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Sensory Data Stories: the role of sensory methods in addressing de-contextualisation in qualitative data reuse

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Despite potential gains, the sharing of qualitative data for reuse remains uncommon compared to sharing quantitative data (Alexander et al. 2020). Ethnographers in particular have understandably safeguarded their fieldwork material from what they see as intrusive and colonialist open sharing. Recognising that qualitative data sharing is ethically, legally, practically, politically and methodologically complex, I nonetheless situate myself with those who believe that ethically sound qualitative data sharing is desirable in some situations, and that we should venture into seeing what is possible (with care) (Mannheimer et al. 2018). The puzzle is how to respect participants, their work and field relations while sharing material that is meaningful to other researchers.

In this talk I will explore creative ways to address this, drawing from my research and collaborations as an ethnographer. I will first introduce others' experiments with creating ethnographic archives (Kraus and Eberhard 2022; Sisters of Hope artistic project), then share new formats that expand existing toolkits for addressing the "problem" of decontextualization of data. Currently data stories (or "context data") are used to help contextualise datasets (Gregory et al. 2023) and can take many forms, often a short text accompanying the README file or sometimes a visual diagram. In this talk I will consider how to use sensory and multimodal methods to expand this toolkit, in a way which still respects interlocuters' privacy but also thinks creatively with video, sound, photography, drawing and other methods to give datasets "texture". This talk and subsequent discussion should not only be of interest to ethnographers and qualitative researchers, but also other scientists exploring how to share datasets meaningfully with others.