

Jacqueline Hodgson, Sophie Marois, Nicole Bögelein, Timothy Bryan

Transnational Workshop on Creative Methods in Research on Courts and Policing at the University of Warwick (UK), 11–12 September 2025

From 11th-12th of September 2025, the authors of this report co-organised a Transnational Workshop on *Creative Methods in Research on Courts and Policing*, hosted at the Scarman Centre at the University of Warwick. The idea of the workshop was devised by Jackie Hodgson (University of Warwick), Sophie Marois (University of Toronto) and Nicole Bögelein (University of Cologne) while working together within the ComparE network* in Cologne in February 2025. As the workshop began to take shape, they were joined by Timothy Bryan (University of Toronto) — and so we became four.

It was of particular interest to us that creative methodologies have gained traction across socio-legal and criminological research, offering tools to engage with the lived, emotional, and structural complexities of the topics of our inquiry. Following a call for abstracts from academics, activists and creative practitioners, we selected 12 papers to be presented across 6 sessions on co-creating visual representations of safety and policing; visual and collaborative methods in the courtroom; creative writing in police research; arts-based approaches to police emotion; and creative collaborations in research on protest and social control. By having everyone present for the two days of the workshop, listening, discussing, eating, sleeping and playing games together, we engaged with one another's work and ideas, and started to develop shared narratives.

The event was funded by the Universities of Warwick, Toronto and Cologne. In order to make the event more accessible, those of us with access to university research monies made a contribution to the costs so that we could offer travel bursaries to freelance creatives and early career researchers who would otherwise be self-funded. Our programme included colleagues from the UK, Canada, Germany, Mexico and the Netherlands, based in a range of university disciplines, theatres, activist groups and as freelance actors, directors, visual artists and a rap artist. The research that workshop participants were engaged in spanned a range of creative practices that might be described as arts-led, including acting and theatre, creative writing, drawing, painting, film, music, textiles and costume. From the inception of this project, we have been particularly interested in work that emphasises creative methods as (a part of) research, i.e., as modes of knowledge production, rather than dissemination alone, and this was very much in evidence across the workshop sessions. The full programme and abstracts are available online on the workshop website.

In the first session, *Co-creating visual representations of safety and policing*, Timothy Bryan (University of Toronto, Canada) presented his work “Imagining the Street: Exploring Safety and Danger through Participant Produced Street Scenes.” This project used visual methodologies (here participant-produced

* <https://bundesstiftung-friedensforschung.de/blog/compare/>

drawings) to elicit nuanced understandings of street safety and danger in urban and rural areas in the province of Nova Scotia, Canada. These were more than literal images of the places people lived. They represented both personal memory and experience, but also cultural values and meaning in ways that would be difficult to capture in the more linear sequencing of words. As a multi-method project, the drawings complemented and anchored the narratives in participant interviews. They also allowed the researchers to explore different scenarios of safety, asking, for example, whether people would feel more or less safe if an image of a police officer was inserted into their drawing: for most, it represented less safety.

The next presentation was by Adina Radosh Sverdlin (University of Toronto, Canada), also representing her co-author Jacqueline Gutiérrez Martínez (Public Security Secretariat of Nuevo León, Mexico) who was unable to be present in Warwick but created a zine to introduce herself to workshop participants. Their project “Growing Up beside the Uniform: Police Officers’ Children Reflect through Art” considered the impact on officers’ children of police domestic violence in Mexico. They carried out 24 artistic workshop sessions, creating safe spaces in which children could reflect on their experiences as well as gain communication skills. The researchers described the challenges of cross-sector funding and of engaging the children with interesting tasks, as well as wider ethical concerns in working with young and potentially vulnerable people. They considered how this more creative approach allowed them to reflect on the impacts of institutional and occupational violence, and on the violent dynamics that officers sometimes inflicted on their own families.

In the second session, *Visual and collaborative methods in the courtroom*, Tasniem Anwar (Vrije Universiteit, Netherlands) was unable to be present to give her paper “The Courtroom as a Landscape,” so the final presentation of the day was made by Sophie Marois (University of Toronto, Canada), also representing her co-authors Fabrice Fernandez, Stéphanie Gariépy and Sarah Arnal (Université Laval, Canada). She spoke about “Elements of a Collective Ethno/graphic Approach to Political Ethnographies of Justice” in relation to observing the trial of the 2017 Québec City mosque shooting. The researchers were three sociologists and a visual artist, Sarah Arnal. This was a collaborative ethnography, in which the visual images were not designed simply to illustrate the courtroom, but rather, to work in dialogue with the sociological analysis and to provide their own interpretive lens attuned to the spatial, temporal and affective textures of the trial. Sophie described the ways that court professionals sought to discipline courtroom discourses and behaviours of the victims’ families — ordering them not to hold hands, for example. The visual representations were able to capture the poignancy of these emotional and intimate moments, adding another layer to the ethnographic account of the trial.

The second day began with session three, *Creative writing in police research*, which explored the use of creative writing approaches in narrating and documenting legal encounters. Building on ethnographic research involving observations of day-to-day policing practices and officer interactions with citizens, Silke Müller (Sociologist, Trier, Germany), narrated these observations through the fictional character “Andreas Grus” who is being sought by police after a domestic dispute in “Creative Writing in Response to the Limits of Police Research.” Utilising the imaginative channel of creative writing, Silke illustrated the emotional and relational depth of police-citizen encounters — particularly with marginalised people, showing how fear, anxiety, humour and even boredom, shape police encounters. These perspectives are often not depicted in traditional scholarly production on policing. In weaving real ethnographic insights into an

imaginative fictional story, Silke showed how creative writing provides a means through which to grasp the complex, contradictory, and nuanced nature of state power and the social world. In the second presentation of this session, Rhiannon White (Common/Wealth Theatre Company, UK) and Chris Brian (Undercover Research Group, UK) explored two approaches to bringing socio-legal processes to life in “Writing and Performing the #Spycops Scandal.” Taking the ‘Spycops Scandal’ as its object of focus, the presentation showed how memoirs and political theatre offer new ways of narrating stories of police injustice, providing alternatives to official state discourses by placing first-hand accounts of infiltration at their centre. The presenters revealed how, through memoirs, reporting can combine with compelling personal narratives in powerful ways; how interactive stage performances can enable audiences to think about their own relationship to police surveillance; and how centring the testimony of activists in online archives can deepen public understandings of police practices.

Session four, *Creative and arts-based approaches to police emotion*, included three presentations. Sarah-Jane Lennie and Lucy Davies (Anglia Ruskin University, UK) had a joint paper which was presented by Sarah-Jane Lennie: “Psychodrama and Sociodrama: Beneficial Methodologies for both Participant and Researcher in Police Research.” Drawing on her experience as a former police officer, Sarah-Jane began her presentation by discussing the post-traumatic stress disorder she had witnessed among many colleagues. Her presentation situated these experiences within a professional culture and structure in which emotions are often considered as weaknesses. To address this, she introduced the methods of psychodrama and sociodrama, which consist of guided dramatic action, either individually or in groups, as critical action research. Sarah-Jane emphasised the value of these approaches in revealing emotional experiences and social dynamics in environments characterised by strong hierarchies and organisational silencing.

Lucy Davies, also from Anglia Ruskin University, UK, then presented her paper, “Silenced Voices: Exploring the Emotional Impact of Trauma and its Role in Police Decision-Making.” She used the method of audio diaries to gain insight into police misconduct, which she defined as behaviour that violates a professional standard of ethical code of conduct. In her work, she examined how decision-making is shaped by emotions and cognition. The audio diary method she employed to study these processes evolved from more commonly used written diary formats. Ten UK police officers completed them by answering guided questions, for example, about the dedication of their time and their day-to-day work. Lucy reflected on the advantages and challenges of this emerging research method. One of the strongest features of the method, for example, was that officers often seemed to share more, as they could record themselves when they were alone and without interruption.

In the final presentation in this session, Jackie Hodgson and Rachel Lewis (University of Warwick, UK), with Jen Davis (Director, Freelance, UK) and Yasmin Dawes (Actor, Freelance, UK) presented their work titled “Arts-Based Approaches to Police Engagement with Racism.” They described how a variety of creative methods, including forum theatre and creative writing, were used to explore themes around racism in policing through five three-hour workshop sessions with officers from across West Midlands Police. By responding to, and participating in, dramatic narratives based on Jackie and Rachel’s research findings, officers were challenged to imagine and play out the changes necessary for an anti-racist police force — the stated objective of West Midlands Police. Jen and Yasmin shared their experiences of taking on creative roles in research and training contexts. They then performed a scene from a script written by officers as part of the workshop, in which the police officer’s lack of empathy was contrasted in stark

terms with the lived experience of a young girl whose home had been raided by the firearms police, leaving her family's life in tatters.

Sessions five and six explored *Creative collaborations in research on protest and social control*. To set the stage for the fifth session, performer and researcher Wiebke Acton guided workshop participants through a series of theatrical community-building group exercises. The interdisciplinary group of researchers, consisting of Wiebke Acton (University of Leeds, UK), Nicole Bögelein (University of Cologne, Germany), Louise Earnshaw (University of Leeds, UK), and Ingrid Sharp (University of Leeds, UK), then shared the process that led them to co-create the short film, *Ways of Knowing*. Through sharing experiences from their various research projects on violence, crime, protest, and activism, alongside excerpts from the film, the speakers explained the ways in which embodied research methods fostered a spirit of collaboration within their team and deepened their connection to their respective research processes and topics.

During the sixth session, Aleksandra Barjaktarević (University of Heidelberg, Germany) and PTK (music artist, Germany) presented their work, "On Harmonising Sociological and Arts-Based Research: The Role of Music in Political Action for Refugee Rights." Their presentation highlighted the strength of arts-based and sociological collaboration through the case study of the Berlin-based music collective Antinational Embassy, born out of the 2013 occupation of a local school by and for refugees and asylum seekers. Examining the role of music in political action for refugee rights, they emphasised that musical production is not subordinate to sociological analysis, but rather a complementary heuristic in scientific enquiry and theorising. Their presentation featured videos of music samples and insights from rap-writing workshops. The sixth session—and broader workshop—came to an end with a presentation from David Lydon (Canterbury Christ Church University, UK) titled, "The 'Magic' of Emotion: Researching and Representing the Emotions of Protest and Activism through Creative Methods." The project centred on a large 3D photomontage of Extinction Rebellion protests, which participants were able to view in the conference room from the first day of the workshop. During his presentation, David situated this visual criminological work within a tradition of existentialist scholarship attentive to what Jean-Paul Sartre described as the "magic" of emotion, an approach that aims to capture the emotion of protest in the face of climate catastrophe. In an ode to epistemological anarchism, David concluded the workshop by calling for methodological pluralism and creativity.

After two days of exchange and discussions, the workshop ended. But as the discussions were so lively and there was agreement that more exchange was needed, three of the organisers Jackie Hodgson, Sophie Marois and Nicole Bögelein are planning a special issue in the *Journal of Creative Research Methods*. The call for abstracts is out and due to be answered by 9 February 2026. Anyone who works on the topic is invited to contribute.²

Kontakt | Contact

Jacqueline S. Hodgson | University of Warwick | School of Law | jackie.hodgson@warwick.ac.uk

² https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/copr/special-issue-call/final_call_for_proposals.pdf

Sophie Marois | University of Toronto | Department of Sociology | sophie.marois@mail.utoronto.ca

Nicole Bögelein | University of Cologne | Institute of Criminology | nicole.boegelein@uni-koeln.de

Timothy Bryan | University of Toronto | Department of Sociology | t.bryan@utoronto.ca