & Knizek BL. Why we need qualitative research in suicidology. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 40: 74-80, 2010
- Jacelon CS & Imperio K. Participant diaries as a source of data in research with older adults. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15: 991-997, 2005
- Joe S, Canetto S, Romer D. Advancing prevention research on the role of culture in suicide prevention. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 38: 354-362, 2008
- Kirmayer LJ. *Cultural psychiatry in historical perspective*. In: Bhugra D, Bhui K (Ed). *Textbook of Cultural Psychiatry*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp 3-19
- Latour B. A sociology without objects? Remarks to inter-objectivity. *Berliner Journal Fur Soziologie*, 11: 237-48, 2001
- Latour B. *Iconoclash, Beyond the Image-Wars in Science, Religion and Art*. In: Weibel P & Latour B (Eds). *Iconoclash*. Cambridge/London, ZKM & MIT Press, 2002, pp 14-37
- Latour B. "Não congelará a imagem", ou: como não desentender o debate ciência-religião. *Mana*, 10: 349-375, 2004
- Latour B. O que é iconoclash? Ou, há um mundo além das guerras de imagem? *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 14: 111-150, 2008
- Lester D. Qualitative research in Suicidology: thoughts on Hjelmeland and Knizek's "why we need qualitative research in suicidology". *Suicidology Online*, 1: 76-78, 2010
- Lévi-Strauss C. Le Père Noël supplicié. *Les Temps Modernes*, 77: 1572-1590, 1952
- Lévi-Strauss C. *O pensamento selvagem*. Campinas, Papirus Editora, 2008
- Loparic Z. Heidegger and Winnicott. *Natureza Humana*, 1: 103-135, 1999
- Malinowski B. *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967
- Oliveira VM. *Competência em saúde mental (mental health literacy): do conceito às estratégias na questão do suicídio no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, FIOCRUZ, 2011
- Perez LF. Passos de um suplício, reinvenção do natal e educação dos sentimentos. *Teoria & Sociedade*, 17: 257-269, 2009
- Robinson J, Pirkis J, Kryszynska K, Niner S, Jorm AF, Dudley M, Schindeler E, De Leo D, Harrigan S. Research Priorities in suicide prevention in Australia. A comparison of current research efforts and stakeholder-identified priorities. *Crisis*, 29: 180-190, 2008
- Souty J. *Entre arte e ritual*. In: Campos M, Berbara M, Conduru R, Siqueira VB (Eds). *História da arte: ensaios contemporâneos*. Rio de Janeiro, EdUERJ, 2011, pp 112-124
- Viveiros de Castro E. Exchanging perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies. *Common Knowledge*, 10: 463-484, 2004
- Weber F. Settings, interactions and things A plea for multi-integrative ethnography. *Ethnography*, 2: 475-499, 2001
- WHO/World Health Organization. *Suicide prevention (SUPRE)*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2008
- Winnicott DW. *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. London, Karnak Books, 1990