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## Excruciating Elegance: Representing the Embodied Habitus of *Capoeira*

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Dr Sara Delamont, Cardiff University  
Dr Neil Stephens, Cardiff University

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### **Excruciating Elegance: Representing the Embodied Habitus of *Capoeira***

**Dr Sara Delamont, Cardiff University  
Dr Neil Stephens, Cardiff University  
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**Qualiti, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Cardiff, CF10 3WT  
+44(0) 29 2087 5345  
qualiti@cardiff.ac.uk  
www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/qualiti**



## **Author contact details**

**Dr Sara Delamont, BA, MA(Cantab), PhD (Edin), DSc Econ (Cardiff), AcSS**  
**Reader in Sociology**  
**Cardiff School of Social Sciences**  
**Cardiff University**  
**Glamorgan Building**  
**King Edward VII Avenue**  
**Cardiff**  
**Wales**  
**CF10 3WT**

**delamont@cardiff.ac.uk**

**Dr Neil Stephens, BScEcon, PhD (Wales)**  
**Researcher in the ESRC Centre for Economic & Social Aspects of**  
**Genomics (CESAGen)**  
**School of Social Sciences**  
**Cardiff University**  
**6 Museum Place**  
**Cardiff**  
**Wales**  
**CF10 3BG**

**StephensN@Cardiff.ac.uk**

“*Capoeira*’s elegance is excruciating, its seductive capacities never to be underestimated.”

**Browning, 1995:87**

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## **Introduction**

The ways in which ethnographic research is written, as fieldnotes, as analytic memos, and especially for publication, have been the subject of debate for twenty five years. The publication of Clifford and Marcus (1986) gave an impetus to the debate, as the subsequent growth of publications on it testifies. This working paper draws upon fieldwork conducted since 2003 on how the Brazilian dance and martial art *capoeira* is taught in the UK, a research project affiliated to Qualiti. Our title, taken from Sandra Browning’s (1995) study of samba and *capoeira*, is double-edged. “Excruciating elegance” is an excellent way to encapsulate many aspects of *capoeira*, but it also encapsulates our goal for successful academic writing: it should be elegant, and producing that elegance can be as excruciating as performing *capoeira* moves.

The paper is in four sections: first we explain enough about *capoeira* for the reader to make sense of the research. Then we outline the methods and the research setting. The third section uses the fieldnotes to illustrate ‘typical’ lessons. The crisis in representation is the focus of the fourth section. Using two facets of our writing about *capoeira* constructing titles and the use of poetic representation, we advance Cardiff’s contribution to the research on (re)presentation.

## ***Capoeira* Explained**

*Capoeira* is the Brazilian martial art that is simultaneously a fight, a dance and a game (Lewis, 1992; Downey, 2005; Assunção, 2005). Its origins lie in the culture of the African slaves taken to Brazil after 1500, and it was part of the culture of

the male African-Brazilian urban underclass by 1900. After a period of illegality and persecution (Holloway, 1989; Assunção, 2005), *capoeira* was legalised in the 1920s, and has spread across the world since the 1970s in what Assunção (2005) terms the *capoeira* diaspora. To play *capoeira* successfully, beautifully and pleurably, men and women who grew up in Europe or North America have to lose their *cintura dura*, literally 'hard waists.' Someone with a hard waist does not move their whole body as one unit, but has a rigid torso whatever their legs are doing. Hard waists impede non-Brazilians in soccer, on the dance floor, in carnival processions and in *capoeira* (Downey, 2005). Non-Brazilians enthusiastically learning *capoeira* in New Zealand and Finland, in Alaska and Southern California, in Vancouver and in Warsaw (Assunção, 2005) are not only being taught the specific moves and tactics of a martial art, but also learning to move their whole bodies like Brazilians, shedding their hard waists, and, at a more conceptual and interactive level of skill, acquiring the *jogo de cintura* or 'game of the waist.' This is partly a physical, bodily quality: the opposite of the *cintura dura*: but more importantly it is a metaphor encapsulating an attitude to everyday life: a way to face challenges with wit, cunning and mental agility.

A superficial exposure to *capoeira* can be misleading. It is always done to music, especially the music of the *berimbau*, an African instrument like a huge wooden bow strung with wire (Almeida, 1986; Capoeira, 1995 and 2002; Schreiner, 1993). Because of the music, the mixed classes, and the gaiety, it can look spontaneous and even undisciplined. A casual observer could be misled into thinking that *capoeira* bodies are not disciplined compared to those exponents of, for example, karate (Ashkenazi, 2002, Polly 2007) or other far eastern martial arts (Twigger, 1999, Holcombe, 2002; Donohue, 2002). A closer study, or participating in a programme of serious training, forces the realization that behind the fluent performance lie hours of drill and practice.

*Capoeira* in Brazil is not, of course, uniform. In a country of such vast size, racial diversity and inequalities of class and wealth, *capoeira* is taught and learnt in

different ways. White university students (*discipulos*) in Florianopolis, army recruits in Brasilia and African-Brazilian street children in Olinda all learn *capoeira* differently. Travassos (1999) contrasted the *capoeira* classes in Rio taken by middle-class *discipulos* and those led by African-Brazilian teachers or taken by poor, lower class students. She found that the middle-class *discipulos* were not required to adhere strictly to uniform rules, and learnt only *capoeira* without having it embedded in other African Brazilian cultural phenomena, such as *maculele* (1), *samba*, *bumba meu boi* (2) and the fisherman's dance *puxada de rede* (3).

*Capoeira* taught in the UK is, generally, closer to the *capoeira* Travassos found taught by African-Brazilians and learnt by poor, often African-Brazilian, students. The teachers we know require *discipulos* to buy, and wear, uniforms; and routinely expose students to *maculele*, *samba* and other African-Brazilian dance, while encouraging them to enjoy performing the fisherman's dance and the *bumba meu boi*. British students learn the martial art in a thorough-going Brazilian context, embedded in an historical narrative about the enslavement and then liberation of African slaves in Brazil. The award of nicknames, widespread in diasporic *capoeira*, is explained to students in the context of that historical narrative about the African-Brazilians' fight for the survival of their own culture: keeping *capoeira* alive when it was persecuted and outlawed. The nickname here is usually given to the student by the teacher around the same time as their "baptism" into a *capoeira* group or lineage at a ceremony called a *batizado*. The student plays a teacher, is knocked to the ground and given their first belt (*corda*). Subsequently if they train conscientiously, students can earn more advanced *cordas*. Getting the first belt, which is a symbolic baptism into a *capoeira* group, is intended to be motivating. Achilles reminisced:

It happened with me. When I received my first belt, I always wanted to come to class wearing it, and I wanted to show my belt to everybody. I felt more *capoeira*. I felt more *capoeira* when I received my belt because

that's really amazing. And after you get that belt you go home, and you want to sleep with your belt. Quite crazy – it definitely helps a lot to motivate students.

## Research Methods and Setting

The paper is based on four years of fieldwork by Stephens, a young man who is a *capoeirista* and Delamont, an old woman who conducts ethnographic observation in *capoeira* classes. The authors have 'real' *capoeira* names, but publish with and appear in this text with the pseudonymous nicknames of *Trovao* (Thunder) and *Bruxa* (Witch) (4). *Trovao* has learnt *capoeira* from a Brazilian teacher we call (pseudonymously) Achilles. *Bruxa* has watched several *capoeira* teachers, but has focused most consistently on Achilles teaching *Trovao* and his friends (5). *Capoeira* classes take place in 'Tolnbridge' two evenings a week from 7 or 8 until 9 or 10 for about 44 weeks each year. Achilles lives and works in a neighbouring city, Cloisterham, where he teaches five or six times every week, and has over 100 students. He also oversees a class in Bramborough. There are extra classes, festivals and events in Cloisterham to which Tolnbridge and Bramborough people are welcomed. A second set of *capoeira* classes, led by Perseus, occur in nearby Longhampston. *Trovao's* participation in *capoeira* is mainly encompassed by Achilles's lessons in Tolnbridge and Cloisterham. He has taken about 400 hours of regular classes, and participated in many other events and performances. *Trovao* has done some classes in London, Amsterdam and Vancouver. *Bruxa* has watched Achilles teach about 200 times, making about 400 hours of ethnographic fieldwork. She has done a hundred other observational sessions on 46 other teachers, in London, New Zealand and Utrecht as well as Tolnbridge, Cloisterham and Longhampston.

*Trovao* has been learning *capoeira* since April 2003. *Bruxa* has been observing *capoeira* classes since the Autumn of 2003. *Trovao* does the lessons, plays the instruments, and performs in the *roda*. *Bruxa* observes lessons and writes fieldnotes. She interviews *discipulos* and teachers formally and informally. *Trovao* and *Bruxa* have contrasting understandings of *capoeira*, because *Trovao*

has an embodied experience like Downey (2005), Lewis (1992), Assunção (2005) and Browning (1995), while *Bruxa* has an understanding based on focused observations (Stephens and Delamont, 2006a). The *capoeira* project is a traditional, conventional ethnography, and its contribution to Qualiti is more at the representational end of the cycle than the data collection end. Teachers are all aware that research is going on and have given permission. Students are kept informed wherever practical – but classes are carried out in public spaces, and newcomers arrive and leave continuously, both during any particular lesson, and, more generally, taking up *capoeira* and dropping it again, so not all students in all lessons know that *Bruxa* is doing research.

### **Classroom Routines**

In this section we present narrative accounts from five routine lessons, interspersed with some explanatory comments, to contextualize the extracts from *Bruxa's* fieldnotes. We start on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2005 – Tolnbridge in a youth club:

Achilles started the class at 8.05. There were 22 students present, 16 male, 6 female. This class is advertised as Beginners 8.00 – 9.15, to be followed by Advanced at 9.15 – 10.30 but at least two advanced students are here already (Lunghri and Jagai). The students stand in lines, a CD of *capoeira* music is playing. Achilles stands facing the students and leads a warm up: stretching arms, legs, backs, the neck, the ankles, the wrists and the waist. The stretching includes bending to touch the floor, twisting the torso from the waist up, standing on one leg with the other held up behind, bent at the knee, and then gradually begins to include a few simple *capoeira* moves. Achilles sets them to run, in single file round the hall, clockwise until he yells 'change direction', when they run anti-clockwise. He varies the lengths between the yells of 'change direction', and then orders them to 'run' sideways, and then backwards, again alternating clockwise and anti-clockwise movement.

Such warm-ups are normal in all UK classes. They function not only to get the students warm and stretched, but are also part of developing the flexible waists and mental alertness teachers want to see in students. Achilles often includes things that act as social 'ice breakers', such as playing 'catch', or mock races, and the class starts in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere.

Achilles orders them up to the far end of the hall, to get into pairs and run, with the partner up in a piggy-back to the end where I am standing. Once here they swap over and run back. Then they have to carry their partner like a bride being carried over a threshold, and swap. Then they have to do a wheelbarrow race. I am struck by how sensibly they sort themselves into pairs so they can carry each other – it would be absurd for tiny women to be paired with large men for this, and they aren't.

At 8.15 Achilles gets them back into lines, and begins to demonstrate basic *capoeira* moves, this time with his back to them so they can mimic him. He gets them doing the basic *ginga*, emphasising how important it is to have a firm base: to have both feet firmly planted on the ground. He goes round and tests a few people's base by hooking their ankle with his foot to see if they fall over or wobble [.....] 8.35 Advanced student (Hathi) arrives with the club instruments (in response to phone call from Lunghri) so there can be live music.

Live music, with students playing the instruments, is considered superior to a CD. If the instruments cannot be stored safely at a training venue, someone has to keep them at their house and bring them to the class.

8.36 Mong arrives – I go over and kiss him. He changes and warms up before joining the class.....

*Capoeira* is self-consciously and explicitly "Brazilian" in its proxemics and level of bodily contact. It is normal for opposite sex class members to greet each other

with hugs and kisses on both cheeks, for women to greet other women in that way, and for men to exchange 'high fives', punch each others' fists or shake hands heartily. *Bruxa* often hugs students she knows, *Trovao* engages in the normal proxemics of a class member (see Delamont, 2006).

8.45 Handstand training. In pairs, 'guys with guys, girls with girls' – they hold each others' legs to help the balance, first together at full stretch, then bent at the knees, then opened into a wide V shape, taking it in turns to be upside down. People practice raising themselves up so their arms are straight and down so their head is also on the floor and back up again. Achilles walks round coaching people.

9.01 Pay break –

9.05 Achilles calls them to the *roda*, seats them in a circle. He thanks all the people who came to the workshops taught by Mestre Spithridates over the weekend in Tolnbridge and in Cloisterham, and those who did the *Bumba Meu Boi* parade through Cloisterham on Sunday. Then he gives an exhortation to everyone to come to the music workshop on Sunday to buy and learn the *berimbau*. It is £10 to learn to play, £30 to buy a *berimbau* and have the lesson. Achilles teaches two simple songs in Portuguese one with the chorus *Sim, Sim, Sim, Nao, Nao, Nao* (Yes, yes, yes, no, no, no) and one where the chorus is just '*berimbau, berimbau, berimbau*'.

9.08 *Roda* starts. Shere Khan (the most advanced student in the class) arrives. He changes and warms up. 9.10 Achilles stops the *roda* and explains the rules and the etiquette: where to sit if you want to be in the queue to play and 'If you don't want to play, sit over there' (where I'm sitting). Lunghri says loudly 'who doesn't want to play?' (meaning, that the only point of learning the moves is to use them to play). As the *roda* progresses, Lunghri, Shere Khan and Jagai all sing the lead part (the verses) as well as Achilles.

9.25 Beginners class ends. 9.30 Advanced class starts. 9 people, 1 female, 8 males.

Most of the time, *capoeira* is done without regard for the students' sex, but the handstand routine is sometimes sex-segregated by Achilles. The importance of giving up their leisure time to perform in public and take extra classes is apparent from Achilles's brief talk at 9.05. The "rules" of *capoeira* play are made explicit by Achilles in his intervention at 9.10. It is apparent from the importance of the *roda* that *capoeira* is dyadic, not monadic like body building (Monaghan, 1999) or circuit training (Crossley, 2004; Sassatelli, 1999). Its habitus is more like that of boxing (Wacquant, 2004) or ballet (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006). Elsewhere (Stephens and Delamont, 2006 b) we have drawn on the ideas of Frank (1990, 1991) to analyse the disciplined nature of *capoeira* bodies. In the next extract, from a lesson 14 months later, similar things can be seen.

(A Wednesday night in July 2006 in the same location). When I arrived the ballet lesson was still on – Lunghri, Yegasuri, Tegumai and Trovao were already there. As other people arrived the ballet lesson ended. Achilles arrived, the hall was set up with *capoeira* music on the CD player, the *berimbaus* strung, and the other instruments set out on the row of chairs. At 8.15 Achilles began the lesson – with 14 students – sets them stretching. By 8.20 they have reached the stage in the stretching routine where they are down close to the floor, with their legs spread out, bent forward from the waist with their torso bent forward so their elbows are on the floor. The Achilles demonstrates, and tells them, to begin to come back to standing position, to bring their legs together while still bent over at the waist, so they can touch their toes, and then slowly uncurl their torso and slowly stand up. Then they stand on one leg with the other held up behind them: first the right leg and then the left. [.....]

These stretching moves occur in the sequence at the beginning of nearly every lesson. Achilles varies the opening part of the warm up, according to the weather,

and to ensure it is never predictable. However, as the stretching draws towards the beginning of the rehearsal of *capoeira* moves, there are nearly always some stretches done at floor level, including the 'elbows on floor' position, from which they are always urged to return slowly and carefully. Then the position that in the fieldnotes is abbreviated as 'LJS' for 'Long John Silver', in which the class stand on one leg with one arm held up in the air to balance, while the other leg is held up behind the back by the other arm is a regular feature. Achilles demonstrates this and can hold himself entirely still. Experienced students are noticeably still, too, while novices wobble, and cannot hold the pose for long. In London once, when Mestre Gelasius was teaching Mestre Hermes's class as a guest, Gelasius demonstrated going into that stretch, and *then* leaning forward from the waist: at that point even experienced students wobbled and fell out of the pose. Because *capoeiristas* spend a great deal of time with only one foot on the floor, being able to balance on one leg, and being able to hop, are useful skills that are taught and practiced regularly.

At 8.25 Achilles starts to *ginga*, and they move into a *ginga* with him. Once they are into the rhythm, then he demonstrates jumping 90 degrees, then jumping back, or jumping a further 90 degrees so they are facing in the opposite direction from where they started. Achilles drills them in this, so they *ginga*, and jump when he yells 'Yup' and points one way or the other. Periodically he calls out 'look in front', or 'big leg'. This hard fast drill goes on, with additions, until 8.35: it is fast, and demanding, so everyone is sweating. As they train Achilles yells repeatedly 'look in front', 'eye content', '*boa*' (good) and 'nice'. At 8.35 Achilles stops the drill, and says he wants them to train the *leque* (fan), a flourish. In this move the player bears her whole weight on one arm, and puts both legs up in the air in a display: either apart, or together (which is harder) and either straight or bent. Achilles demonstrates two or three ways to do it. The class try to train their *leques*, but most cannot hold the position – they either go up into a full handstand with both hands on the floor, or do a full cartwheel

(*au*), or fall over. At 8.38 Achilles calls up Yegasuri as his demonstration partner, and shows how to train the *leque* in a pair: one person holds their partner's wrist firmly in both hands, to balance and steady them, while the other practices the *leque*. It is much easier to train to do it with a partner, because the person trying the *leque* has some balance and stability. Each pair trains 5 *leques* each side for each partner. Then Achilles calls up Drupada as his demonstration partner, and shows how to use the *leque* in a sequence. Achilles gets Drupada to launch a kick at him, he escapes the kick and then does a *leque*. The class go into pairs to train this very short routine [.....]

8.58 Achilles now moves the lesson content on: he demonstrates a false *rabo de arraia* (a kick) followed by the *leque*. They train that in pairs [....]

9.11 Achilles circles them, then calls up Drupada again. This time Achilles does a kick, Drupada retaliates with the *rabo de arraia*, but while he is vulnerable with one leg in the air, Achilles avoids the kick, slides in close and hooks Drupada's leg from under him so he falls to the floor. Achilles says this is called a *banda transgrada* and makes them repeat the Portuguese name after him. I can see and so can the experienced students that if Drupada had gone up into a *leque*, he would have been able to escape the *banda*. The students watch Achilles and Drupada demonstrate this five times: Achilles pulls Drupada over four times, twice attacking his left leg and twice his right. Then he gets Drupada to play the attacking role and to pull him over.

The experienced students always enjoy being the demonstration partner who is "allowed" to throw Achilles, and everyone relishes watching Achilles go down. In real play Achilles is too advanced to get "caught", and has many evasion techniques, so being allowed to throw him is a treat for students.

I can now see the point, or rather the sequence that Achilles was trying to build them up to: but I do not know if the majority of students 'know' yet.

They spread out across the hall, in pairs, and practice this sequence. The advanced students can do it, the beginners are not able to time the *banda*: their partner has usually got both feet back on the floor before the attacker has slid into the correct position.

9.25 Achilles calls Lughri up to demonstrate. They repeat the sequence as far as the *banda transgrada* and this time Lughri does the *banda transgrada* on Achilles, so Achilles can show how to escape the counter-attack. He leaps up from the *Banda* and attacks Lughri with a *vingativa* (a type of body check). Achilles stresses that when friends train together, they help each to learn the moves. 'I knock you over, you knock me over'. Lughri and Achilles demonstrate this full sequence five times – Achilles asking the audience 'Can you see?', and 'Do you understand?' after each. The students ask for a sixth demonstration, the advanced watching intently to ensure they have grasped it, the novices in some bemusement: all of them glad of a break, a respite from the training. Achilles stresses that when you train these *bandas* and *vingativas* with a partner, you try to be stationary so your friend can practice the attack to help them learn it, and vice versa. Because you are expecting an attack, waiting for it, and allowing it to happen, training a move like a *vingativa* is nothing like using it in real play in a *roda*, when it would be unexpected and you would evade it, not wait passively for it to hit your body. They train that sequence until 9.35, when Achilles stops them, to pay for the lesson and come to the *roda*.

*Capoeira* teachers in the UK often end classes with a *roda*: this is a real game, in which two players actually face each other in a circle formed by everyone else playing instruments or clapping and singing. The attractions of the *roda* are expressed in all the books by *capoeira* teachers (eg. Almeida, 1986; Capoeira, 1995 and 2002; Vieira, 2004) and by ethnographers (Assunção, 2005; Downey, 2005; Lewis, 1992 and 2002).

In this extract, Achilles can be seen teaching explicitly the differences between training (when your friends help you learn and practice attacks) and real play, when your opponent will be trying to outwit you. One vital aspect of *capoeira* is deception or trickery: a good player outwits her opponents by false moves, distractions and surprise attacks coming out of a blue sky. This is called *malicia*, and is fundamental to the dance-fight-game (Lewis, 1992; Downey, 2005). In the next three brief extracts, Achilles is seen demonstrating and even teaching *malicia* over a five month period.

Friday July 28<sup>th</sup> 2006, in a University Sports Hall:

Achilles teaches a trick: stop the *ginga* in first position, do a *laterale* (a sideways escape), come up right, feint an *armada*, (a spinning kick) as if you are going to kick from left to right, but in fact, do the real kick from right to left, so the opponent has leant into your kick to escape it but because of your trickery she is making herself vulnerable to it. They train this in lines, 10 to each side: that is they do a *laterale* to their right side, stand up, feint an *armada* from right to left, but actually deliver one from left to right, then *ginga* again until Achilles yells 'now' and indicates to the left when they do a *laterale* to their left and so on.

Friday October 27<sup>th</sup> 2006, the same Sports Hall

7.54 Achilles calls them back to lines. He demonstrates a sequence of moves: *ginga*, first position, a false move, swiftly followed by a 'flying' *martelo* (a kick launched in mid air with both feet off the ground). Achilles does this, and he can deliver the kick, easily. Achilles demonstrates this leading with his left leg, then with his right, four times. Then he says 'Can you see?' 'It's easy' and demonstrates something that while it appears effortless for him, the move is at the limits of what they can do. Achilles never says 'It's easy' when demonstrating anything the advanced students can do easily. I smile, as I know that only two or three of the students will be able to do that move.

There are 23 present, of whom ten are relatively experienced: that is they have the second, third or fourth belt. Two of Achilles's Cloisterham students, Mysa and Vainateya, who have the brown and green (fourth) belt came tonight so there are eight Tolnbridge people plus Mysa and Vainateya who can either do this move, and practice it, or who can try to do it and realistically be expected to master it and add it to their repertoire.

Achilles drills them in lines. When they have drilled this short sequence five times to the left and five times to the right, Achilles calls up Jagai to be his demonstration partner. Achilles tells Jagai what he wants to demonstrate. Jagai does a *rabo de arraia*, Achilles dodges that kick, and comes up right to do the *martelo rodada* which Jagai escapes. Again they demonstrate the sequence four times with Jagai attacking Achilles and his counter attack, then once with Achilles doing the *rabo de arraia*, and Jagai the *martelo*. Achilles showing his superiority by doing a counter attack on Jagai so he falls to the ground. Everyone laughs. They go into pairs to practice that routine.

Wednesday Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006

Achilles has divided the class and is teaching moves that build up into a sequence. Achilles's close friend and advanced student Usana has come to Tolnbridge tonight, and Achilles uses him as his demonstration partner. They are a similar size and build. There are ten advanced students at one end of the hall, and twenty nine beginners at the other. Achilles demonstrates something to the advanced, leaves them to practice it, runs to teach the beginners and so on.

8.50 Achilles circles the advanced, and demonstrates with Usana. Usana does an *armada*, then Achilles jumps back to evade it, and counter attacks with a *martelo*. Usana blocks the *martelo* with his arms and attacks with a *rabo de arraia*. The ten advanced work in pairs to practice that routine.

Achilles goes back to teach the beginners. When Achilles returns, he and Usana repeat the routine but with a trick at the last stage. Now Usana blocks the *martelo*, does a *feint* (a false *rabo de arraia* from left to right) but actually attacks with a real one from right to left: so Achilles demonstrates dropping to escape the kick from the left and finding it coming in fast from the right.

This is a classic version of *malicia*: feint an attack of one kind so the opponent is extremely vulnerable to the real attack of another kind or from another direction. Similarly:

Friday Nov 24<sup>th</sup> 2006

7.30 Achilles has them in lines doing the *ginga*. Then he demonstrates a false move that signals to the opponent that an *armada* is coming from left to right, but instead you launch a *queixada* from right to left. He drills them in that standing in the lines. Then he calls Shere Khan up to demonstrate the move in use. Achilles tells Shere Khan to attack him with the false *armada*, the real *queixada* sequence, and Achilles demonstrates with a vivid mime, how his initial escape from the *armada* is suddenly wrong and dangerous.

Achilles is an excellent actor and can mime being a bad player, caught by surprise by false moves, in a way that makes everyone laugh.

Later in the lesson, at 7.36, Achilles demonstrates the same principle but with two different kicks: now the attacker feints a *queixada* but instead drops low and does a *rabo de arraia* in the opposite direction. This is a more deceptive sequence, because with the *armada, queixada* sequence, both kicks are delivered standing, so the opponent could, if they escaped by dropping very close to the ground, *de facto* avoid the false and the real kick. With this sequence the second kick comes through much lower than

the *queixada*, so an escape that would be fine for a *queixada* is unsafe for evading a *rabo de arraia*. Achilles drills them to do this pair of attacks in lines, ten to each side. Then he asks Cleitus (the Brazilian visitor who had been playing the drum but has now joined the class) to be his demonstration partner. He tells Cleitus what he wants in Portuguese, Cleitus does the false *queixada*, real *rabo de arraia* attack. Achilles drops into an escape and then rapidly swaps to a different escape as the *rabo de arraia* comes. Sets them to practice in pairs. [...]

7.42 Achilles and Cleitus demonstrate the attack again, this time Cleitus uses two different escapes that work equally well. The students go into pairs to practice: *Trova* arrives. Achilles goes to the three Brazilians present, Usara, Cleitus and Fortunatus, (who is a teacher at the same grade as Achilles). They practice in two pairs what a really advanced person would do if attacked in that way. Yegasuri arrives: so there are 18 people training, of whom 15 are Tolnbridge students.

7.50 Achilles and Cleitus demonstrate the same deception but with *armadas*, and Achilles stresses that they need to focus upon exactly *when* to dodge, *how* to dodge and *when* to feint. The students try to do this: Achilles and Cleitus stretch each other's legs, then redemonstrate the sequence, slowly, emphasising exactly what to do, and at what distance. The students train again.

In these extracts the core of the typical *capoeira* class is apparent: physical activity with the development of technical skills, 'ring craft', and especially *malicia*. Elsewhere we have published analyses of teacher authority (Delamont, 2006), and of bodies (Stephens and Delamont 2007 b). In the next section we address issues about writing and publication, issues of general relevance to Qualiti.

## Writing the Embodied Text

In this section we address the debates about the representation of qualitative data, and then illustrate key points with thoughts on the ways in which ethnographies are conventionally titled and finally an example of using poetry to express emotion. The *capoeira* project would lend itself to the production of hypermedia ethnography (Dicks *et al* 2005), but in the final section of this document we have focused on issues of writing and representation, which have been an important theme in the work of the Cardiff 'school' of ethnography (Delamont *et al*, 2001; Coffey, 1999; Atkinson and Coffey, 2003).

### Representation:

Sometimes a particular book or journal article marks the arrival in the spotlight of a new argument or standpoint. When Clifford and Marcus (1986) edited a collection of papers called *Writing Culture* they were creating one of those moments. Twenty one years later, that volume is still controversial, and the issues they highlighted have remained important. Clifford and Marcus are male American anthropologists, and the immediate impact of *Writing Culture* was in anthropology. The first angry responses came from women in American anthropology (Behar and Gordon, 1995) and from men and women in British Social Anthropology (James, Hockey and Dawson, 1997). However the wider impact is demonstrated by the three editions of Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2005) each of which has featured chapters on writing and (re)presentation by Richardson (1994, 2000) and Richardson and St Pierre (2005). Not only have Denzin and Lincoln provided that chapter in each edition of the *Handbook*, there was an increasing proportion of material on rhetoric, writing, and (re)presentation as each new edition appeared. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000) in their seven moments model chose the publication of Clifford and Marcus (1986) and the parallel volume edited by Marcus and Fischer (1986) as the starting point of their fourth moment, entitled "the crisis of representation" (2000: 16 and 1063). The

intellectual problems with this linear 'movements' model are explained elsewhere (Delamont *et al.*, 2000) and are not elaborated here.

Since the Enlightenment, rhetoric – once a respected and canonical discipline – had been relegated to the margins of intellectual life. With the rise of modern science, rhetoric became a marginalised, even despised activity. It contrasted with the rational and factual status ascribed to science, having connotations of sophistry and persuasion. In recent years, however, there has been a growing movement to rehabilitate rhetoric, not least in the recognition that the 'sciences' and other factual enterprises are themselves inescapably rhetorical in character. The natural sciences, economics, history, among many other domains, have been shown to deploy their own rhetorical conventions – not least in their characteristic literary conventions. Such analyses have the consequence of demystifying those conventions. For instance, they can show how scholars convey their own authoritative status: how they persuade their readers through the use of metaphors and other figures of speech; how they use examples and other illustrative materials to build plausible arguments.

In the sociology of science a parallel, development had been taking place. As Ashmore, Myers and Potter (1995: 322) explain it:

studies of discourse and rhetoric have broken down easy distinctions between form and content as well as showing the historical contingency and rhetorical orientation of the literary genres used in techno science. The form of science writing has been made problematic.

Their paper is authored by three men who choose to write as one woman or to represent themselves in one female authorial voice. Dating the fashion in Science and Technology Studies (hereafter STS) to Renyi (1984), Ashmore *et al.* say that:

one of the current orthodoxies is the use of “new” literary forms.....People have written dialogues, plays, encyclopaedias, lectures, fragments, and parodies, and now we have a diary. (322)

The landmark STS texts are Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) and Mulkay (1985). Gilbert and Mulkay’s analysis of biochemists’ rhetoric, with its two ‘accounting repertoires’, empiricist and contingent, is a classic. Mulkay’s (1985) experiments with dialogues, plays and so forth to present his own research about science and scientists. As Ashmore *et al.* (1994) explain:

what this kind of work does..... is to put in question some of the most basic and taken-for-granted desiderata of scholarly or academic or scientific writing – such as the distinction between the serious and the non serious, the important and the trivial.

In this period Donna Haraway’s (1989) analysis of the texts produced by primatologists used the close scrutiny of textual forms to highlight unrecognised sexism in ethnology. Deidre McCloskey (1985) pioneered the examination of rhetoric in economics, as Brown (1977) and Edmondson (1984) had done for sociology.

These reflexive studies of how research is written for publication have had a particularly powerful impact on qualitative researchers, especially ethnographers. Different kinds of prose are interspersed with poetry, resulting in more promiscuous mix of styles and genres. Such experimental writing serves a number of purposes. It subverts the smooth surface of the text in order to disrupt the monologic style in which the ethnographer/observer occupies the sole vantage-point, and from whose standpoint the entire account is provided. The kaleidoscopic presentation of different textual styles and fragments thus allows the writer and the reader to shift from one perspective to another. Couched in such innovative ways, the ethnographer may well be seeking to ‘evoke’ a social setting and social action. The writing may, therefore, be impressionistic in

character. Moreover, the evocative text is evaluated in terms of its connotative or affective quality as much as, or more than, its denotative precision.

In parallel with the new focus on how texts had been traditionally written, and the proposals to experiment with non-traditional forms, came concerns about polyvocality. The ethnographic text under the auspices of postmodernism aspires to be a polyvocal one. That is, in addition to the voice of the ethnographer/author, there will be the voices of social actors. Their experiences will not always, perhaps not ever, be filtered through the interpretative framework of the author. Rather, the text will reproduce the actors' own perspectives and experiences. This may include extended biographical and autobiographical accounts, extended dialogues between the researcher and informants, and other 'documents of life'. Typically there is an emphasis on the kinds of narratives or stories through which social actors construct their own and others' experiences. The ethnographer will be visible or audibly present in the text. Her or his own feelings, actions and reactions will be inscribed in it. The mechanics of the research as well as its emotional content will be integral to its reportage. The postmodern text will be imbued with the work of research, which will not therefore be relegated or marginalised to a methodological appendix or an autobiographical confessional entirely divorced from the 'real' work of analysis and reportage. Indeed, some postmodern ethnographic texts may have the air of a 'confessional' throughout. The presence of the researcher reflects the principle of reflexivity.

The representational practices and devices alluded to relate closely to the analytic strategy of evoking multiple 'voices' in the reconstruction of social realities. If research dissolves the privilege of the observer/author, then it also implies that there should be multiple voices identifiable in the analysis. This goes well beyond the ordinary practice of quoting informants or including extracts from fieldnotes to illustrate ethnographic texts. The polyvocal text - and hence the analytic strategy that underlies it - does not subordinate the voices and press them into the service of a single narrative. Rather, there are multiple and shifting

narratives. The point of view of the 'analysis' is a shifting one. There is no single implied narrator occupying a privileged interpretative position. A relatively early example is Krieger's (1983) account of a lesbian community. The expression of voices has become a major preoccupation of many qualitative researchers in recent years, and to some extent, the force of polyvocality has become blunted: in some contexts it can seem to mean little more than 'letting the informants speak for themselves', with little or no theoretical sophistication. Equally, the celebration of voices can allow the author to find her or his 'voice' in a way that differs from the canons of conventional academic writing: it provides permission for first-person narratives that insert the author in her or his texts, rather than suppressing the personal in the analytic.

There are features of the *capoeira* project which lend themselves to such 'modern' forms of representation. The research is four-handed and two-headed, done by one investigator *Trovao* who does *capoeira* and has an embodied understanding of it, and one *Bruxa* who has only a passive, intellectual engagement. In our reflexive writing on ethnography (Stephens and Delamont, 2006a) we deliberately mixed textual styles.

The accumulated, dual understandings of *capoeira* classes and their culture, distilled from the noisy and chaotic setting, are presented in a traditional academic text where the two authorial voices have been crafted into one shared, dispassionate, scholarly text (p.320).

We stated that text was for an 'experienced' reader of conventional academic texts about unfamiliar settings. We then presented the interplay of our two perspectives, in a dual-voiced, 'messy' text.

'This is a much more "accurate" representation of *capoeira* itself, where all the rehearsal, drill and practice are only a prelude to the "real" thing, the 'game, fight, play, dance' in the *roda* (320).

We proposed that the 'messier, dual-voiced, dialogic text' would stretch the reader as *Trovao* is tested in the *roda*. *Bruxa* has written a 'confessional', autobiographical text (Delamont, 2005a, 2005b), and a fictional episode (2005a).

Several issues around the writing of ethnography arise out of the *capoeira* work. There are major issues of race and ethnicity, of gender and sexualities, of bilingualism, of global inequalities, of globalization and diaspora and of representing noise, smells, proxemics, taste and joy in words. Those ethnographic perennials of fieldwork notes, of 'going native', and of making the familiar strange and strange familiar are recurrent problems whenever we write.

Much of the discussion about authorial voice and polyvocality has arisen from scholars concerned about race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. That is, scholars who are concerned to preserve and valorize the 'authentic' voices of ethnic minorities, oppressed racial groups, women, gays, lesbians and transsexuals. All the issues of 'authenticity' for ethnic minorities are compounded when the data were collected in languages other than English, or the informants speak non-standard forms of English. We face these issues whenever we wish to use Achilles's own words (or those of any other Brazilian), as in the quote on page 5. When we quote Achilles saying 'I felt more *capoeira*' the emotion is preserved, but at the cost of making Achilles sound relatively 'simplistic'. If *Bruxa* spoke Portuguese, the grammatical and lexical complexity of Achilles's recalled emotions from his own *Batizado* fourteen years before would be more apparent. When we as British authors quote Achilles, or any other teacher, we risk reproducing an English language cultural imperialism. We have written about globalization, diaspora and globalisation elsewhere (Stephens and Delamont, 2007), and here only wish to comment that the growing English-language literature on *capoeira* is one aspect of the way(s) in which diasporic *capoeira* may be under pressure to globalize in English speaking countries.

The difficulties of writing about the noise, smells, proxemics, tastes and emotions associated with *capoeira* are just an example of the ongoing struggles of all ethnographic authors to capture all the dimensions of a setting (Atkinson, Delamont and Housley, 2007). *Capoeira* classes and events are themselves loud and often take place in noisy settings: a youth club with a band practicing in the next room, a sports hall with a children's birthday party going on at the other end, a performance in a night club where everyone is drinking and yelling.

*Capoeira* classes are smelly: the locations often stink before the *capoeira* begins and the sweat of the *capoeiristas* adds another layer to the atmosphere. Bodily proxemics are non-British. Brazilian food, served at events, tastes different, and Brazilian teachers can find British food (for example flapjacks, a high energy snack British students will happily eat) strange and even repellent. All these are difficult to convey in written words.

It is also noticeable that the way(s) in which other ethnographers write about *capoeira* reflect the changing nature of the ethnographic text. Our specific example is contrasting paragraphs on the handstand in Brazilian *capoeira*. Both are written by men who learnt *capoeira* in Brazil, and can themselves *do* the move. However, they have chosen to write about the handstand in rhetorically different ways, that illustrate the shifts in 'acceptable' textual styles we have been discussing. First, Lewis (1992: 83):

One of the most distinctive aspects of *capoeira* movement is body inversion, time spent upside down with the weight mostly on the hands and the feet in the air... The goal seems to be for the *capoeira* player to be as comfortable on his hands as on his feet, to be able to move freely from one's support system to the other.

Lewis moves on to relate the inversion in *capoeira* to a desire, by African-Brazilians, to invert the social hierarchy. Downey (2005: 45-48) instead describes in great detail how he learnt to do the handstand (*bananeiria* – literally banana tree). He explains carefully how a *capoeira* handstand differs from a gymnastic one (you must not look at the floor, you need to be ready to defend yourself with a kick, or close your body in defence). Then he switches to an auto-ethnographic mode, to explain how he learnt to *do* the *bananeiria*, after he left Brazil:

I suddenly had the sensation of 'standing up' on my hands while doing the exercise my instructor had shown me... my experience of the *bananeiria* changed completely... When I 'stood up' my center of gravity perceptibly moved over my hands and then rose, as if I had simply put my feet under underneath my body before standing up from the ground (p.47).

We are not contrasting these to criticise one or the other, merely to show how styles of “acceptable” writing have changed. Lewis has written in the style most commonly used before the publication of Clifford and Marcus (1986), Downey in a way that is *now* entirely ‘canonical,’ but would have seemed ‘unscholarly’ twenty years ago.

In the next section we explore strategies for titling ethnographic papers, and in the final section we indulge ourselves with poetic representation of one incident from our fieldwork.

### **Titles**

Atkinson (1990: 75-81) has explored the stylistic conventions used in titling ethnographic work. The formula is a classic: two part paired clauses, which indicate a general disciplinary theme and a fieldwork specific topic. These are arranged either Topical : Generic or Generic : Topical. Atkinson (1990: 76) argues that they announce a strategy for the reader to find significance in the paper, above and beyond the specific local study. The *capoeira* titles so far have all taken the first course, that is Topical : Generic. The first part is something ‘catchy’ and colloquial, probably perplexing or intriguing, and the second part academic, explanatory and prosaic. So far eleven titles have been constructed as follows:

- 1) No place for women among them? Reflections on the *axe* of fieldwork;
- 2) Where the boys are? Familiarity, reflexivity and fieldwork;
- 3) The Smell of sweat and rum: Teacher authority in *capoeira* classes;
- 4) Balancing the berimbau: Embodied ethnographic understanding;
- 5) ‘Samba No Mar’: Bodies, movement and idiom in *capoeira*;
- 6) Up on the roof: The habitus of diasporic *capoeira*;
- 7) “I’m Your Teacher! I’m Brazilian!”: Authenticity and authority in European *capoeira*;
- 8) Learning the game of the waist: Acquiring Brazilian bodies and minds in *capoeira* classes;

- 9) 'I can see it in the nightclub': Fighting, fitness and flexibility in embodied masculinity;
- 10) 'They start to get *malicia*': Teaching tacit skills in diasporic *capoeira*;
- 11) 'Yeah, but this isn't Brazil': (second half yet to be decided).

There are four types of source for the first part: (a) a quote from an informant (4, 7, 9, 11); (b) a quote from the fieldnotes, such as a *capoeira* song (5, 8); (c) a quote from the academic literature (1, 3, this working paper); (d) popular culture and the media (2, 6). The quotes from the academic literature are from Landes (1947) (1 and 3) and Browning (1995) (this paper). The titles (2 & 6) are from sixties pop songs, with clear links to the theme of the paper (ie. not gratuitous). 'Up on the Roof', for example, is not only a song, it is also an explicit reference to the Station Ident the BBC used for 3 years in which Mestre Poncianinho played *capoeira* on a London rooftop. The prosaic halves of all the titles make it clear whether the paper is about ethnographic fieldwork (1, 2, 4) or about *capoeira* (3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

## Poetry

Poetry is probably the most frequently used of the 'new' textual forms. As Brady (2000: 963) wrote 'it is the poetic turf more anthropologists are traversing nowadays.' To illustrate the potential of poetic representation to convey emotion, that is how much *capoeira* can mean to serious, committed *discipulos*, poetic forms are used. We have chosen an incident involving one Tolnbridge student, who, in trying to behave more 'correctly', with much better adherence to the conventions of *capoeira* than any of his fellow students, got reprimanded by Perseus, his *mestre*.

(2) Early in the *capoeira* fieldwork an episode occurred in a master class taught by two visiting teachers, Ulysses, an Angola specialist, and Diomedes, a regional teacher. There are two *capoeira* traditions: *angola* canonised by Mestre Pastinha, and *regional* created by Mestre Bimba (see Lewis, 1992; Downey, 2005; Assunção, 2005). In the tradition of *angola capoeira*, ordinary clothing, or

black and yellow is worn. (Pastinha's students wore black and yellow because these were the colours of his football team.) Regional groups normally wear white trousers and t-shirts. Rashka was behaving in an impeccably 'correct' way, except for failing to thread and tie his belt "properly." Rashka, the most experienced and committed *discipulo* in the class, who is an African Portuguese man, wore black trousers and a yellow t-shirt for the angola lesson and then changed to white trousers and t-shirt for the regional lesson. When he joined Diomedes's class he had not threaded his *corda* through the belt loops and tied it properly with the correct knot. The master in charge, Perseus, who had invited Ulysses and Diomedes, called to Rashka, prodded him with the *berimbau*, and told him sternly to thread and tie the *corda* properly. Such an incident lends itself to a poetic treatment, and is the one chosen to represent the use of alternative forms of representation.

Most ethnographic poetry is free verse: prose broken up into lines. In Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 129 – 130) there is an interview extract turned into such a poem. For Raksha it should really be a *capoeira* song, in Portuguese, playing with the *capoeira* format, to celebrate the centrality of the call and response songs with accompany all *roda* play, in which the master sings the verses and everyone else the chorus, as in:

zum zum zum

Capoeira mata um (capoeira kills one)

There is a *capoeira* song which can be adapted to Rashka's reprimand. In English it includes a verse that goes:

Master: I hide the end of the knot

Chorus: Parana

Master: No one knows how to untie

Chorus: Parana

'Parana' is a state in Brazil and is often used in choruses. The verse is metaphorical, about "hiding", or secreting one's purpose in "knots", that is, engaging in *malicia*. However, it can be twisted to 'fit' the episode of the *corda* that had not been tied properly. In this *capoeira* song the word *camara*, friend or

comrade, which features in many common choruses, is used to create a 'typical' refrain.

Raksha: My master says  
          'Put on your cord'  
Chorus: Corda on, camara  
Raksha: I thread my cord,  
          I tie my cord  
Chorus: Corda on, camara  
Raksha: His cord is red  
          He is my master  
Chorus: Corda on, camara  
Raksha: My cord is blue  
          His cord is red  
Chorus: Corda on, camara  
Raksha: My cord is blue  
          Perseus, I obey

This song would, of course, have to scan in Portuguese, and fit one of the musical rhythms (see Lewis, 1992)

To do free verse, as most ethnographers do, is easier. Below is a piece of ethnographic poetry, intended to convey emotion. It is in two verses, one for each lesson, each teacher, each outfit. Rashka's ethnicity, his commitment to the rules, conventions and etiquette of *capoeira*, and his inadvertent 'breach' of a convention are portrayed. The colours of the belts have symbolic significance: so they represent the stages of capture, enslavement and emancipation of the African-Brazilians; or the deities of the African-Brazilian religion *Candomble*, or facets of Brazilian society (such as the colours of the flag). In the *Beribazu* group, to which Perseus and Rashka then belonged, the first *corda* is blue, for the Atlantic Ocean, across which the slaves were transported.

Rashka's Lament

I changed my trousers  
Out of respect.  
I wore black for Ulysses  
To honour Angola, my father's land,  
I am Angolan, I am Portuguese,  
I am Capoeira.

Diomedes called.  
He is Regional.  
I changed my trousers  
I wore white for the freed slaves  
I ran, the corda round my waist  
To join Diomedes.  
Perseus spoke. He is my master  
'Thread your corda'. 'Tie it properly'.  
'Respect Diomedes'.  
The blue corda is the sea.  
The sea crossed by slaves from Angola  
I earned my corda  
In the roda.  
Perseus is my master: I thread my corda.

This song is reasonably typical of the sorts of poetic representation that are now found in ethnographic texts: designed to emphasise the emotional aspects of the informants' experiences. It focuses on the disciplinary relationship between *mestre* and student, and the duty of the learner to obey the teacher. Arguably, a more important use for poetic representation might be to express joy or even *axé*, the energy that drives *capoeira*. In future writing we need to work on ways to convey the joy, the *axé*, the humour and the *malícia* of *capoeira*.

## Conclusions

Using data from a two-handed ethnography of diasporic *capoeira* we have raised the on-going issue of the textual representation of qualitative research. In the publication of a textually complex journal article (Stephens and Delamont, 2006a), and here with our reflexive focus on titling and the use of poetry, we open a dialogue with the rest of Qualiti and with the audience for its work.

## Notes:

- (1) A dance done in grass skirts, with wooden sticks that are clashed noisily together.
- (2) A folkloric performance about a dead bull being brought back to life (Makuna, 1999).
- (3) Men mime hauling in a heavy fishing net, while women invoke the Yoruba and African-Brazilian sea-goddess *Iemanjá*.
- (4) When we began the research, many British *capoeiristas* were much better known in *capoeira* by their *capoeira* nickname than by their real, legal name. That is two hundred *capoeira* people might have heard of a keen student in Fordhampton called 'Ikki', but only thirty people might know he was 'Dominic Fieldhouse'. So in 2003 it seemed far more important to protect Neil Stephens's *capoeira* identity – that is his 'real' nickname – than his real legal name, because any reader who discovered his *capoeira* name could have easily discovered the identity of the *capoeira* classes and all the *discipulos* we were writing about. Consequently we coined a pseudonymous *capoeira* nickname for him (and one for Sara Delamont because the same issues could have arisen with her *capoeira* nickname). As the research has evolved so too has the use of pages on websites such as Facebook, where *capoeiristas* often appear with their real names. In 2007 'Dominic Fieldhouse' is likely to be on a Facebook page and all 200 *capoeiristas* may well know him by that name *and* as 'Ikki.' We have continued to use *Trovao* and *Bruxa*, but recognize that it is harder and harder to disguise and protect the Tolnbridge and Cloisterham *discipulos*. We chose the names *Bruxa* and *Trovao* carefully. In European folklore witches are often

jealous old women, so *Bruxa* seems appropriate. *Trova* invokes *Xango* the Yoruba God of Thunder, an important figure in *Candomblé* the African-Brazilian religion.

(5) We have used pseudonyms for all the teachers and students. Achilles teaches in three British cities 'Bramborough', 'Tolnbridge' and 'Cloisterham'. Male students' nicknames such as Rashka, come from Kipling's *The Jungle Book*.

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Email: [info@ncrm.ac.uk](mailto:info@ncrm.ac.uk)  
Homepage: [www.ncrm.ac.uk](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk)