Urban Crime and Negotiation Attempts with a Criminal to Access the Field: Contact, Engagement and a Present[1]

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Negotiating access to a field can be portrayed as relatively straightforward. When the researcher seeking access is a criminology practitioner and that access is being sought from a criminal, the process of attempting to build trust and rapport, especially when the opportunity to engage presents itself by chance, is complicated. This ethnographic account outlines the process of such an encounter, balancing accountability to profession whilst simultaneously seeking to operationalise the theoretical intertwining of the criminology practitioner and independent academic researcher status. The duality of these seemingly opposite roles of this specific encounter is contrasted by the creative opportunity of cultural criminology's methodological approach of verstehen. Techniques of impression management to elicit a favourable response were fluid and evolving, recognising when one approach was failing and changing direction to pursue another. This approach needed to coexist and compliment the disposal of the criminological encounter from a practitioner control agent perspective. This was achieved by the use of discretion. Limited success was gained post interaction with a potential channel of communication elicited by a third party for possible access to the field, although there is no certainty of this.
Keywords: Access to the field, impression management, discretion, verstehen.

Introduction

The following ethnographic account of attempting to gain access to a field of research demonstrates the realities of negotiating with a gatekeeper, especially where the researcher and the potentially researched seemingly occupy diametrically opposed positions. I did not foresee the obstacles I faced in terms of access issues. Although Adler and Adler (2011: 515) identify "potential respondents are reluctant to be interviewed", textbooks devoting consideration to access portray it as relatively straightforward after the initial negotiations (see, for example, Delamont 2016, Hammerslry and Atkinson 2019, Wengraf 2001).

I am a practitioner of criminology, working as a control agent in the private sector. Additionally, I am also an independent academic researcher with no current academic affiliation with any university. My area of research is situated within cultural criminology looking at protest stickers and how they publicise non mainstream political agendas in an area around the University of Bristol's Clifton campus, located in the United Kingdom. I undertake this independent academic work to further the scholarly knowledge within the academic study of criminology from the perspective of a criminological practitioner. I believe the unique position this affords me, to be both operationally and academically invested in my field of study, gives me a niche space to occupy, offering comment on the conflation of both areas. This practitioner independent academic duality provides the currency of credibility, translating theory into practice whilst ploughing my trade as a street level bureaucrat (Lipsky 2010). My independent academic status, developed from my practitioner expertise, opens up scholarly opportunities based on my continuous work in the field.

Protest stickers

Protest stickers, as a form of communicative street art, occupy a ubiquitous yet often overlooked presence of contemporary socio-political discourse in urban landscapes, particularly in pedestrian heavy areas (Chaffe 1993, Clough 2011, Hundertmark 2003, Lewisohn 2008, Riggle 2010). These small, adhesive, ephemeral objects, often featuring text, images and symbols, or a mixture of any of these, serve as a means of expressing dissent, promoting social change, or advocating for specific causes. They populate streetscape furniture around university campuses, travel hubs and retail areas where they invite viewers to engage, should they choose to notice them (Gerbaudo 2014, Velikonja 2021). The interpretation of protest stickers is a complex process influenced by various factors, including the viewer's cultural background, personal beliefs and understanding of the symbols employed. As Hansen and Flynn (2015), Tedford (2021), Collins (2022) and Bodden and Awcock (2024) have all argued, the meaning of a sticker is not inherent but is constructed through the interaction between the viewer and the message. This individualistic interpretation is contingent upon the familiarity of the text, images and symbols in mainstream discourse, with the expectation that the message resonates with the viewer's everyday written and visual vocabulary.

The pervasiveness of protest stickers can be traced to both cultural and historical traditions of communication. Early forms of symbolic expression, such as cave drawings, artefacts and paintings, can be considered precursors to contemporary protest stickers (Chaffe 1993). The development of decalcomania in the 1800s further traces the evolution of this medium (McCormick 2010). In contemporary protest sticker history, the "silent agitators" produced by the Industrial Workers of the World over a century ago helped develop awareness about labour conditions and encouraged unionisation (Tedford 2019). Today, protest stickers continue to be employed by a diverse range of political groups, from left-wing and anarchist movements to extreme right-wing ideologies, environmental activists and international conflict advocates.

The analysis of protest stickers requires a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates elements of semiotics, cultural studies and urban geography. Semiotics, as a framework for understanding the relationship between signs and their meanings, provides a valuable tool for interpreting the visual and textual elements of protest stickers that convey the intended message (Sebeok 2001). Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce are among the key figures in the development of modern semiotics, and their work continues to inform research (Yakin and Totu 2014). More contemporary scholarship by Jaworski and Thurlow (2010), Visgo (2010), Reershemius (2019) and Cosmeleata (2022) has also applied semiotics to analyse protest stickers. However, scholars like Umberto Eco (1978) critique the sole reliance on semiotics, citing issues such as interpretative variability, cultural dependency and the ideological biases of interpreters as significant limitations.

To address these limitations, an approach that considers not only the semiotic elements of protest stickers but also their geographical distribution, their role as a form of protest and the active subjectivity of viewer interpretation provides breadth. Indeed, approaches such as

geographies of protest stickers (Awcock 2021), the use of political stickers as forms of protest (Awcock and Rosenberg 2023) and the active subjectivity involved in interpreting sticker meanings (Bodden and Awcock, 2024) offer fresh perspectives. Shepard Fairey, the renowned sticker artist, reflects on the dynamic nature of protest sticker interactions, noting that the more stickers he disseminated, the more he considered their capacity to create distinct interactions with the urban environment (Fairey 2010: 9). Similarly, Betancourt (2010: 283) emphasises that stickers introduce elements that provoke reflection and engagement, offering pedestrians a counter narrative to the ubiquitous urban advertisements. However, not every protest sticker elicits such active engagement. As Clough (2011) observes, many individuals coexist with these stickers daily without ever noticing them. In agreement, Invader (2019: 9) estimates that "only about one in a thousand" might actually notice a sticker, underscoring the often-invisible nature of these political artefacts.

My ethnographic work aims to contribute to the ongoing academic inquiry into protest stickering. By responding to the call for further research by scholars such as Awcock (2021), Bodden and Awcock (2024), Cole (2021), Feigenbaum (2014) and Nouri and Morgan (2023), this article seeks to expand the understanding of the significance of protest stickers as indicators of political activism across multiple domains.

Protest Stickers as Markers of Subculture, Transgression and Crime

Subcultures use symbolic forms of expression through dissent to resist mainstream values. Stickerists, as a subcultural group, undertake this visible protest to mark urban space and contest dominant political narratives which often exclude marginalised groups, with which they may identify. Armstrong (1998) recognises this facet and identifies that subcultures operate in opposition to middle class respectability and control over public spaces. Indeed, subcultures are not merely isolated groups; rather, they are deeply intertwined with broader societal structures resisting dominant cultural norms forming identities that challenge hegemonic narratives and provide alternative frameworks for understanding identity and belonging (Giulianotti and Armstrong 2004). Subcultures, in addition to understanding, also develop identity formation and expression, and provide the individual members with a sense of agency and community in localities where they may feel otherwise alienated or oppressed (Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong 2016). Taking into account the following section's discussion on the site of the fieldwork regarding the predominantly white and middle-class demographic of the University of Bristol's student body, alongside the gentrification of long-term residential areas driven by these students, the activities of subcultural stickerists can be understood as an effort to reclaim and assert control over these contested urban spaces.

Whilst protest stickers may be able to foster dialogue, in the eyes of the state, placing them is a criminal act with the relevant legislation being outlined later in this discussion. An alternative viewpoint is that they represent a form of transgression that blurs the lines between legality and illegality. Such low level deviance (Garland 1996) is often tolerated at least for a short while, reflecting the ambivalence with which broader society currently views such

political messaging transgressions. Hall (1978) states that the notion of crime is socially constructed and reflects the power dynamics within society. In this context, stickerists frame protest stickers as necessary acts of resistance in a media landscape that often excludes marginalised voices. The states response to protest stickers by criminalising such acts can be understood as the policing of space, where the state seeks to maintain its control over public areas. Presdee (2000) recognises such social anxieties around deviance and control, particularly when mainstream political power is challenged from the margins. Ferrell and Sanders (1995) also recognise such political challenge with negative perceptions of stickerist subcultures being sensationalised in media outlets supporting mainstream narratives. The response of the state reflects Foucault's (1995) disciplinary society, where the state seeks to regulate not only the behaviour but also the visibility of dissent. Such transgressive acts are further blurred by the dichotomy between legitimate street art and low-level deviance. Public perceptions of street art vary on a continuum from criminal damage to sought after works (Young 2013). In the city that is home to the notorious Banksy, never has there been a more contested binary. Therefore, the nuanced motivations behind stickerists actions of transgressions or criminality, and the socio-political contexts that inform them, will continue to be both simultaneously promoted and demonised.

The Fieldwork Site

Since January 2022 I have been undertaking specific fieldwork documenting protest stickers that I find positioned on street furniture such as lampposts, litter bins, traffic signs and utility infrastructure, as well as the exterior of buildings, walls and other publicly accessible spaces. I use my mobile phone's camera to capture images of these stickers and I undertake this discreetly (Webb et al. 1966, Kellehear 1993), although not covertly. From the commencement of this work until June 2024, I have documented 235 political stickers covering a multitude of political domains relating to left-wing, right-wing and environmental activism, and to international conflicts. The site of the fieldwork is based around the University of Bristol's Clifton campus with the geographical boundaries reaching out to a quarter of a mile from a central building known as Senate House. The fieldwork was undertaken once a fortnight in the morning for an hour each time (Hill, no date).

The University of Bristol occupies a unique position within the city. Shaped by the urban environment, a rich socio-political history of protest both within the wider city and the University campus, and the demographic of the student body, a complex relationship between education, class and politics results. With the stickers that I am interested in being one form of protest, this follows the city's popularity for such left-leaning and liberal socio-political milieu. Significant protests, including the 1793 Bristol Bridge riots, the 1831 Queen's Square Reform riots, the Bristol bus boycotts of 1963, the rioting in the St Pauls district in 1980, the Stokes Croft Tesco protest and riots of 2011, the 2019 Extinction Rebellion protests, the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests and the Kill the Bill 2021 violence, all serve as significant reminders of such activity (Scott 2021). The University is also no stranger to such activism with campaigns

drawing attention to perceived social injustices, educational matters and wider geopolitical events, all attracting significant local and national attention (Bevan 2023). This University is traditionally seen as a liberal institution which aligns itself with progressive causes such as environmentalism, social justice and decolonisation (Shah 2018). However, juxtapose this with the student demographic of a higher proportion of white and middle-class students than the national average (HESA 2024), then a paradox emerges with the city's reputation for left-wing politics and the relative privileged background of the University's student body. As Reay et al. (2010) argue, higher education institutions often reproduce social inequalities rather than challenge them, despite their ostensibly progressive missions. While universities often serve as sites for political and social activism, the relatively privileged background of the students attending the University of Bristol raises important questions about the extent to which these students genuinely engage with the city's more radical politics (Bathmaker et al. 2013). The disconnect between the promoted progressive image of the University and the lived experiences of many of its students highlights the limitations of liberalism when it is not accompanied by a comprehensive understanding of the class and racial inequalities vis-a-vis the wider city environs. Research by Brockliss (2000, p.147) identified polarising issues around the "town-gown relations", which in Bristol manifests itself with the socioeconomic disparities between the student body and long-term city residents. The influx of students into traditionally working-class neighbourhood areas close to the University is contributing to gentrification, potentially exacerbating social tensions (Jones 2018). This process challenges the narrative of Bristol as a uniformly progressive city and highlights the complexities of urban social dynamics. Furthermore, whilst the city's progressive history and the University's instances of student activism align with left-wing ideals, the predominantly white, middle-class composition of the student body complicates this narrative. It is within this pluralism that my study of protest stickers is situated.

My employed role as a criminological control agent necessitates that I wear a uniform, with every item being black in colour, apart from body armour that has a section of high visibility yellow. My radio and body-worn camera are attached to this. The uniform mimics that of the public police to provide symbolic power (Puck 2018). I am a white, middle-aged, bald, stocky male and it has been suggested that my appearance both matches others who undertake similar roles and compliments my career of choice. While other colleagues have taken similar attributes to be indicative of their profession, when I am attempting to be discreet with my academic fieldwork, these two strands do not allow for seamless compatibility.

The locating of a protest sticker identifies the fact that a crime has occurred. In the United Kingdom, legislation on stickering can be found in three pieces of statute. The Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Highways Act 1980 deal with the placing of stickers on property without the owner's permission. The owners of most of the street furniture, Bristol City Council, sporadically conduct clean-up operations to rid such structures of all stickers (bristol.gov.uk. 2024). The

private owners of the other properties affected do the same, often on a more frequent basis. Anecdotal conversations with the workforce that undertake this work would indicate that permission for the placing of political stickers has never been provided.

A Gatekeeper

In October 2023, whilst undertaking employed control agent work outside the geographical boundaries of my specific fieldwork site, I watched an individual place a sticker on a lamppost that contained other protest stickers. I had just turned a corner from one road into this sighting of a crime being undertaken and it caught me by surprise. It was just after 9pm, the sun had already set and the street lights, those that were working, partially lit the area although not directly. As I continued walking towards this individual, they became aware of my presence and shot me a cursory glance. Then, upon recognising and identifying their perception of my role, they looked panicked and apprehensive of what may happen next, more so than I would have expected although as has been previously researched, negative interactions with control agents can elicit such emotions (Geller et al 2014). As I now stood close to them, they said "I was just looking to see what that sticker said". I smiled and replied "of course". I had watched them place a new sticker on a lamppost, thereby committing a crime. However, the limits of my employment are such that I only possess the jurisdictional powers afforded to all civilians. Whilst the ability to act as an agent of the landowner, to deal with any person undertaking such an act on property owned by my employer, is available (Shearing and Stenning 1983), this lamppost was not, however, in that category. Therefore, I was left with two options: report the matter directly to both the police and the city council, or deal with the situation in front of me by using discretion. Reporting to other agencies would not have received a timely response due to the nature of what I was dealing with. I know this from multiple previous requests. Therefore, discretion, in these circumstances, was apt.

For the first time in twenty-two months of research, I was now presented with an opportunity of engaging with my first stickerist. Plummer (2001: 133) discusses such encounters stating "sometimes a subject is found by chance". I had interpreted the stickers I found during fieldwork with subjectivity, consistent with my cultural criminological verstehen as advocated by Ferrell (1998). An alternative interpretation from the stickerists' perspective had now presented itself by this chance encounter, or as Ferrell et al. (2015: 217) terms it, instant ethnography where we "engage the politics of transgressive possibility and so embrace something of cultural criminology's progressive mandate". However, at this point in time I was conscious that I was not in my independent academic research role but in my employed control agent capacity. I had already constructed a position in support of the conflation of both, which had until this point always been a theoretical construction. Now I was faced with an intertwining of my two worlds, my next actions would dictate which path I followed, that of a control agent or an independent academic researcher. Or did I need to separate these two worlds? If I had conflated them theoretically, surely there would now be an opportunity to do so practically?

Whilst still smiling, I asked the individual what the sticker said and why were they interested in it? They replied, "it's Antifa, everywhere in Bristol". Noticing that they did not include in the answer their interest in it, I asked, "And do you support that?"; to which, they replied, "Don't you?". Their backpack was at the foot of the lamppost so I bent down, took hold of it and passed it back to them. As I did so, I said, "where do you plan on putting up the rest of these stickers then?". The backpack was open and easily visible inside was a sheet of stickers identical to the sticker I had just witnessed being placed on the lamppost. "That's nothin to do with you", was the reply provided. The conversation had all the elements forming to become confrontational; so, wishing, for numerous reasons, to de-escalate it, I said, "may I be completely honest with you?". Met with silence, I outlined that I had seen them place the sticker on the lamppost and the fact that there was a sheet of stickers in their backpack suggested that they were out stickering. At this point, though, I offered the olive branch of explaining that whilst I had the option to do something about what I had witnessed, I also had another option of finding an alternative solution, one that was acceptable to both of us. Whilst stickering can be detrimental to a community, this low level anti-social behaviour needs to be tackled sensitively with sanctions enforced appropriately to uphold confidence in crime control (GLC 2020). "So, what's to stop me just walking off?", was their reply. I asked for just one minute of their time to explain and, by doing so, it may answer their earlier question, in a roundabout way, whether I supported putting up stickers.

They appeared to be somewhat intrigued and, whilst they zipped up their backpack and put it on, they said, "Well?". I started to talk about my interest in stickers from an academic perspective and very briefly outlined what I had been doing these past twenty-two months. I showed them two pictures on my phone of the latest stickers that I had recorded. Both were for environmental activism. They looked at me and implied that it was very unusual that I would be interested in stickers. They started to walk off, so I walked with them and told them of the work I had undertaken, subjectively analysing each sticker. I carried on mentioning that it would be just wonderful if I could get a stickerist's perspective. At this point they stopped walking, looked at me and said, "you're mad if you think I'd talk to you". Whilst this was not entirely unexpected, I was caught off balance with my enthusiasm of beginning a conversation with someone who could provide their reasons for stickering. So far, my attempted negotiations with this potential recruit were not being managed too well (Crang and Cook 2007). I began to consider if my approach had been unwise. As Berk and Adams (1970) have discussed, I had attempted to become the naive interviewer haphazardly negotiating access. Coffey (1999: 4) develops this further and discusses "the necessity to activate strategies of impression management in order to secure access to a research site". I needed to find a way to undertake this, and quickly. They carried on walking, so I did also, and continued talking, stating why it would be totally understandable; would they not like their side of the story to be presented? "The stickers do the talking" was their reply, followed by "look, no offence, but me and you, we live in different places. It's clever of you not to do nothin 'bout earlier, but trying to use that now, I don't know".

With my renewed focus on impression-management, I decided to try another approach. I said, "do you want me to show you where the right-wing stickers are? Don't you lot want to take them down and cover that space with your own stuff?" They replied: "There's none of their shit around here, elsewhere maybe, but not here". To which, I said: "You're wrong you know, there's three not far from here". They then went on to say "anyway, if they are up, it won't be for long. The bloc will rip them". This strategy of selectively informing a potential recruit with information has been identified as impression management to entice gatekeepers (Homan 1992). I was now in the territory of Coffey's (1999) active strategies.

I once more stated that I would really like to know more about why the stickers are put up. This prompted the following remark: "I dunno, that's not right, shouldn't you be stopping me? You ain't taken the sheets even!". I replied, "well, I'm trying to find a solution that works for both of us and with you seeing me and now walking off I doubt if you'll put any more stickers out tonight as you know I'm about. So, that's the crime prevention bit of my job done. But I hope you've also seen another side to me, one that's actually interested, really interested, in why you sticker. And not because I wear a uniform but because I'm researching it. I want to understand". This final attempt at impression management, to build rapport (Duncombe and Jessop 2002) with the stickerist, now seemed to hang in the balance.

They looked at me blankly and I did not know what the response was going to be. I could not tell from their body language or expressions what to expect. I broke the growing silence saying, "look, most lunchtimes I go over there for a coffee. I pointed to an independent coffee truck that was now closed. If you want a coffee on me, well, it would be great to chat. I'll even come in normal clothes if it'll help". They said, "I dunno man, you're different an everything, but it ain right talkin to you. Earlier that was sound thou". I had relied on Tyler's (2006) concept of fair treatment in procedural justice interactions hopefully to begin to develop a relationship of trust. I replied, "Ok, well the offer is there, I'll leave it for tonight. And thanks for your time, I appreciate it".

Walking back to the office, I began to analyse critically this interaction with the stickerist. Firstly, my control agent role; had I chosen the correct approach? For the three non-indictable offences outlined above, I really was very limited in my options. By stopping continuing stickering offences with my presence when I did, I had prevented further crime being committed, or as Cohen and Felson (1979) recognised, my sentinel role as a capable guardian worked. Relying on the assumption that this individual would not realise that my options were limited, and appearing to be lenient in my dealings with them by indicating that I had discretion to choose what to do, I had not professionally compromised this role and had actually been effective in my response. How would I have dealt with this incident if it had not involved stickers? Exactly the same is my response. With over thirty years of experience in the criminological field undertaking both public and private control agent roles, I have plenty of wisdom gained from such street level bureaucracy to understand the complex interplay between discretion and the procedural justice model applied in a real time operational context.

What about my detailing my academic endeavours whilst wearing my control agent uniform? I can understand that this blurring of boundaries may have appeared odd to the individual. From my perspective, I had managed to operationalise my theoretical conflations of role, but only after I had decided on my method of disposal for the crime. If there had of been credible options to undertake a different approach, I would not have introduced my academic interest. What about ethical boundaries? As an independent academic researcher, I have no formal ethics committee for guidance. What I do rely on is the British Society of Criminology's statement of ethics (BSC, no date) and my professional association's ethical code of conduct (IPSA 2020). I was happy that I had conformed with both, although I did consult each whilst back in my office, just to be certain. Had I been duplicitous in my undertakings? Again, after careful consideration, I do not believe so. I had stated my interest clearly and whilst I may not have stated that I did not really have much legal recourse at the scene of the crime, the fact that I acknowledged that I had options of how I dealt with the matter was correct.

The Dichotomy of Insider Outsider Positionality

Merton (1972) was instrumental in identifying that a researcher's positionality influences their interactions with research participants, which effects the overall research process. As a criminology control agent, I have an insider perspective grounded in my theoretical and operational knowledge of crime, control and social order. This affords me the ability to analyse critically the legal and social implications of political stickers, as well as the broader subject of public space management. I am able to navigate this area with authority, leveraging theoretical and empirical insights obtained from my research to subjectively interpret the actions of the stickerists as part of broader deviant behaviour. Notwithstanding my insider status from a criminological position, I also occupy outsider status when viewed through the lens of stickerists, with such status being magnified due to my control agent role. Levine and Papania (2011) recognise that my employed role may be seen as an agent of repression who is aligned with the very systems stickerists seek to challenge. Indeed, I am not just an outsider; though I am not active in the field of stickering, I represent the very antithesis when positionality of outsider status is considered. This sharp contrast is interesting as my subjective interpretation of stickers may be far removed from the deeply personal and possibly collective experiences that motivate stickerists. Whilst I can interpret the socio-political messages embedded within stickers, my outsider status limits my ability to grasp fully the emotional and experiential dimensions that drive stickerists to use this medium for expression. However, recognising this dichotomy from the outset, and hence my attempt to recruit a gatekeeper to understand the stickerists perspective, is identified in Finlay's (2002) work of fostering a mutual understanding whilst also maintaining a critical distance. Indeed, the very importance of recognising such reflexivity is crucial to understanding how my dual role as insider and outsider shapes my overall research outcomes (Copes and Pogrebin 2017). It is the very essence of my approach at attempting to work with a stickerist that I hoped would help mitigate my control agent biases, whilst simultaneously building trust with at least one member of this subculture community

(Liu and Burnett 2022). As I reflect on the interactions with this stickerist, it becomes apparent that the complexity of any research field relationship that I do manage to cultivate will necessitate fluidity to negotiate both my insider and outsider positionalities (Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

A Present

Due to the shift work hours that I keep, I usually attend that lunchtime coffee truck twice a week. The rest of October passed. Then the colder winter months came and went, until finally early spring arrived. Without any more sightings of the individual from October or their appearance at the coffee truck, I began to think that my offer had not been successful. After initially partially changing my clothes from uniform to civilian attire, just in case the stickerist put in an appearance, in the spring I reverted back to wearing uniform albeit without body armour. The staff on the coffee truck seemed to change quite often, although ownership kept the same name throughout. In early March 2024 a turn of events surprised me. The owner was serving and said, "Steve, I haven't seen you in ages, I took the winter off and went back home. I have something for you, though". Knowing this gentleman's heritage, I wondered if it may be something from his country of birth, to repay my loyalty to his product. I said, "thank you, I hope you've wrapped it up!". He looked surprised and said, in a serious voice, "no, why would I do that?". At this point, with confusion spoiling the suspense of the moment, he handed me a flimsy plastic carrier bag. I thanked him and looked inside. I began to grin as I pulled out an A4 sheet of paper with three Antifa stickers on it. I turned it over and a handwritten note on the back said "go on, do it" with a smiley face emoji afterwards. I asked where did he get these? I was informed that just before he went home in the middle of November a person had come to the truck and asked if he could have a favour — the bald security man would be coming by for a coffee later, could he pass on these, please?

I had managed to get contact with the stickerist, albeit later than had been sought, due to circumstances outside my control. This was pleasing, as I believe I had treated the stickerist with respect and honesty, which had served to reduce the power imbalance between us (Todak and James 2018). The three Antifa stickers, to me at least, symbolised a request to replace the three right-wing stickers. Had they searched for them and not found them? They had actually been removed a few weeks after our interactions by a clean-up crew. Or, was this gift an attempt at making contact? It could be either. Could I go so far as to suggest I had established the beginnings of trust and rapport? (Tunnel 2016). I think the jury is out on that one. I asked the coffee truck owner if I could give him and his staff my contact details to pass onto the person who left the gift? He said of course and he would be pleased to help me.

As I write this in July 2024, relying on my electronic field notes made soon after the interactions with the stickerist and the owner of the truck, I have yet to meet again with my stickerist, either in person undertaking their craft or whilst grabbing a coffee. Being the eternal optimist though, maybe one day. In case you are wondering, I do still have the three Antifa stickers, however they will be staying on the A4 paper.

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