6

The Artist as Ethnographer

One of the most important interventions in the relation between artistic authority and cultural politics is "The Author as Producer" by Walter Benjamin, first presented as a lecture in April 1934 at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris. There, under the influence of the epic theater of Bertolt Brecht and the factographic experiments of Soviet writers like Sergei Tretiakov, Benjamin called on the artist on the left "to side with the proletariat."[1] In Paris in 1934 this call was not radical; the approach, however, was. For Benjamin urged the "advanced" artist to intervene, like the revolutionary worker, in the means of artistic production—to change the "technique" of traditional media, to transform the "apparatus" of bourgeois culture. A correct "tendency" was not enough; that was to assume a place "beside the proletariat." And "what kind of place is that?" Benjamin asked in lines that still scathe. "That of a benefactor, of an ideological patron—an impossible place."

Several oppositions govern this famous argument. Behind the privileging of "technique" over "theme" and "position" over "tendency" lies an implicit privileging of productivism over *proletkult,* two rival movements in the early Soviet Union. Productivism worked to develop a new proletarian culture through an extension of constructivist formal experiments into actual industrial

production; in this way it sought to *overthrow* bourgeois art and culture altogether. No less committed politically, *proletkult* worked to develop a proletarian culture in the more traditional sense of the word; it sought to *surpass* bourgeois art and culture. For Benjamin this was not enough: again implicitly, he charged movements like *proletkult* with an ideological patronage that positioned the worker as passive other.[2] However difficult, the solidarity with producers that counted for Benjamin was solidarity in material practice, not in artistic theme or political attitude alone.

A glance at this text reveals that two oppositions that still plague the reception of art—aesthetic quality versus political relevance, form versus content—were "familiar and unfruitful" as long ago as 1934. Benjamin sought to overcome these oppositions in *representation* through the third term of *production,* but neither opposition has disappeared. In the early 1980s some artists and critics returned to "Author as Producer" to work through contemporary versions of these antitheses (e.g., theory versus activism).[3] This reading of Benjamin thus differed from his reception in the late 1970s; in a retracing of his own trajectory, allegorical disruptions of image and text were pushed toward cultural-political interventions. As Benjamin had responded to the aestheticization of politics under fascism, so these artists and critics responded to the capitalization of culture and privatization of society under Reagan, Thatcher, Kohl, and company—even as these transformations made such intervention more difficult. Indeed, when this intervention was not restricted to the art apparatus alone, its strategies were more situationist than productivist—that is, more concerned with reinscriptions of given representations.[4]

This is not to say that symbolic actions were not effective; many were, especially in the middle to late 1980s, around the AIDS crisis, abortion rights, and apartheid (I think of projects by ACT-UP artist groups, posters by Barbara Kruger, projections by Krzysztof Wodiczko). But they are not my subject here. Rather, I want to suggest that a new paradigm structurally similar to the old "Author as Producer" model has emerged in advanced art on the left: *the artist as ethnographer.*

The Cultural Politics of Alterity

In this new paradigm the object of contestation remains in large part the bourgeois-capitalist institution of art (the museum, the academy, the market, and the media), its exclusionary definitions of art and artist, identity and community. But the subject of association has changed: it is the cultural and/or ethnic other in whose name the committed artist most often struggles. However subtle it may seem, this shift from a subject defined in terms of *economic relation* to one defined in terms of *cultural identity* is significant, and I will comment further on it below. Here, however, the parallels between these two paradigms must be traced, for some assumptions of the old producer model persist, sometimes problematically, in the new ethnographer paradigm. First is the assumption that the site of political transformation is the site of artistic transformation as well, and that political vanguards *locate* artistic vanguards and, under certain circumstances, substitute for them. (This myth is basic to leftist accounts of modern art: it idealizes Jacques Louis David in the French Revolution, Gustave Courbet in the Paris Commune, Vladimir Tatlin in the Russian Revolution, and so on.)[5] Second is the assumption that this site is always *elsewhere*, in the field of the other—in the producer model, with the social other, the exploited proletariat; in the ethnographer paradigm, with the cultural other, the oppressed postcolonial, subaltern, or subcultural—and that this elsewhere, this outside, is the Archimedean point from which the dominant culture will be transformed or at least *subverted*. Third is the assumption that if the invoked artist is *not* perceived as socially and/or culturally other, he or she has but limited access to this transformative alterity, and that if he or she *is* perceived as other, he or she has automatic access to it. Taken together, these three assumptions may lead to a less desired point of connection with the Benjaminian account of the author as producer: the danger, for the artist as ethnographer, of "ideological patronage."[6]

This danger may stem from the assumed split in identity between the author and the worker or the artist and the other, but it may also arise in the very identification (or, to use the old language, commitment) undertaken to

overcome this split. For example, the *proletkult* author might be a mere fellow traveler of the worker not because of any essential difference in identity but because identification with the worker alienates the worker, confirms rather than closes the gap between the two through a reductive, idealistic, or otherwise misbegotten representation. (This othering in identification, in representation, concerns Benjamin about *proletkult*.) A related othering may occur with the artist as ethnographer vis-à-vis the cultural other. Certainly the danger of ideological patronage is no less for the artist identified as other than for the author identified as proletarian. In fact this danger may deepen then, for the artist may be asked to assume the roles of native and informant as well as ethnographer. In short, identity is not the same as identification, and the apparent simplicities of the first should not be substituted for the actual complications of the second.

A strict Marxist might question the informant/ethnographer paradigm in art because it displaces the problematic of class and capitalist exploitation with that of race and colonialist oppression, or, more simply, because it displaces the social with the cultural or the anthropological. A strict poststructuralist might question this paradigm for the opposite reason: because it does not displace the producer problematic enough, because it tends to preserve its structure of the political—to retain the notion of a *subject* of history, to define this position in terms of *truth,* and to locate this truth in terms of *alterity* (again, this is the politics of the other, first projected, then appropriated, that interests me here).

From this poststructuralist perspective the ethnographer paradigm, like the producer model, fails to reflect on its *realist assumption:* that the other, here postcolonial, there proletarian, is somehow in reality, in truth, not in ideology, because he or she is socially oppressed, politically transformative, and/or materially productive. (For example, in 1957 Roland Barthes, who later became the foremost critic of the realist assumption, wrote: "There is therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as a producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of things, metalanguage is referred to a language-object, and myth is impossible. This is why revolutionary

language proper cannot be mythical."[7]) Often this realist assumption is compounded by a *primitivist fantasy:* that the other, usually assumed to be of color, has special access to primary psychic and social processes from which the white subject is somehow blocked—a fantasy that is as fundamental to primitivist modernisms as the realist assumption is to productivist modernisms.[8] In some contexts both myths are effective, even necessary: the realist assumption to claim the truth of one political position or the reality of one social oppression, and the primitivist fantasy to challenge repressive conventions of sexuality and aesthetics. Yet the automatic coding of apparent difference as manifest identity and of otherness as outsideness must be questioned. For not only might this coding essentialize identity, but it might also restrict the identification so important to cultural affiliation and political alliance (identification is not always ideological patronage).

There are two important precedents of the ethnographer paradigm in contemporary art where the primitivist fantasy is most active: the dissident surrealism associated with Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the *négritude* movement associated with Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In different ways both movements connected the transgressive potential of the unconscious with the radical alterity of the cultural other. Thus Bataille related self-destructive drives in the unconscious to sacrificial expenditures in other cultures, while Senghor opposed an emotionality fundamental to African cultures to a rationality fundamental to European traditions.[9] However disruptive in context, these primitivist associations came to limit both movements. Dissident surrealism may have explored cultural otherness, but only in part to indulge in a ritual of self-othering (the classic instance is *L'Afrique fantôme,* the "self-ethnography" performed by Leiris on the French ethnographic-museological mission from Dakar to Djibouti in 1931).[10] So, too, the *négritude* movement may have revalued cultural otherness, but only in part to be constrained by this second nature, by its essentialist stereotypes of blackness, emotionality, African versus European, and so on (these problems were first articulated by Frantz Fanon and later developed by Wole Soyinka and others).[11]

Renée Green, *Import/Export Funk Office,* 1992, detail.

In quasi-anthropological art today the primitivist association of unconscious and other rarely exists in these ways. Sometimes the fantasy is taken up as such, critically, as in *Seen* (1990) by Renée Green, where the viewer is placed before two European fantasms of excessive African (American) female sexuality, the mid-nineteenth-century Hottentot Venus (represented by an autopsy) and the early-twentieth-century jazz dancer Josephine Baker (photographed in a famous nude pose), or in *Vanilla Nightmares* (1986) by Adrian Piper, where the racialist fantasms invoked in *New York Times* fashion advertisements become so many black specters to delight and terrify white consumers. Yet sometimes, too, the primitivist fantasy becomes absorbed into the realist assumption, so that now *the other* is held to be *dans le vrai*. This primitivist version of the realist assumption, this siting of political truth in a projected other or outside, has problematic effects beyond the automatic coding of identity vis-à-vis alterity noted above. First, this outside is not other in any simple sense. Second, this siting of politics as outside and other, as transcendental opposition, may distract from a politics of here and now, of immanent contestation.

First is the problem of the *projection* of this outside-other. In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (1983) Johannes Fabian argues that anthropology was founded on a mythical mapping of time onto space based on two presumptions: "1. Time is immanent to, hence coextensive with, the world (or nature, or the universe, depending on the argument); 2. Relationships between parts of the world (in the widest sense of both natural and sociocultural entities) can be understood as temporal relations. Dispersal in space reflects directly, which is not to say simply or in obvious ways, sequence in Time."[12] With space and time thus mapped onto one another, "over there" became "back then," and the most remote (as measured from some Greenwich Mean of European Civilization) became the most primitive. This mapping of the primitive was manifestly racist: in the Western white imaginary its site was always dark. It remains tenacious, however, because it is fundamental to narratives of history-as-development and civilization-as-hierarchy. These nineteenth-century narratives are residual in discourses like psychoanalysis and disciplines like art history, which still often assume a connection between the (ontogenetic) development

of the individual and the (phylogenetic) development of the species (as in human civilization, world art, and so on). In this association the primitive is first projected by the Western white subject as a primal stage in *cultural* history and then reabsorbed as a primal stage in *individual* history. (Thus in *Totem and Taboo* [1913], with its subtitle "Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics," Freud presents the primitive as "a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development.")[13] Again, this association of the primitive and the prehistoric and/or the pre-Oedipal, the other and the unconscious, *is* the primitivist fantasy. However revalued by Freud, where we neurotics may also be savage, or by Bataille and Leiris or Senghor and Césaire, where such otherness is the best part of us, this fantasy is not deconstructed. *And to the extent that the primitivist fantasy is not disarticulated, to the extent that the other remains conflated with the unconscious, explorations of alterity to this day will "other" the self in old ways in which the other remains the foil of the self (however troubled this self may be in the process) more than "selve" the other in new ways in which difference is allowed, even appreciated (perhaps through a recognition of an alterity in the self).* In this sense, too, the primitivist fantasy may live on in quasi-anthropological art.

Then there is the problem of the *politics* of this outside-other. Today in our global economy the assumption of a pure outside is almost impossible. This is not to totalize our world system prematurely, but to specify both resistance and innovation as immanent relations rather than transcendental events. Long ago Fanon saw an inadvertent confirmation of European culture in the oppositional logic of the *négritude* movement, but only recently have postcolonial artists and critics pushed practice and theory from binary structures of otherness to relational models of difference, from discrete space-times to mixed border zones.[14]

This move was difficult because it runs counter to the old politics of alterity. Basic to much modernism, this appropriation of the other persists in much postmodernism. In *The Myth of the Other* (1978) Italian philosopher Franco Rella argues that theorists as diverse as Lacan, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari idealize the other as the negation of the same—with deleterious effects on cultural politics. This work often assumes dominant definitions of the

negative and/or the deviant even as it moves to revalue them.[15] So, too, it often allows rhetorical reversals of dominant definitions to stand for politics as such. More generally, this idealization of otherness tends to follow a temporal line in which one group is privileged as the new subject of history, only to be displaced by another, a chronology that may collapse not only different differences (social, ethnic, sexual, and so on) but also different positions within each difference.[16] The result is a politics that may *consume* its historical subjects before they become historically effective.

This Hegelianism of the other is not only active in modernism and postmodernism; it may be structural to the modern subject. In a celebrated passage in *The Order of Things* (1966) Michel Foucault argues that this subject, this modern man that emerges in the nineteenth century, differs from the classical subject of Cartesian and Kantian philosophies because he seeks his truth in the *un*thought—the unconscious and the other (this is the philosophical basis of the primitivist crossing of the two). "An unveiling of the nonconscious," Foucault writes, "is the truth of all the sciences of man," and this is why such unveilings as psychoanalysis and anthropology are the most privileged of modern discourses.[17] In this light the othering of the self, past and present, is only a partial challenge to the modern subject, for this othering also buttresses the self through romantic opposition, conserves the self through dialectical appropriation, extends the self through surrealist exploration, prolongs the self through poststructuralist troubling, and so on.[18] Just as the *elaboration* of psychoanalysis and anthropology was fundamental to modern discourses (modernist art included), so the *critique* of these human sciences is crucial to postmodern discourses (postmodernist art included); as I suggested in chapter 1, the two are in a relation of deferred action. Yet this critique, which is a critique of the subject, is still centered on the subject, and *it still centers the subject*.[19] In *The Savage Mind* (1962) Claude Lévi-Strauss predicts that man will be *dissolved* in the structural-linguistic refashioning of the human sciences.[20] At the end of *The Order of Things* Foucault reiterates this famous prediction with his bold image of man "erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea." Intentionally or not, might the psychoanalytic-anthropological turn in contemporary practice and theory work

to *restore* this figure? Have we not slipped back into what Foucault calls "our anthropological sleep?"[21]

No doubt the othering of the self is crucial to critical practices in anthropology, art, and politics; at least in conjunctures such as the surrealist one, the use of anthropology as auto-analysis (as in Leiris) or social critique (as in Bataille) is culturally transgressive, even politically significant. But clearly too there are dangers. For then as now self-othering can flip into self-absorption, in which the project of an "ethnographic self-fashioning" becomes the practice of a narcissistic self-refurbishing.[22] To be sure, reflexivity can disturb automatic assumptions about subject-positions, but it can also promote a masquerade of this disturbance: a vogue for traumatic confessional in theory that is sometimes sensibility criticism come again, or a vogue for pseudo-ethnographic reports in art that are sometimes disguised travelogues from the world art market. Who in the academy or the art world has not witnessed these testimonies of the new empathetic intellectual or these *flâneries* of the new nomadic artist?[23]

Art and Theory in the Age of Anthropological Studies

What has happened here? What misrecognitions have passed between anthropology and art and other discourses? One can point to a virtual theater of projections and reflections over the last two decades at least. First some critics of anthropology developed a kind of artist envy (the enthusiasm of James Clifford for the intercultural collages of "ethnographic surrealism" is an influential instance).[24] In this envy the artist became a paragon of formal reflexivity, a self-aware reader of *culture understood as text.* But is the artist the exemplar here, or is this figure not a projection of an ideal ego of the anthropologist: the anthropologist as collagist, semiologist, avant-gardist?[25] In other words, might this artist envy be a self-idealization in which the anthropologist is remade as an artistic interpreter of the cultural text? Rarely does this projection stop there in the new anthropology or, for that matter, in cultural studies or in new historicism. Often it extends to the object of these studies, the cultural other, who is also reconfigured to reflect an ideal image of the anthropologist, critic, or historian.

This projection is hardly new to anthropology: some classics of the discipline presented entire cultures as collective artists or read them as aesthetic patterns of symbolic practices (*Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict [1934] is only one example). But at least the old anthropology projected openly; the new anthropology persists in these projections, only it deems them critical, even deconstructive.

Of course the new anthropology understands culture differently, as text, which is to say that its projection onto other cultures is as textualist as it is aestheticist. This textual model is supposed to challenge "ethnographic authority" through "discursive paradigms of dialogue and polyphony."[26] However, long ago in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) Pierre Bourdieu questioned the structuralist version of this textual model because it reduced "social relations to communicative relations and, more precisely, to decoding operations" and so rendered the ethnographic reader *more* authoritative, not less.[27] Indeed, this "ideology of the text," this recoding of practice as discourse, persists in the new anthropology as well as in quasi-anthropological art, as it does in cultural studies and new historicism, despite the contextualist ambitions that also drive these methods.[28]

Recently the old artist envy among anthropologists has turned the other way: a new ethnographer envy consumes many artists and critics. If anthropologists wanted to exploit the textual model in cultural interpretation, these artists and critics aspire to fieldwork in which theory and practice seem to be reconciled. Often they draw indirectly on basic principles of the participant-observer tradition, among which Clifford notes a critical focus on a particular institution and a narrative tense that favors "the ethnographic present."[29] Yet these borrowings are only signs of the ethnographic turn in contemporary art and criticism. What *drives* it?

There are many engagements of the other in twentieth-century art, most of which are primitivist, bound up in the politics of alterity: in surrealism, where the other is figured expressly in terms of the unconscious; in the *art brut* of Jean Dubuffet, where the other represents a redemptive anti-civilizational resource; in abstract expressionism, where the other stands for the primal exem-

plar of all artists; and variously in art in the 1960s and 1970s (the allusion to prehistoric art in some earthworks, the art world as anthropological site in some conceptual and institution-critical art, the invention of archaeological sites and anthropological civilizations by Anne and Patrick Poirier, Charles Simonds, many others).[30] So what distinguishes the present turn, apart from its relative self-consciousness about ethnographic method? First, as we have seen, anthropology is prized as the science of *alterity;* in this regard it is, along with psychoanalysis, the lingua franca of artistic practice and critical discourse alike. Second, it is the discipline that takes *culture* as its object, and this expanded field of reference is the domain of postmodernist practice and theory (thus also the attraction to cultural studies and, to a lesser extent, new historicism). Third, ethnography is considered *contextual,* the often automatic demand for which contemporary artists and critics share with other practitioners today, many of whom aspire to fieldwork in the everyday. Fourth, anthropology is thought to arbitrate the *interdisciplinary,* another often rote value in contemporary art and criticism. Fifth, the recent *self-critique* of anthropology renders it attractive, for it promises a reflexivity of the ethnographer at the center even as it preserves a romanticism of the other at the margins. For all these reasons rogue investigations of anthropology, like queer critiques of psychoanalysis, possess vanguard status: it is along these lines that the critical edge is felt to cut most incisively.

Yet the ethnographic turn is clinched by another factor, which involves the double inheritance of anthropology. In *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976) Marshall Sahlins argues that two epistemologies have long divided the discipline: one stresses symbolic logic, with the social understood mostly in terms of exchange systems; the other privileges practical reason, with the social understood mostly in terms of material culture.[31] In this light anthropology *already* participates in the two contradictory models that dominate contemporary art and criticism: on the one hand, in the old ideology of the text, the linguistic turn in the 1960s that reconfigured the social as symbolic order and/or cultural system and advanced "the dissolution of man," "the death of the author," and so on; and, on the other hand, in the recent longing for the referent, the turn to context and identity that opposes the old text paradigms and subject

critiques. *With a turn to this split discourse of anthropology, artists and critics can resolve these contradictory models magically: they can take up the guises of cultural semiologist and contextual fieldworker, they can continue and condemn critical theory, they can relativize and recenter the subject, all at the same time.* In our current state of artistic-theoretical ambivalences and cultural-political impasses, anthropology is the compromise discourse of choice.[32]

Again, this ethnographer envy is shared by many critics, especially in cultural studies and new historicism, who assume the role of ethnographer usually in disguised form: the cultural-studies ethnographer dressed down as a fellow fan (for reasons of political solidarity, but with great social anxiety); the new-historicist ethnographer dressed up as a master archivist (for reasons of scholarly respectability, but with great professional arrogance). First some anthropologists adapted textual methods from literary criticism in order to reformulate culture as text; then some literary critics adapted ethnographic methods in order to reformulate texts as cultures writ small. And these exchanges have accounted for much interdisciplinary work in the recent past.[33] But there are two problems with this theater of projections and reflections, the first methodological, the second ethical. If both textual and ethnographic turns depended on a single discourse, how truly *inter*disciplinary can the results be? If cultural studies and new historicism often smuggle in an ethnographic model (when not a sociological one), might it be "the *common theoretical ideology* that silently inhabits the 'consciousness' of all these specialists . . . oscillating between a vague spiritualism and a technocratic positivism"?[34] The second problem, broached above, is more serious. When the other is admired as playful in representation, subversive of gender, and so on, might it be a projection of the anthropologist, artist, critic, or historian? In this case an ideal practice might be projected onto the field of the other, which is then asked to reflect it as if it were not only authentically indigenous but innovatively political.

In part this is a projection of my own, and the application of new and old ethnographic methods has illuminated much. But it has also obliterated much in the field of the other, and in its name. This is the opposite of a critique of ethnographic authority, indeed the opposite of ethnographic method, at least

as I understand them. And this "impossible place," as Benjamin called it long ago, is a common occupation of many anthropologists, artists, critics, and historians.

The Siting of Contemporary Art

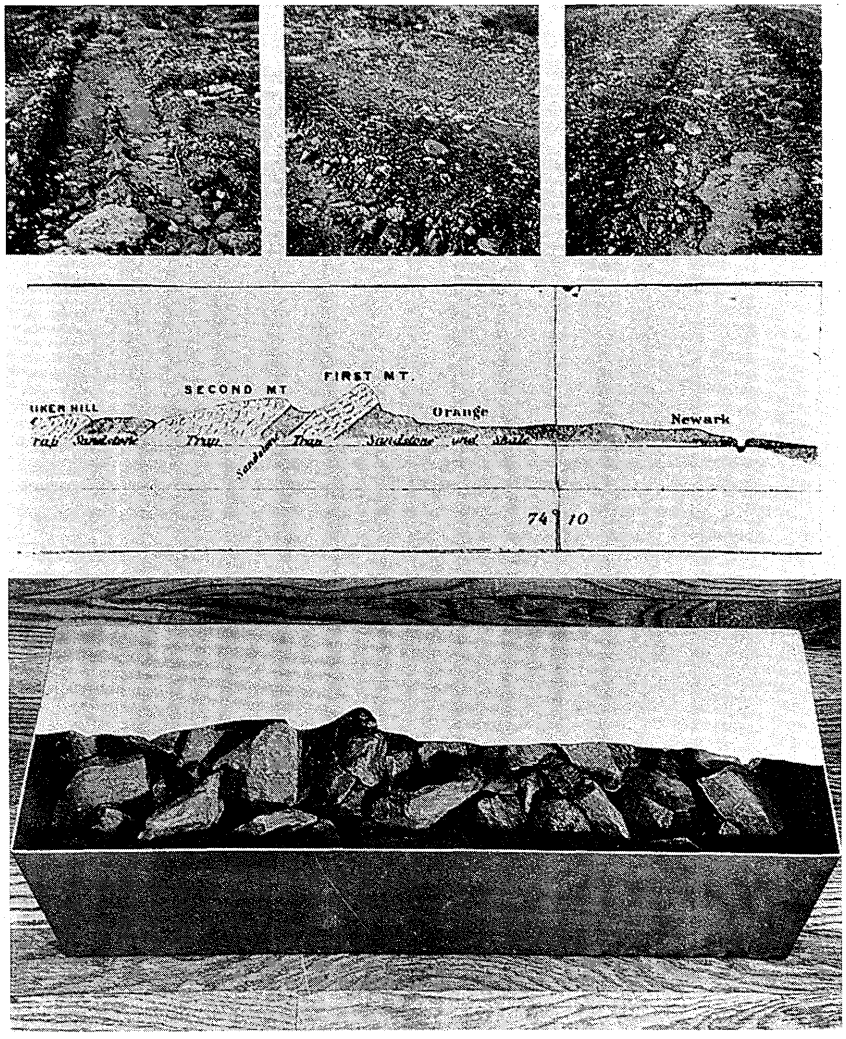
The ethnographic turn in contemporary art is also driven by developments within the minimalist genealogy of art over the last thirty-five years. These developments constitute a sequence of investigations: first of the material constituents of the art medium, then of its spatial conditions of perception, and then of the corporeal bases of this perception—shifts marked in minimalist art in the early 1960s through conceptual, performance, body, and site-specific art in the early 1970s. Soon the institution of art could no longer be described only in spatial terms (studio, gallery, museum, and so on); it was also a discursive network of different practices and institutions, other subjectivities and communities. Nor could the observer of art be delimited only in phenomenological terms; he or she was also a social subject defined in language and marked by difference (economic, ethnic, sexual, and so on). Of course the breakdown of restrictive definitions of art and artist, identity and community, was also pressured by social movements (civil rights, various feminisms, queer politics, multiculturalism) as well as theoretical developments (the convergence of feminism, psychoanalysis, and film theory; the recovery of Antonio Gramsci and the development of cultural studies in Britain; the applications of Louis Althusser, Lacan, and Foucault, especially in the British journal *Screen;* the development of postcolonial discourse with Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and others; and so on). Thus did art pass into the expanded field of culture that anthropology is thought to survey.

These developments also constitute a series of shifts in the *siting* of art: from the surface of the medium to the space of the museum, from institutional frames to discursive networks, to the point where many artists and critics treat conditions like desire or disease, AIDS or homelessness, as sites for art.[35] Along with this figure of siting has come the analogy of *mapping.* In an important

moment Robert Smithson and others pushed this cartographic operation to a geological extreme that transformed the siting of art dramatically. Yet this siting had limits too: it could be recouped by gallery and museum, it played to the myth of the redemptive artist (a very traditional site), and so on. Otherwise mapping in recent art has tended toward the sociological and the anthropological, to the point where an ethnographic mapping of an institution or a community is a primary form of site-specific art today.

Sociological mapping is implicit in some conceptual art, sometimes in a parodic way, from the laconic recording of *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* by Ed Ruscha (1963) to the quixotic project of Douglas Huebler to photograph every human being (*Variable Piece: 70*). An important example here is *Homes for America* by Dan Graham, a report (published in a 1966–67 *Arts* magazine) of modular repetitions in a tract-housing development that reframes minimalist structures as found objects in a technocratic suburb. Sociological mapping is more explicit in much institutional critique, especially in the work of Hans Haacke, from the polls and profiles of gallery and museumgoers and the exposés of real-estate moguls in New York (1969–73) through the pedigrees of masterpiece collectors (1974–75) to the investigations of arrangements among museums, corporations, and governments. However, while this work questions social authority incisively, it does not reflect on sociological authority.

This is less true of work that examines the authority arrogated in documentary modes of representation. In a videotape like *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained* (1976) and in a photo-text like *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974–75), Martha Rosler belies the apparent objectivity of medical statistics regarding the female body and of sociological descriptions concerning the destitute alcoholic. Recently she has also pushed this critical use of documentary modes toward the geopolitical concerns that have long driven the work of Allan Sekula. In a cycle of three photo-text sequences in particular, Sekula traces the connections between German borders and Cold War politics (*Sketch for a Geography Lesson,* 1983), a mining industry and a financial institution (*Canadian Notes,* 1986), and maritime space and global economics (*Fish Story,*



Robert Smithson, *Six Stops on a Section,* 1968, photo, map, bin.

Each block of houses is a self-contained sequence — there is no development — selected from the possible acceptable arrangements. As an example, if a section was to contain eight houses of which four model types were to be used, any of these permutational possibilities could be used:

AABBCCDD	ABCDABCD
AABBDDCC	ABDCABDC
AACCBBDD	ACBDACBD
AACCDDBB	ACDBACDB
AADDCCBB	ADBCADBC
AADDBBCC	ADCBADCB
BBAACCDD	BADCBADC
BBAADDCC	BACDBACD
BBCCAADD	BCADBCAD
BBCCDDAA	BCDABCDA
BBDDAACC	BDACBDAC
BBDDCCAA	BDCABDCA
CCAABBDD	CABDCABD
CCAADDBB	CADBCADB
CCBBDDAA	CBADCBAD
CCBBAADD	CBDACBDA
CCDDAABB	CDABCDAB
CCDDBBAA	CDBACDBA
DDAABBCC	DACBDACB
DDAACCBB	DABCDABC
DDBBAACC	DBACDBAC
DDBBCCAA	DBCADBCA
DDCCAABB	DCABDCAB
DDCCBBAA	DCBADCBA

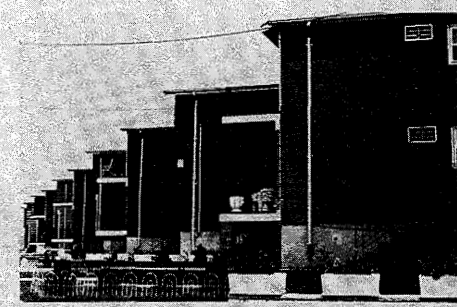
The eight color variables were equally distributed among the house exteriors. The first buyers were more likely to have obtained their first choice in color. Family units had to make a choice based on the available colors which also took account of both husband and wife's likes and dislikes. Adult male and female color likes and dislikes were compared in a survey of the homeowners:

'LIKE'

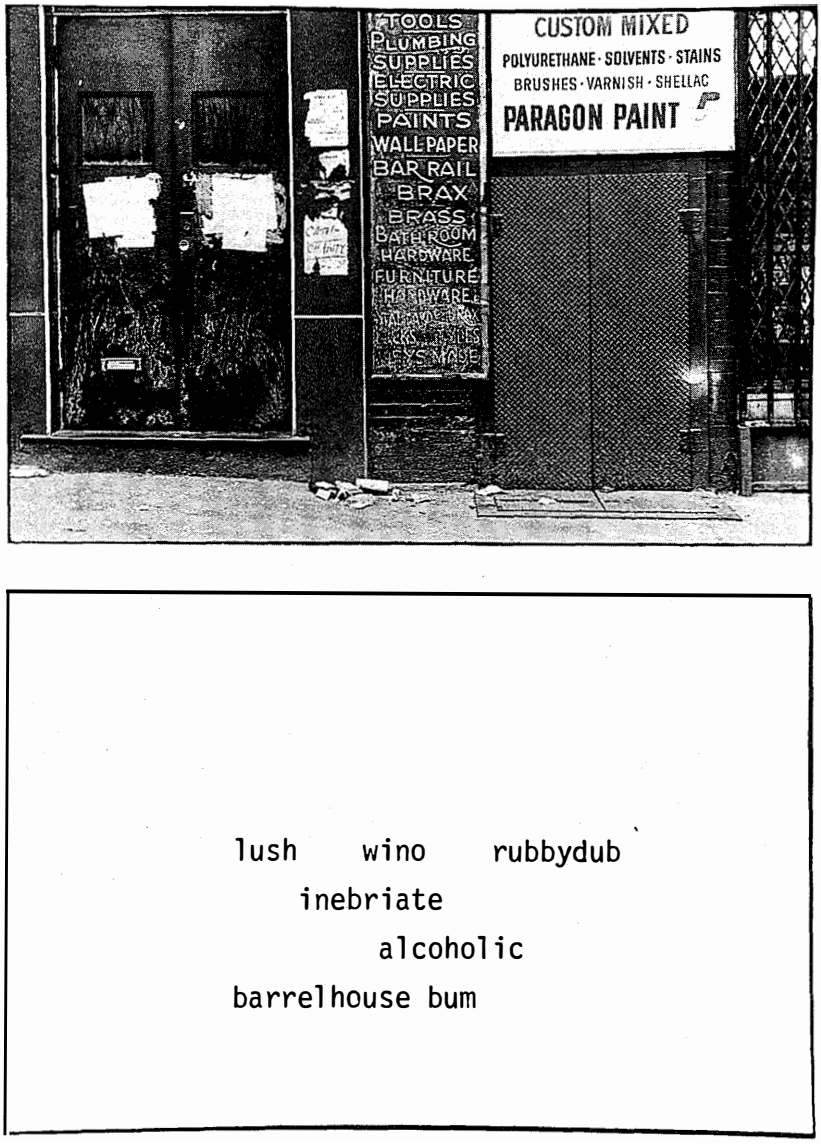
Female	Male
Skyway Blue	Skyway Blue
Lawn Green	Colonial Red
Nickle	Patio White
Colonial Red	Yellow Chiffon
Yellow Chiffon	Lawn Green
Patio White	Nickle
Moonstone Grey	Fawn
Fawn	Moonstone Grey

'DISLIKE'

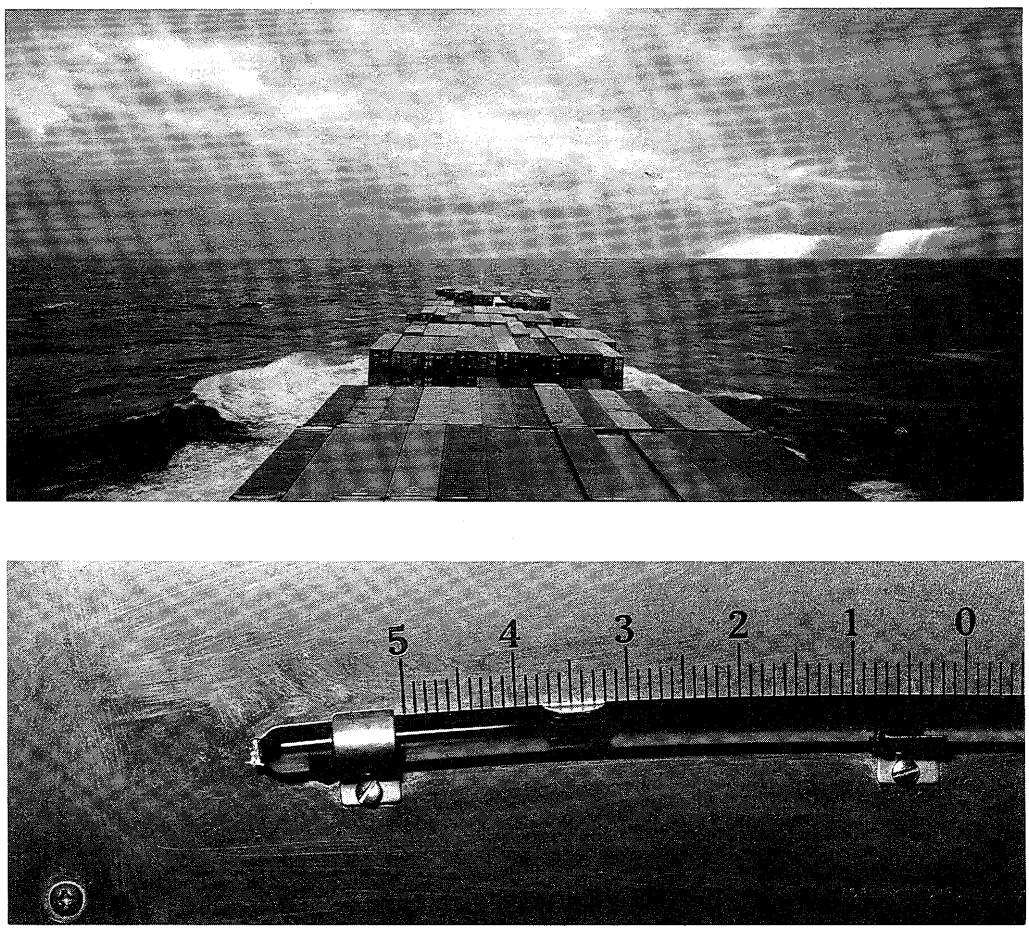
Female	Male
Patio White	Lawn Green
Fawn	Colonial Red
Colonial Red	Patio White
Moonstone Grey	Moonstone Grey
Yellow Chiffon	Fawn
Lawn Green	Yellow Chiffon
Skyway Blue	Nickle
Nickle	Skyway Blue



Dan Graham, *Homes for America,* 1966, detail of layout.



Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems,* 1975, detail.



Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, 1995, details of panorama and inclinometer in the mid-Atlantic.

1995). With these "imaginary and material geographies of the advanced capitalist world," he sketches a "cognitive map" of our global order. Yet, with his perspectival shifts in narrative and image, Sekula is as reflexive as any new anthropologist about the hubris of this ethnographic project.[36]

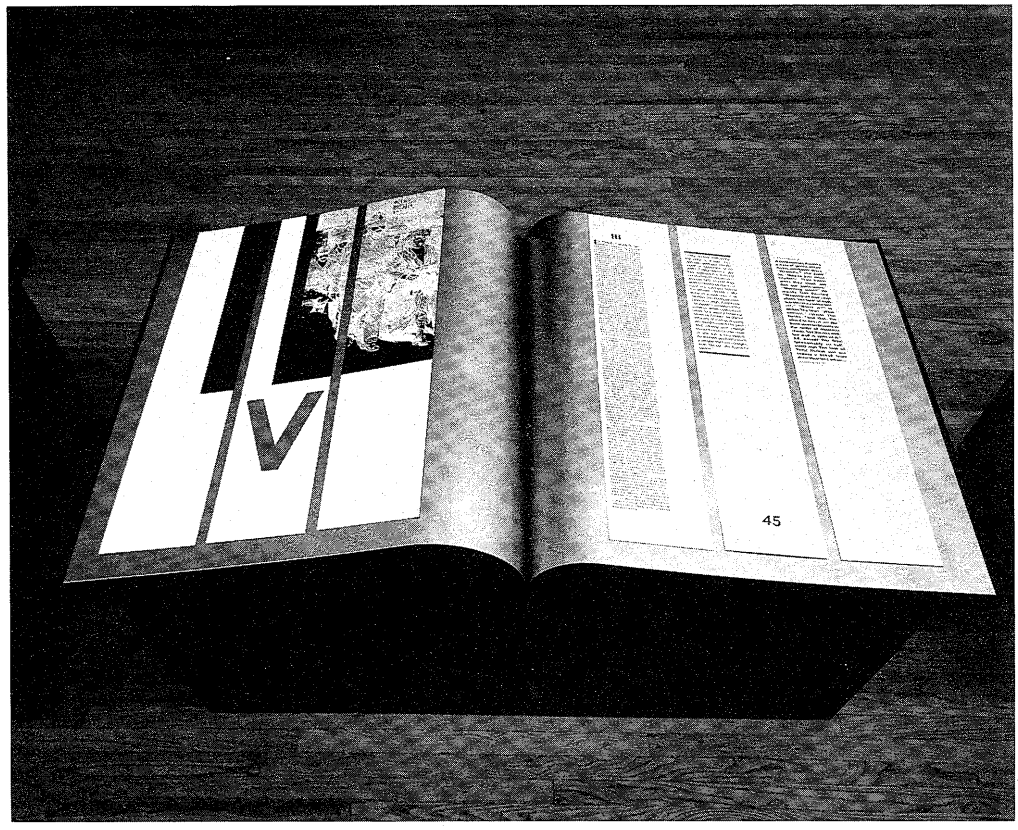
An awareness of sociological presumptions and anthropological complications also guides the feminist mappings of artists like Mary Kelly and Silvia Kolbowski. Thus in *Interim* (1984–89) Kelly registers personal and political positions within the feminist movement through a polyphonic mix of images and voices. In effect, she represents the movement as a kinship system in which she participates as an indigenous ethnographer of art, theory, teaching, activism, friendship, family, mentorship, aging. In various reframings of institutional definitions of art Kolbowski also takes up ethnographic mapping reflexively. In projects like *Enlarged from the Catalogue* (1987–88), she proposes a feminist ethnography of the cultural authority at work in art exhibitions, catalogues, reviews, and the like.[37]

Such reflexivity is essential, for, as Bourdieu warned, ethnographic mapping is predisposed to a Cartesian opposition that leads the observer to abstract the culture of study. Such mapping may thus confirm rather than contest the authority of mapper over site in a way that reduces the desired exchange of dialogical fieldwork.[38] In his mappings of other cultures Lothar Baumgarten is sometimes charged with such arrogance. In several works over the last two decades he has inscribed the names of indigenous societies of North and South America, often imposed by explorers and ethnographers alike, in such settings as the neoclassical dome of the Museum Fredericianum in Kassel (Germany) in 1982 and the modernist spiral of the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1993. Yet rather than ethnographic trophies, these names return, almost as distorted signs of the repressed, to challenge the mappings of the West: in the neoclassical dome as if to declare that the other face of Old World Enlightenment is New World Conquest, and in the Frank Lloyd Wright spiral as if to demand a new globe without narratives of modern and primitive or hierarchies of North and South, a different map in which the framer is also framed, plunged

in a parallax in a way that complicates the old anthropological oppositions of an us-here-and-now versus a them-there-and-then.[39]

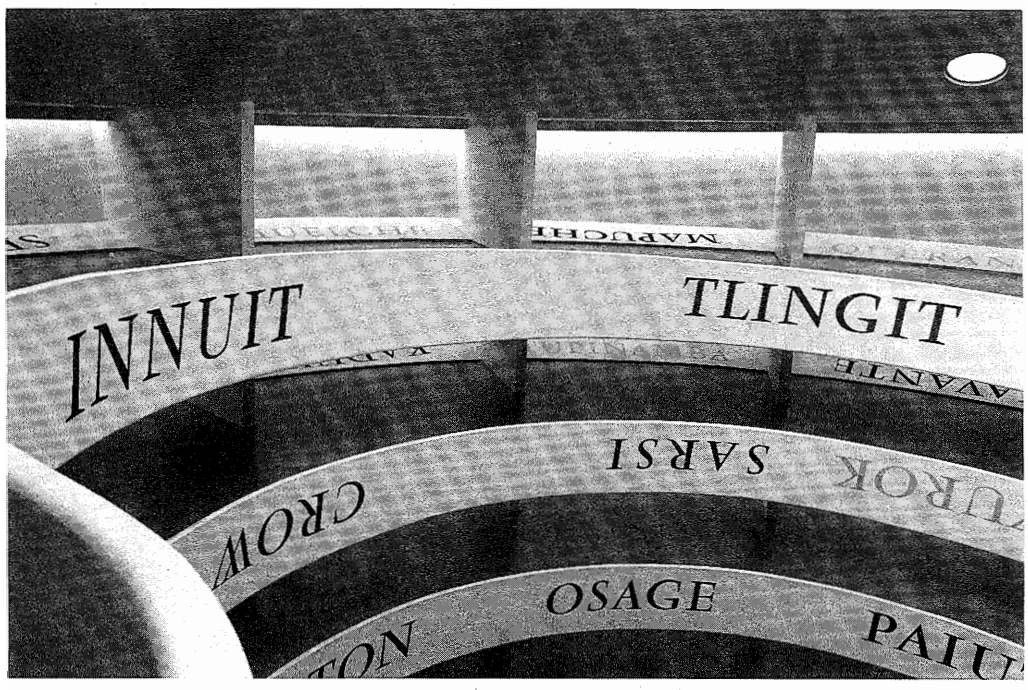
Yet the Baumgarten example points to another complication: these ethnographic mappings are often commissioned. Just as appropriation art in the 1980s became an aesthetic genre, even a media spectacle, so new site-specific work often seems a museum event in which the institution *imports* critique, whether as a show of tolerance or for the purpose of inoculation (against a critique undertaken by the institution, within the institution). Of course this position within the museum may be necessary to such ethnographic mappings, especially if they purport to be deconstructive: just as appropriation art, in order to engage media spectacle, had to participate in it, so new site-specific work, in order to remap the museum or to reconfigure its audience, must operate inside it. This argument holds for the most incisive of these projects, such as *Mining the Museum* by Fred Wilson and *Aren't They Lovely?* by Andrea Fraser (both 1992).

In *Mining the Museum,* sponsored by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Baltimore, Wilson acted as an archaeologist of the Maryland Historical Society. First he explored its collection (an initial "mining"). Then he reclaimed representations evocative of histories, mostly African-American, not often displayed as historical (a second "mining"). Finally he reframed still other representations that have long arrogated the right to history (for example, in an exhibit labeled "Metalwork 1793–1880," he placed a pair of slave manacles—a third "mining" that exploded the given representation). In so doing Wilson also served as an ethnographer of African-American communities lost, repressed, or otherwise displaced in such institutions. Andrea Fraser performed a different archaeology of museum archives and ethnography of museum cultures. In *Aren't They Lovely?* she reopened a private bequest to the art museum at the University of California at Berkeley in order to investigate how the heterogeneous domestic objects of a specific class member (from eyeglasses to Renoirs) are sublimated into the homogenous public culture of a general art museum. Here Fraser addressed institutional *sublimation,* whereas Wilson focused on institutional *repression.* Nonetheless, both artists play with museology first to expose and then to

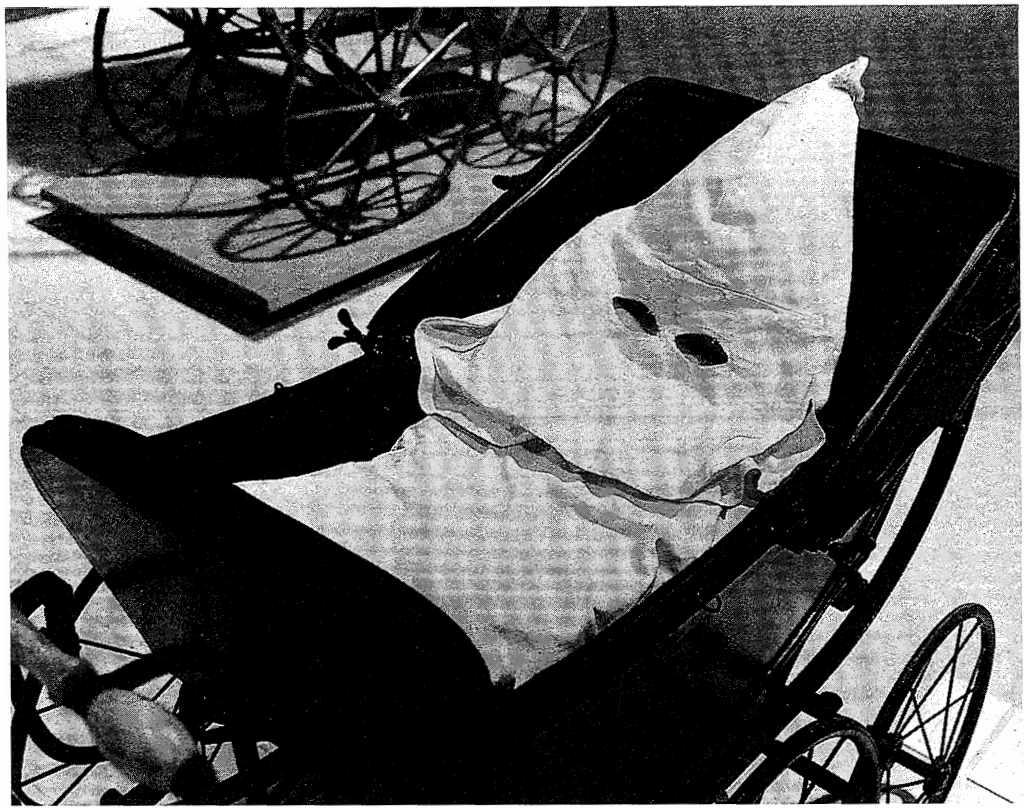


Mary Kelly, *Historia,* 1989, detail of section III.

Silvia Kolbowski, *Enlarged from the Catalogue, February 1990,* detail.



Lothar Baumgarten, *America Invention,* 1993, detail, The Guggenheim Museum.



Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum,* 1992, details of carriage and KKK hood, Maryland Historical Society.

reframe the institutional codings of art and artifacts—how objects are translated into historical evidence and/or cultural exempla, invested with value, and cathected by viewers.

However, for all the insight of such projects, the deconstructive-ethnographic approach can become a gambit, an insider game that renders the institution not more open and public but more hermetic and narcissistic, a place for initiates only where a contemptuous criticality is rehearsed. So, too, as we saw in chapter 4, the ambiguity of deconstructive positioning, at once inside and outside the institution, can lapse into the duplicity of cynical reason in which artist and institution have it both ways—retain the social status of art and entertain the moral purity of critique, the one a complement or compensation for the other.

These are dangers of site-specific work inside the institution; others arise when this work is sponsored outside the institution, often in collaboration with local groups. Consider the example of "Project Unité," a commission of forty or so installations for the Unité d'Habitation in Firminy (France) during the summer of 1993. Here the quasi-anthropological paradigm operated on two levels: first, indirectly, in that this dilapidated housing project designed by Le Corbusier was treated as an ethnographic site (has such modern architecture become exotic in this way?); and then, directly, in that its largely immigrant community was offered to the artists for ethnographic engagement. One project suggests the pitfalls of such an arrangement. Here the neo-conceptual team Clegg & Guttmann asked the Unité residents to contribute casettes for a discotheque, which were then edited, compiled, and displayed according to apartment and floor in a model of the building as a whole. Lured by collaboration, the inhabitants loaned these cultural proxies, only to have them turned into anthropological exhibits. And the artists did not question the ethnographic authority, indeed the sociological condescension, involved in this facilitated self-representation.

This is typical of the quasi-anthropological scenario. Few principles of the ethnographic participant-observer are observed, let alone critiqued, and only limited engagement of the community is effected. Almost naturally the

project strays from collaboration to self-fashioning, from a decentering of the artist as cultural authority to a remaking of the other in neo-primitivist guise. Of course this is not always the case: many artists have used these opportunities to collaborate with communities innovatively, to recover suppressed histories that are sited in particular ways, that are accessed by some more effectively than others. And symbolically this new site-specific work can reoccupy lost cultural spaces and propose historical counter-memories. (I think of the signs posted by Edgar Heap of Birds that reclaim Native American land in Oklahoma and elsewhere, and of the projects developed by collectives like Repo History that point to suppressed histories beneath official commemorations in New York and elsewhere.) Nevertheless, *the quasi-anthropological role set up for the artist can promote a presuming as much as a questioning of ethnographic authority, an evasion as often as an extension of institutional critique.*

At Firminy the ethnographic model was used to animate an old site, but it can also be used to develop a new one. The local and the everyday are thought to resist economic development, yet they can also attract it, for such development needs the local and the everyday even as it erodes these qualities, renders them siteless. In this case site-specific work can be exploited to make these nonspaces seem specific again, to redress them as grounded places, not abstract spaces, in historical and/or cultural terms.[40] Killed as culture, the local and the everyday can be revived as simulacrum, a "theme" for a park or a "history" in a mall, and site-specific work can be drawn into this zombification of the local and the everyday, this Disney version of the site-specific. Tabooed in postmodernist art, values like authenticity, originality, and singularity can return as properties of sites that artists are asked to define or to embellish. There is nothing wrong with this return per se, but sponsors may regard these properties precisely as sited values to develop.[41]

Art institutions may also use site-specific work for economic development, social outreach, and art tourism, and at a time of privatization this is assumed necessary, even natural. In "Culture in Action," a 1993 public art program of Sculpture Chicago, eight projects were sited throughout the city. Led by artists like Daniel Martinez, Mark Dion, and Kate Ericson and Mel Zeigler,

these collaborations did serve "as an urban laboratory to involve diverse audiences in the creation of innovative public art projects."[42] But they could not but also serve as public-relations probes for the corporations and agencies that supported them. Another instance of this ambiguous public service is the yearly designation of a "Cultural Capital of Europe." In Antwerp, the capital for 1993, several site-specific works were again commissioned. Here the artists explored lost histories more than engaged present communities, in keeping with the motto of the show: "On taking a normal situation and retranslating it into overlapping and multiple readings of conditions past and present." Borrowed from Gordon Matta-Clark, a pioneer of site-specific work, this motto mixes the metaphors of site-mapping and situationist *détournement* (defined long ago by Guy Debord as "the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble").[43] Yet here again impressive site-specific projects were also turned into tourist sites, and situationist disruption was reconciled with cultural-political promotion.

In these cases the institution may shadow the work that it otherwise highlights: it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital, and the director-curator becomes the star. This is not a conspiracy, nor is it cooption pure and simple; nevertheless, it can detour the artist more than reconfigure the site.[44] Just as the *proletkult* author according to Benjamin sought to stand in the reality of the proletariat, only in part to sit in the place of the patron, so the ethnographic artist may collaborate with a sited community, only to have this work redirected to other ends. Often artist and community are linked through an identitarian reduction of both, the apparent authenticity of the one invoked to guarantee that of the other, in a way that threatens to collapse new site-specific work into identity politics *tout court*.[45] As the artist stands *in* the identity of a sited community, he or she may be asked to stand *for* this identity, to represent it institutionally. In this case the artist is primitivized, indeed anthropologized, in turn: here is your community, the institution says in effect, embodied in your artist, now on display.

For the most part the relevant artists are aware of these complications, and sometimes they foreground them. In many performances James Luna has acted out the stereotypes of the Native American in white culture (the orna-

mental warrior, the ritualistic shaman, the drunken Indian, the museum object). In so doing he invites these popular primitivisms to parody them, to force them back on his audience explosively. Jimmie Durham also pressures these primitivisms to the point of critical explosion, of utter bombast, especially in a work like *Self-Portrait* (1988), a figure that plays on the wooden chief of smoke-shop lore with an absurdist text of popular fantasies regarding the Indian male body. In his hybrid works Durham mixes ritualistic and found objects in a way that is preemptively auto-primitivist and wryly anti-categorical. These pseudo-primitive fetishes and pseudo-ethnographic artifacts resist further primitivizing and anthropologizing through a parodic "trickstering" of these very processes. All such strategies—a parody of primitivisms, a reversal of ethnographic roles, a preemptive playing-dead, a plurality of practices—disturb a dominant culture that depends on strict stereotypes, stable lines of authority, and humanist reanimations and museological resurrections of many sorts.[46]

Disciplinary Memory and Critical Distance

I want to elaborate two points in conclusion, the first to do with the siting of contemporary art, the second with the function of reflexivity within it. I suggested above that many artists treat conditions like desire or disease as sites for work. In this way they work *horizontally,* in a synchronic movement from social issue to issue, from political debate to debate, more than *vertically,* in a diachronic engagement with the disciplinary forms of a given genre or medium. Apart from the general shift (noted in chapter 2) from formalist "quality" to neo-avant-garde "interest," there are several markers of this move from medium-specific to discourse-specific practice. In "Other Criteria" (1968) Leo Steinberg saw a turn, in early Rauschenberg combines, from a vertical model of picture-as-window to the horizontal model of picture-as-text, from a "natural" paradigm of image as framed landscape to a "cultural" paradigm of image as informational network, which he regarded as inaugural of postmodernist art making.[47] Yet this shift from vertical to horizontal remained operational at best; its social dimension was not developed until pop. "Its acceptance

Jimmie Durham, *Often Durham Employs . . .* , 1980s.

Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native Hosts,* 1988, detail, City Hall Park, New York.

of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is," Lawrence Alloway predicted long ago in "The Long Front of Culture" (1958). "Rather than frozen in layers in a pyramid," pop placed art "within a continuum" of culture.[48] Thus, if Rauschenberg and company sought other criteria than the formalist terms of medium-specific modernism, so pop repositioned the engagement with high art along the long front of culture. This horizontal expansion of artistic expression and cultural value is furthered, critically and not, in quasi-anthropological art and cultural studies alike.

A few effects of this expansion might be stressed. First, the shift to a horizontal way of working is consistent with the ethnographic turn in art and criticism: one selects a site, enters its culture and learns its language, conceives and presents a project, only to move to the next site where the cycle is repeated. Second, this shift follows a spatial logic: one not only maps a site but also works in terms of topics, frames, and so on (which may or may not point to a general privileging of space over time in postmodern discourse).[49] Now in the postmodernist rupture, associated in chapter 1 with a return to the historical avant-garde, the horizontal, spatial axis still intersected the vertical, temporal axis. In order to extend aesthetic space, artists delved into historical time, and returned past models to the present in a way that opened new sites for work. The two axes were in tension, but it was a productive tension; ideally coordinated, the two moved forward together, with past and present in parallax. Today, as artists follow horizontal lines of working, the vertical lines sometimes appear to be lost.

This horizontal way of working demands that artists and critics be familiar not only with the structure of each culture well enough to map it, but also with its history well enough to narrate it. Thus if one wishes to work on AIDS, one must understand not only the discursive *breadth* but also the historical *depth* of AIDS representations. To coordinate both axes of several such discourses is an enormous burden. And here the traditionalist caution about the horizontal way of working—that new discursive connections may blur old disciplinary memories—must be considered, if only to be countered. Implicit in the charge is that this move has rendered contemporary art dangerously political. Indeed, this image of art is dominant in general culture, with all the calls to purify art of politics

altogether. These calls are obviously self-contradictory, yet they too must be considered in order to be countered.[50]

My second point concerns the reflexivity of contemporary art. I have stressed that reflexivity is needed to protect against an over-identification with the other (through commitment, self-othering, and so on) that may compromise this otherness. Paradoxically, as Benjamin implied long ago, this over-identification may alienate the other further if it does not allow for the othering already at work in representation. In the face of these dangers—of too little or too much distance—I have advocated parallactic work that attempts to frame the framer as he or she frames the other. This is one way to negotiate the contradictory status of otherness as given and constructed, real and fantasmatic.[51] This framing can be as simple as a caption to a photograph, as in The Bowery project by Rosler, or a reversal of a name, as in the signs of Heap of Birds or Baumgarten. Yet such reframing is not sufficient alone. Again, reflexivity can lead to a hermeticism, even a narcissism, in which the other is obscured, the self pronounced; it can also lead to a refusal of engagement altogether. *And what does critical distance guarantee?* Has this notion become somewhat mythical, *a*critical, a form of magical protection, a purity ritual of its own? Is such distance still desirable, let alone possible?

Perhaps not, but a reductive over-identification with the other is not desirable either. Far worse, however, is a murderous disidentification from the other. Today the cultural politics of left and right seem stuck at this impasse.[52] To a great extent the left over-identifies with the other as victim, which locks it into a hierarchy of suffering whereby the wretched can do little wrong. To a much greater extent the right disidentifies from the other, which it blames as victim, and exploits this disidentification to build political solidarity through fantasmatic fear and loathing. Faced with this impasse, critical distance might not be such a bad idea after all. It is to this question that I turn in the final chapter.

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Articles
Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art

Kris Rutten, An van. Dienderen and Ronald Soetaert

Abstract

An increasing wave of art events has occurred since the 1990s that have displayed significant similarities with anthropology and ethnography in their theorisations of cultural difference and representational practices. In this theme issue the authors aim to revisit the ethnographic turn in contemporary art by focusing on practice-led research. Contributions were collected from theorists, artists and critics, to engage critically with the ethnographic perspective in their work. Next to full research papers the authors also invited short statements and reflections by artists about their practice. In this introductory article, the issues at stake in the ethnographic turn in contemporary art are explored in greater detail.

Keywords: contemporary art, ethnography, practice-led research, representation

Introduction

With his seminal essay 'The artist as ethnographer?', Hal Foster (1995) put the 'ethnographic turn' in contemporary art high on the agenda of cultural studies. Since the 1990s there has been a wave of art practices, productions and events that show significant similarities with anthropology and ethnographic research in their theorisations of cultural difference and representational practices. 'Documenta XI' in 2002, curated by Okwui Enwezor, focused on how contemporary art could develop

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in a dialectical relationship with an increasingly 'global' culture. Artists such as Lan Tuazon, Nikki S. Lee, Bill Viola, Francesco Clemente, Jimmy Durham and Susan Hiller share with anthropologists a concern for the 'politics of representation' (Schneider & Wright 2006: 19). In 2003, the conference 'Fieldworks', held at the Tate Modern, aimed to bring together artists and anthropologists to reflect on their respective uses of fieldwork and to explore possible convergences. More recently, in 2012, two concurring exhibitions in Paris focused on ethnographic perspectives. On the one hand there was the 'Masters of Chaos' exhibition that confronted 'anthropological artefacts' with new artworks. 'La Triennale', on the other hand, focused on the theme 'intense proximity'. The aim of the latter exhibition – curated by Enwezor – was to 'unlearn the notion that ethnography is necessarily "bad"' (Enwezor 2012: §11). Also in 2012, a conference was organised with the title 'The artist as ethnographer' in Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, by the curatorial platform '*le peuple qui manque*'. The aim of the conference was to

> ambitiously raise the epistemological issues at stake […], from multiple locations and practices: artistic inquiries through colonial knowledge and archives, and also through the history of scientific museology; the documentary field and its recomposition through various apparatus of collaborative form; authority regimes, enunciation modes, experimentation with writing and fiction throughout the narratives of the 'Other'.[1]

In 2013, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco organised an exposition titled 'Migrating Identities' featuring the work of artists currently based in the United States, while having connections to such diverse countries as Bangladesh, Botswana, India, Iran, Japan, Kenya, Peru and the Philippines. As the curators announced: 'Their art is evidence of the ever-changing experience of immigration, which eschews conventional narratives focused on socio-economic status, cultural negotiation, and assimilation.'[2] This is, of course, a non-exhaustive list but these examples make clear that, as George Marcus and Fred Myers (1995: 1) predicted: 'Art has come to occupy a space long associated with anthropology, becoming one of the main sites for tracking, representing, and performing the effects of difference in contemporary life.'

At the same time, there has been growing interest in anthropology for contemporary art that started from a problematisation of the different possible ways to communicate ethnographic findings and insights. This interest has been referred to as the 'sensory turn' in anthropology and ethnographic research (Pink 2009). Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright (2006: 4) assert that '[a]nthropology's iconophobia and self-imposed restriction of visual expression to text-based models needs to be overcome by a critical engagement with a range of material and sensual practices in the contemporary arts'. This implies that the *ethnographic* turn in contemporary art can be related to – and runs parallel with – a *sensory* turn in anthropology and

ethnographic research. This is exemplified by anthropologists who are collaborating with artists, by artists who are creating projects generating anthropological insights, and by art projects that are produced as outcomes of ethnographic research. From this perspective, art projects are presented as (a kind of) ethnographic research and ethnographic research is presented as (a kind of) art.

In this theme issue the aim is to revisit the ethnographic turn in contemporary art. Papers were collected from theorists, artists and critics, to engage critically with the ethnographic perspective in their work. In addition to full research papers short statements and reflections by artists about their own practice were also incorporated. Here, ethnography is approached from a thematic and/or methodological perspective, rather than by looking for fixed categories to define 'ethnographic art'. The aim is to further the critical work on ethnography in relation to contemporary art by specifically looking at art *practices* and *processes*, thereby offering a bottom-up perspective from artists, critics and theorists addressing the questions *if*, *why* and *how* an ethnographic perspective is indeed at work. In these practices the focus is on the extent to which contextualisation is relevant when dealing with the display of *alterity* and *outsiderness*. A large number of the contributions deal with southern-based art practices and/or representations of self and other in relation to the north–south nexus.

The focus is on a critical engagement with the ethnographic perspective, since there has indeed been a broad range of criticism with regard to the underlying assumptions of these projects about the culturally and geographically 'other' (see Geertz 1988). Several authors (e.g., Foster 1995; Irving 2006) criticise the underlying neo-colonial or Eurocentric assumptions of certain projects and critically assess the power relations at work (based on previous colonial, political or socio-economic relations). Critics accuse artists of exoticising and presenting their subjects in a pre-modern context. This special issue takes this criticism as a point of departure. It revisits the 'ethnographic turn' in contemporary art by exploring the assumptions underlying the display of 'alterity' and 'outsiderness' – with related concepts such as 'authenticity', 'marginalisation' and so forth – thereby exploring the reciprocal relations behind these art projects. Of course, the discussion of representing the 'other' in art and culture has already been explored extensively (e.g. Schneider 2008; Schneider & Wright 2006, 2010). In a previous special issue of *Critical Arts* (24[3]), Leora Farber (2010: 303) aptly questioned:

> What can be said to, about, and with the categories of self and other in relation to visual art that has not already been said? Given the discursive contexts in which the explorations of and debates about the status of the self and other must be undertaken, where can these go?

It might be better, Farber argues, to explore the question 'as to whether there may be "new" ways of conceptualising selfhood and otherness emerging in visual representation is posed, and if so, what forms might these take' (ibid.).

This special issue will consist of two volumes (October and December 2013). In this volume, the focus falls specifically on practice-led research. In contrast to existing theoretical discourse and criticism that mainly focus on finished art products, most of the articles in this issue start from the bottom up, by comparing art and anthropological *processes*. The aim is thus to offer a forum for artists and anthropologists to explore and counter this criticism with regard to their own practices. In this introductory article, the issues at stake in the ethnographic turn in contemporary art are explored in greater detail.

The artist as ethnographer?

In his essay 'The artist as ethnographer?' Foster (1995) develops a strong critique of what he calls the quasi-anthropological paradigm in contemporary art. He argues that there has been a series of misrecognitions between art and anthropology, since both sides have not only displayed envy of the other's enterprises, but also ignorance of how methods, paradigms and traditions were established within each field. Foster problematises what it implies to create 'in the name' or 'for the sake' of a cultural and/or ethnic other. In his view, several artists who turned to the ethnographic have presupposed that the site of artistic transformation is elsewhere, more specifically out there in the field of the other: the oppressed postcolonial, the subaltern or the sub-cultural. He cautions these artists for assuming that this 'other' is always outside, and that this 'alterity' is the primary point of subversion of dominant culture (ibid: 302). Foster argues that it has become problematic to situate the 'other' in an 'outside world', since 'in our global economy the assumption of a pure outside is almost impossible'. He argues that postcolonial artists and critics increasingly 'pushed practice and theory from binary structures of otherness to relational modes of difference, from discrete space-times to mixed border zones' (ibid: 178) and pleads for the artist as ethnographer to explore precisely these mixed border zones.

More fundamentally, Foster states that this focus on alterity always overlaps with our own unconscious, with the effect that to 'other' the 'self' becomes more important than to 'selve' the 'other'. Such 'self-othering' easily passes into self-absorption, with the danger that the project of 'ethnographic self-fashioning' becomes a practice of philosophical narcissism (ibid: 304). Foster furthermore warns that 'pseudo ethnographic reports in art are sometimes disguised travelogues from the world art market. Who in the academy or the art world has not witnessed these new forms of '*flânerie*'? (ibid.). Foster concludes with scepticism towards this turn to the ethnographic:

> The other is admired as one who plays with representation, subverts gender and so on. In all these ways the artist, critic, or historian projects his or her practice onto the field of the other, where it is read not only as authentically indigenous but as innovatively political! (ibid: 307)

He thus questions the assumption that a site of artistic transformation is also a site of political transformation.

This critical perspective on the artist as ethnographer can be related to Clifford Geertz's earlier entitlement of ethnographers as *authors* of their texts. According to Geertz (1988: 102), written ethnographies are grounded on pseudo-claims such as text-positivism, ethnographic ventriloquism ('the claim to speak not just about another form of life but to speak from within it'), dispersed authorship ('the hope that discourse can somehow be made "heteroglossial"'), and so on. An van. Dienderen (2006, 2007, 2008) compares these pretensions to similar claims in documentaries and visual ethnography. Are the projects that fit within the ethnographic turn in contemporary art based on comparable claims or pretensions? Do they conceal 'displaced authoritarian or naturalistic connotations'? (Geertz 1988: 104). Could one accuse these artists of 'ethnographic ventriloquism' or 'dispersed authorship'? (ibid.). Similarly, Andrew Irving (2006: 14) warns against underlying assumptions of misplaced temporalisation, 'whereby non-western practices, be they artistic or otherwise, are seen as some throwback to earlier, more primitive forms of humanity'. The criticisms of Foster, Irving and others indeed raise a number of questions that continue to guide contemporary debate on the relationship between art and anthropology as well as the assessment of practices, processes and products that can be situated at its intersection.

Based on Hal Foster (1995):

- Does this artist consider his/her site of artistic transformation as a site of political transformation?
- Does this artist locate the site of artistic transformation elsewhere, in the field of the other (with the cultural other, the oppressed postcolonial, subaltern or subcultural)?
- Does this artist use 'alterity' as a primary point of subversion of dominant culture?
- Is this artist perceived as socially/culturally other and has s/he thus limited or automatic access to transformative alterity?
- Can we accuse the artist of 'ideological patronage'?
- Does this artist use 'alterity' as a primary point of subversion of dominant culture?

- Does the artist work with sited communities with the motives of political engagement and institutional transgression, only in part to have this work recoded by its sponsors as social outreach, economic development, public relations?
- Is this artist constructing outsiderness, detracted from a politics of here and now?
- Is this work a pseudo-ethnographic report, a disguised travelogue from the world art market?
- Is this artist othering the self or selving the other?

Based on Andrew Irving (2006: 14):

- Can this artist be criticised for underlying assumptions of misplaced temporalisation whereby non-Western practices, be they artistic or otherwise, are seen as some throwback to earlier, more primitive forms of humanity?

Based on Lucy Lippard:

- Is the artist wanted there and by whom? Every artist (and anthropologist) should be required to answer this question in depth before launching what threatens to be intrusive or invasive projects (often called 'interventions') (Lippard 2010: 32).

In this special issue the aim is to engage critically with these questions not by presenting them as an exhaustive list to be checked and answered point by point, but by offering a forum to artists and ethnographers to explore and counter this criticism with regard to their own practices.

Practice-based art projects

Questioning and assessing the ethnographic turn in the contemporary art scene is generally discussed through the analysis of finished art objects and their relation to the contexts in which they are created. Most authors discussing the ethnographic turn in contemporary art focus on the artistic product to criticise the ethnographic relevance, rather than the artistic process. By contrast, the aim here is to further this theoretical and critical discourse by looking ethnographically at art *practices*.

The analytical importance of this approach was developed earlier by An van. Dienderen (2008), who conducted fieldwork as part of the production process of three different film projects. By adopting fieldwork techniques such as participant observation, feedback and negotiation during the artistic process, the aim was to understand these processes as the mediated and variable relationships between 'author' and 'other' in which the 'viewer' is prefigured. This creates a complex set of interactions during the production, reception and interpretation of an artwork.

The crisis of representation

The criticisms Hal Foster and others have developed on the ethnographic turn in art have, of course, been at the centre of ethnography's self-questioning for a long time (Kwon 2000; Pinxten 1997). Less concerned with the possibilities of accurately representing the 'other' and his/her culture, the ethnographer nowadays aims to comparatively relate his/her own cultural frame to that of the 'other', in view of establishing an interactive relation. Ethnographers furthermore look at cultural practices in which attention is paid to inter-subjectivity, where one relates engagement with a particular situation (experience) and the assessment of its meaning and significance to a broader context (interpretation) (Kwon 2000: 75). The idea that one actually can 'go native' and 'blend in', so as to completely integrate and participate in a particular culture, has been criticised as exoticism. Yet the stress on ethnography as an interactive encounter is of crucial importance, as 'the informant and the ethnographer are producing some sort of common construct together, as a result of painstaking conversation with continuous mutual control' (Pinxten 1997: 31, see also Rutten and van. Dienderen 2013).

This continuous self-questioning within anthropology and ethnographic research has caused a problematisation of the different possible ways of communicating ethnographic findings and insights. This interest has been referred to as the 'sensory turn' in anthropology and ethnographic research. Indeed, as Tim Ingold (2011: 15) argues:

> Anthropology's dilemma is that it remains yoked to an academic model of knowledge production, according to which observation is not so much a way of knowing what is going on in the world as a source of raw material for subsequent processing into authorative accounts that claim to reveal the truth behind the illusion of appearances. The truth, it is claimed, is to be found on the library shelf, groaning under the weight of scholarly books and periodicals, rather than 'out there' in the world of lived experience.

This implies that the anthropologist is a 'producer' in the original sense of the term. From this perspective, Ingold (ibid: 10) proposes to shift anthropology and the study of culture in particular 'away from the fixation with objects and images, and towards a better appreciation of the material flows and currents of sensory awareness within which both ideas and things reciprocally take shape'.

This discussion can be related to the 'crisis of representation' that has always been a major focus of cultural studies (see the work of Stuart Hall and others). Ronald Soetaert, André Mottart and Ive Verdoodt (2004) aptly posed the question: What did we learn from the 'crisis of representation'? Probably that cultural memory is always mediated in representation as either delegation or description. On the one hand there is the question of 'who has the right to represent whom in instances in which it is considered necessary to delegate to a reduced number of "representers" the voice

and power of decision of an entire group' (Da Silva 1999: 9). On the other hand there is the question of 'how different cultural and social groups are portrayed in the different forms of cultural inscription: in the discourse and images through which a culture represents the social world' (ibid.). Both questions are necessarily related: those who are delegated to speak and act in the name of another (representation as delegation) govern, in a way, the process of presentation and description of the other (representation as description). S/he who speaks for the other controls the forms of speaking about the other (Da Silva 1999).

The contributions in this volume deal with both the criticism raised with regard to the ethnographic perspective in contemporary art (representation as delegation) and with issues in overcoming the restriction to text-based models by turning to more material and sensual practices that can be found in the arts (representation as description). In what follows, the different contributions in this issue are introduced, starting from both these perspectives.

Representation as delegation

In '100% bag tanned: action research generating new insights on design processes', Catherine Willems discusses two examples 'at the intersection' of design and anthropology, combining observations and engagement through design. To better understand how design processes work in context, she set up action research to study the design of handmade footwear in two communities in India. By looking at the processes of creation from an insider's perspective, she hoped to gain the tacit knowledge necessary to make the footwear and to better understand the context in which the material and products are made. She specifically worked with the Kolhapuri artisans in Athani, Karnataka, and with the Jutti artisans in Ranthambore, Rajasthan, to gather information on the skills of creating footwear and to explore what it means to make footwear in those communities.

The article starts with an exploration of what is understood by 'design and making', arguing that form is not 'imposed' on the material, but that they mutually influence each other. By focusing on the making of footwear, Willems investigates the relation between the craftsman, the material and the tools used in his/her surroundings. Based on ethnographic research, the author reflects on the interactivity of the research and its contribution for design anthropology, thereby addressing the question whether it is possible to talk about reciprocal ethnographic knowledge exchange. The author explores how the apprenticeship of the researcher, which entailed designing and making footwear together with the artisans, can stimulate dialogue and interactivity that can result in 'shared' ethnographic power. Thus, in the action research the researcher and the artisans share authorship.

In 'Whose portrait is it?' Angelika Böck discusses 'Portrait as dialogue' – a series of artworks and investigations that explore alternative forms of human

representation. The author investigates how we can identify with the depictions/descriptions of our 'selves' that are created from 'other' cultural perspectives. The artworks problematise the common practice of 'looking at each other' and define particular cultural forms of representation as new possibilities for 'portrayal'. The art installations, which are laid out along the lines of scientific experiments, can be linked to scientific disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. However, both the artist/researcher and the practitioners of a particular form of portrayal are, at the same time, subject and object in this representational 'dialogue'. The author aims, above all, to draw attention to the fact that next to the Western tradition of 'portrayal' rich potential exists in terms of human representational means. By declaring these methods to be 'portrayals', the author acknowledges their artistic quality.

In 'Contested grounds: fieldwork collaborations with artists in Corrientes, Argentina', Arnd Schneider explores the critical implications and potential of dialogical art-anthropology collaborations, which are not set up in the closed context of a university workshop, but rather use the seemingly more open ethnographic setting. This setting problematises the fact that many fieldwork situations outside so-called First-World countries are characterised by unequal differences in terms of economic power and symbolic capital. The author is self-reflexive about being based at metropolitan First-World institutions, and about his anthropology inevitably being a kind of hegemonic practice. At the same time he stresses that there is a Latin-American/Argentinian anthropological research tradition that has to be taken into account and that is, itself, also influenced by the complex challenges of doing research and fieldwork in a country with a troubled economic and political history.

The author highlights how it is not possible to have *a priori* demands when collaborating with artists, which is especially the case when the collaborations are between partners with widely different cultural, social and geographic backgrounds that lead to different expectations regarding the outcome. In this respect, Schneider introduces the concepts 'dialogical aesthetics' and 'speaking nearby'. Specifically, the latter concept, coined by Trinh Minh-Ha (1990), is of interest because 'in ethnographic representations we cannot speak *about* or *for* the other (and that any attempts to *lend* the other a voice remain illusionary as early textual critics assumed) and at best can speak nearby' (Schneider, this volume). The author confronts us with the argument that self-reflection, when it comes to an equal relationship, is crucial in any discussion about the ethics of these kinds of projects.

Representation as description

In 'Visual ethnographies of displacement and violence: land(e)scapes in artists' work at Thulepo Artists' Workshop, Wellington, South Africa 2012', Jade Gibson starts from the self-reflexive turn in ethnographic methodology and focuses on the shift to autobiographical/ethnographic and evocative ethnographic writing

in which the 'self' is explored as a key writing device. Starting from particular approaches to ethnographic methodology and writing that explore creative, visual and experimental perspectives, the author aptly questions how one can rethink the 'ethnographic' within contemporary art beyond practice-led research to how these alternative approaches can also be explored through writing. Her article starts from the stance that the 'ethnographic turn' in contemporary art requires one to take into account critical shifts in relation to interpreting and ethnographic writing within contemporary art practice. Therefore, she deliberately includes artists' writings on the process of artwork construction, as well as an emphasis on ethnographic processes as sensory, creative and performative. Referring to Craig Campbell (2011), Gibson explores what it means to inhabit a space between art and anthropology. This can indeed be related to Homi Bhabha's (1994) 'in-between' space or third space – a point of emergence from the hybridisation of borders, from which new identities may emerge. With her contribution the author thus also problematises the genre of the academic (ethnographic) paper.

In 'Organising complexities: the potential of multi-screen video installations for ethnographic practice and representation', Steffen Köhn explores a possible configuration of video art and anthropology by analysing three recent multi-screen video installations (*Solid Sea 01: The Ghost Ship* by Multiplicity, *Sahara Chronicles* by Ursula Biemann, and *A Tale of Two Islands* by Steffen Köhn) that are all concerned with the transnational movement of people. Köhn discusses how these examples of installation art offer possibilities for the organisation of ethnographic material in terms of multi-perspectivity. He argues that these installations offer a bifocal perspective on contemporary migration and evoke a sensual proximity to the experience of migrant subjects, thereby revealing the complexity of transnational connections. His main interest lies in exploring how these installations involve the spectator in ways that are inaccessible to written ethnography, which is indeed one of the 'problems of representation' that anthropology is grappling with.

Köhn does not reduce these visual artistic practices to 'instruments' for constructing anthropological representations. He takes them seriously as both explorations in perception and engagements with the world. By mediating between the concrete and the abstract, the micro and the macro perspective, the viewer, in his view, is confronted with two different forms of aesthetic experience: immersion and reflexivity. It is exactly the tension between these two forms of reception that gives these installations their significance.

By demanding that viewers position themselves not only physically in relation to the screens, but also intellectually and empathically in terms of the social issues at stake, the author highlights that the significance of the works lies not only in their discursive content, but also in the mode of activated spectatorship which they require.

In '"Woundscapes": suffering, creativity and bare life – practices and processes of an ethnography-based art exhibition', Chiara Pussetti explores the concept and process of 'Woundscapes', a nomadic exhibition project that emerged from the collaboration between 11 anthropologists and artists from different countries. Currently living in the Greater Lisbon area, the work of these artists and anthropologists focuses on the reproduction of particular gazes, stereotypes and individual memories in relation to diasporic dynamics. The exhibition explores different forms of dealing with 'suffering' by examining both individual and collective trajectories of cure strategies in relation to the 'healthcare market'. The aim of the exhibition was to problematise the dichotomy between object and representation, inside and outside, and the ever-encompassing metaphor of the north–south divide. Pussetti connects the idea of 'blurred genres' with that of the 'ethnographic turn' in contemporary art – with art as a form of research and ethnography as a possible ground for art production – by exploring the process of curating the 'Woundscapes' exhibition.

This article also tackles the 'crisis of representation' which followed the publication of *Writing culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), and led to reflections on the different possible ways of presenting fieldwork data, the relation between the subject and object of ethnographic research, and the political, ethical and aesthetic implications of anthropological research. Pussetti claims there is always a zone of adjacency, proximity and distance between the visual practices of anthropology and those of contemporary art (see also Tarek Elhaik in Forero Angel and Simeone 2010).

Vignettes

Also incorporated here are short statements and reflections by artists about their own practice. In her vignette, 'Urban cracks: sites of meaning for critical artistic practices', Elly van Eeghem presents a mind map of the making process of *(Dis)placed Intervention*, a long-term artistic project that aims to visualise city developments into a series of video installations based on field research, in specific contexts, into urban cracks. The artist is attracted by the undefined and layered identity of urban cracks because of their openness to interpretation and counter proposal. Because these 'urban cracks' need time to be grasped, Van Eeghem urges for what she calls a 'tactics of slow return'.

In his vignette, 'From information to inspiration, sensitivities in a casus of Central-African music analysis and contemporary composition', Olmo Cornelis argues that the increased digitisation of cultural objects has created a vast resource of accessible research data, which requires critical analysis and assessment as well as a new analytical framework. In the case of ethnic music, such a framework for digitised and digital-born audio objects is offered by computational ethnomusicology. This vignette focuses on the artistic research of the author, who works with digitised Central African music on a daily basis. First, a historical overview of ethnomusicology

is given which confronts two strands of research within that field, that can be related to elements from Hal Foster's article 'The artist as ethnographer?' (1995). Second, a brief outline is presented of the artist's artistic and scientific research, and how these are related. Finally, the discussed aspects of ethnomusicology, the research and composition, are considered in light of Foster's thesis.

In 'I am merely the place', Mekhitar Garabedian explores the proposition that the other/otherness/alterity is within us, and how we remain *strangers to ourselves*, as the title of a book by Julia Kristeva (1991) claims. Garabedian examines the concept of 'multiple identity' on the basis of Rimbaud's *Je est un autre*, its consequences and readings by Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, and through various representations of the multiplicity that each subjectivity consists of. The author reflects on his personal experience of living in the diaspora, and specifically the experience of language, of the mother tongue, after migration. The essay locates and discusses conditions of diasporic subjectivity that are inherently related to questions about subject formation and language, addressing the following questions: How does language shape and form our understanding and sense of being in the world? How can speaking in another language present a form of estrangement from the self?

Conclusion

The aim of this special issue is to engage critically with the ethnographic turn in contemporary art, by focusing on practice-led research and offering a forum for artists and anthropologists to explore and counter this criticism with regard to their own practices. The contributions in this volume focus both on issues dealing with representation as delegation (those who are delegated to speak and act in the name of another) and representation as description (the process of presentation and description of the other). It is possible to argue that critical perspectives stemming from cultural studies about representation are mainly focused on analysing popular culture critically, whereas some artists are indeed practising what cultural studies preaches, by questioning representations. The different contributions discuss the work of anthropologists who collaborate with artists, artists who create projects which generate anthropological insights, and art projects that are produced as outcomes of anthropological research.

The criticisms of Foster, Irving and others form the background for the self-reflexivity voiced by the authors. Several contributors explore whether they can indeed be accused of pseudo-ethnography, and they are very aware of the difficulties this question raises. In these contributions there is also an attempt to move beyond the strict dichotomy of 'self' vs. 'other', by emphasising the immense complexity of the relations between artist/researcher and subject. This relationship will, inevitably, always be unequal, which makes the call by Arnd Schneider an interesting perspective to start from. Since one cannot speak *about* or *for* the other in an unproblematic

way, it might be better to aim to 'speak nearby' (Trinh Min-ha 1990), without ignoring these unequal relations. Also, the crisis of representation is perceived as more complex than 'merely' looking for different formats of representation. The question arises as to how to combine the 'language' of artistic reflection with the 'language' of anthropology as an academic enterprise, as exemplified by Gibson's attempt to include artists' writing in a scholarly article. Different authors focus on their artistic processes as mediated and variable relationships between 'author' and 'other' in which the 'viewer' is prefigured, thereby emphasising the complex set of interactions arising during the production, reception and interpretation of an artwork. The vignettes represent a personal addition to the scholarly articles, with artists reflecting on how to grapple with issues of representation and identification.

Several of the contributions in this issue refer to the 'blurred genres' that the authors aim to explore in their work on art and anthropology, creating a 'third space' that crosses disciplinary borders. Soetaert, Mottart and Verdoodt (2004) linked the concept of borderland with a central concept introduced by M.L. Pratt, i.e., that of the contact zone. Pratt (1991) argues that a contact zone can be a space in which to break down the marginalisation of the non-dominant literacy/culture as a space where 'cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other'. The contact zone could be close to Bhabha's (1994: 206) 'third space', as a space for the 'enunciation of cultural difference'. Whether conceptualised as contact zones, a third space or the borderland, in such zones it is possible to problematise and thematise these representations and to redefine the objects of study. With this special issue the guest editors hope to create such a contact zone by bringing together different disciplinary perspectives in order to problematise contemporary art and anthropology. This reconceptualisation involves bringing texts and perspectives together to organise a productive dialogue, so that artists and anthropologists learn from one another person's point of view, and come to 'see' their culture not only from their own perspective, but also from the perspective of outsiders. Of course, the aim is not to close the discussion on the 'ethnographic turn' in contemporary art, but rather to open up debate and stimulate continued dialogue.

Notes

1 http://www.lepeuplequimanque.org/ethnographe (accessed 21 July 2013).
2 http://www.ybca.org/migrating-identities (accessed 21 July 2013).

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When Anthropology Meets Contemporary Art

Notes for a Politics of Collaboration

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> *Decolonization obliges us to reconsider the relationship between the observer and the observed.*
>
> —Luis Guillermo Vasco Uribe, "Rethinking Fieldwork and Ethnographic Writing"

> *If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is speech coming out of their mouth.*
>
> —Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" (translation modified)

Ethnography has always been collaborative. To varying degrees the anthropologist in the field has always relied upon a "cooperative relationship" with those being studied to explain, to confirm, and even to proffer their own observations and interpretations. The trouble is that this collaborative relationship has habitually been expunged in the ensuing ethnographic text—Malinowski's oeuvre being the favorite example—leading to the false and misleading impression that the ethnographic subject is passive and anthropological knowledge a mere matter of data collection. While much has changed in anthropological practice since the late 1960s, from an acute reflexivity and various calls for experimentation to the more recent call for engagement, in the last decades there has been a growing consensus that if anthropology is to address responsibly the crisis of representation and its myriad of ethical and political challenges, one promising route, though not the only one, would

be to highlight, systematize, and prioritize the collaborative nature of ethnography. Indeed, if one of the key challenges facing anthropology lay in exposing and overturning the vexed authority of the anthropologist as ethnographer—an authority tacitly permitting representations that too often turned out to be distorting, if not repressive and dominating—how better to do it than to embolden and broaden the collaborative nature of the ethnographic project itself? That would be a working *with* that displaces the conceits of ethnographic authority.

The focus in what follows is not on the merits or potentialities of collaboration, nor is it a consideration of specific collaborative ethnographies. Neither is my goal to assess collaboration and its role in the "refunctioning" of ethnography (Holmes and Marcus 2005).[1] My aim, rather, is a critical consideration of what I see as the guiding principle of the recent collaborative turn, namely, collaboration as an ethical commitment. In particular, I wish to inquire as to whether this proclaimed ethical focus has not limited the impact of collaboration in its contribution to a critical anthropology; that is, an anthropology that allows for politics. To begin I present this guiding principle of an ethical commitment, its background, and its claims. I then offer a critical examination of this principle and its potential shortcomings in terms of collaborative ethnography by arguing how this commitment presupposes a claim of inequality that risks depoliticizing practices of collaboration. This is followed by a discussion of equality as a presupposition and as political gesture by turning to the writings of French philosopher Jacques Rancière. In the section that follows I draw out the implications of equality for politics through a consideration of two books presented and edited by Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright that explore collaborations between art and anthropology.

Although Schneider and Wright nowhere mention or discuss equality, I want to suggest that arguments they put forward for collaborations between anthropology and art nonetheless presuppose an equality that, in turn, allows for politics. Specifically, Schneider and Wright highlight how art practices can challenge anthropology by providing "new ways of seeing," which I argue presents a unique opportunity for taking collaborative practices to their full political potential. Turning to my own fieldwork with Palestinian artists in Israel, I take on Schneider and Wright's project by outlining how my experience was met with an assertion of equality that reconfigured the ethnographic encounter.

Resonant with the work of anthropologists in Latin America, one of the key points I put forward is that a politics of collaboration is fundamentally about decolonizing anthropology, its knowledge, and its methods: the disruption of the boundaries between anthropology and its other.

The Collaborative Turn in Anthropology

As collaborative methods have come to the forefront of anthropological research in recent years—not only in terms of historically underscoring the collaborative nature of all ethnographic work but, more significantly, to redress the various challenges facing contemporary ethnographic practice—there has been a near consensus that the central issue in this effort is that of an ethical commitment (see Fluehr-Lobban 2008; Lassiter 2004, 2005). According to Luke Eric Lassiter this ethical commitment is "a guiding principle . . . that transcends all other agendas, including the more general scientific principle that all is, or should be, knowable" (Lassiter 2004: 1). Similarly for Fluehr-Lobban, collaborative research, by including participants as active partners in research, is "'ethically conscious' research" (Fluehr-Lobban 2008: 175). While Lassiter and Fluehr-Lobban are undoubtedly among the most vocal proponents of the ethical imperative of collaborative research, there is arguably little disagreement over its centrality among those advocating a stronger and more emboldened collaborative approach in anthropology.

There are two principal claims behind this particular ethical framing of collaboration. Given the asymmetries of class and privilege that characterize the ethnographic encounter, and the various misrepresentations entailed, there is the ethical responsibility on the part of the anthropologist (1) to consult with the subjects of research in order to verify, validate, and even adjust their interpretations; and (2) to be socially relevant—that is, engaged with the world of which they are part, which is to say, to plan their research projects with the subjects of research. Indeed, it is on the basis of these two principles that the project of a collaborative ethnography is considered first and foremost an ethical commitment. Moreover, it is on this basis that the ethnographic subject is refigured as a "consultant" or "co-intellectual" (Lassiter 2004) in the ethnographic process—co-establishing the research question, collaborating in interpretations, and in some cases co-writing the ethno-

graphic text itself. Significantly, both of these claims prescribe a set of normative conditions upon which ethnographic research is to proceed, and not surprisingly, they share many aspects with the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association.[2]

In starting from the premise of the disparities of class and privilege in the ethnographic encounter, the ethical commitment posed by Lassiter and Fluehr-Lobban unmistakably presupposes a claim of inequality between the anthropologist and the subjects of research, an assumption of inequality that the ethical responsibility of the anthropologist is meant to remedy. In other words, within and implicit in the ethical commitment of anthropologists to conduct and behave themselves in a responsible manner with regard to their ethnographic subjects, there is a presumption of inequality that this ethical posture is meant to overcome.

This presumption of inequality takes various forms but is clearly manifest across the collaborative literature. Samuel R. Cook makes an allusion to this presumption of inequality when he states that collaboration, insofar as it is defined by the journal *Collaborative Anthropologies*, is "aimed at leveling the epistemological and ideological space between ethnographer and research community or consultants" (Cook 2008: 109). And again this presupposition of inequality is asserted by Fluehr-Lobban when she states, "The unequal-partners-in-research model, with its top down approach and hierarchy between researcher and 'subject,' is shifting substantially toward greater equity in the research relationship" (Fluehr-Lobban 2008: 177). While these examples are the most obvious instances where the presupposition of inequality is made explicit, I would argue that this presupposition, even if unspoken, can be found across many collaborative works, both ethnographic and theoretical. Indeed, I would go so far as to assert that it is the presumption of inequality that is the guiding principle of collaborative work in anthropology.

For many readers, the point I am raising regarding the presumption of inequality would appear to be both understandable and laudable; given the colonial context within which anthropology has developed as a discipline and the unmistakable power relations this still occasions today, how could the anthropologist presume otherwise? Citing Argentinian postcolonial scholar Walter Mignolo, Les Field and Joanne Rappaport note in their introduction to a special issue of *Collaborative*

Anthropologies on Latin America that as the product of colonialism and the condition of coloniality, the "geo-politics of knowledge" is "always already unequal" (2011: 4). This, as we have learned, is what anthropology defines as "the politics of representation." Yet, in what would seem to be a counter-intuitive gesture, I want to argue that this presumption of inequality is deeply flawed insofar as it perpetuates the very colonial vestiges that anthropology has been working to undermine since the 1960s, and moreover, it reproduces the vertical relationship of anthropology with its other. To put it simply, I argue that we should consider presuming, or better, presupposing equality.

It might be objected, and fairly so, that the ideal of equality is precisely that, an ideal, and thus presupposing it risks masking and obfuscating existing political inequalities and, in turn, disregarding power asymmetries within the ethnographic fieldwork relationship. Lassiter lucidly draws attention to this dilemma in his *Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*:

> Americans as a whole, of course, have long struggled with reconciling the differences between the ideal of equality and the very real consequences of living in an inequitable society stratified, at the very least, along lines of race, class, and gender. Americanist ethnography has, at least since its inception, toyed with the same paradox, especially as its subjects, assistants, informants, collaborators, and consultants have continually and consistently sought equal time and representation in the larger ethnographic project that has been undertaken primarily by middle- and upper-class Euro-American anthropologists. (Lassiter 2005: 46)

The awareness of this paradox, of how to live up to the ideal of equality in the face of real inequalities, is undoubtedly one with which many anthropologists have been struggling for years, particularly in the various attempts to decenter ethnographic authority (Clifford 1988a). It is precisely this paradox that leads to an ethical framing of the collaborative project and, more broadly, to the politics of representation itself.[3] In this short passage Lassiter underlines how the ideal of equality is curbed or subdued by real inequality, be it racial, class, or gender inequality, among others. Although the ideal of equality in this instance is something that each person or community seeks, one senses that for it to be fully realized it must be given or provided; given that we live in

an unequal social reality, the ethical commitment and responsibility on the part of the anthropologist should be to ensure, as much as possible, the conditions by which to foster equality within the ethnographic process. Is this not precisely the goal of the ethical orientation of collaboration, a commitment and responsibility of the ethnographer to assure a level playing field or equity within the ethnographic process?

For the assumption that equality has to be given or provided by the anthropologist considering the very real inequalities within the ethnographic encounter, I want to suggest another reading. In the second half of the passage, where Lassiter states that "subjects, assistants, informants, collaborators, and consultants have continually and consistently sought equal time and representation" (Lassiter 2005: 46), he highlights the contours of an idea of equality as that which is not simply sought but asserted and verified by the ethnographic subject. In contrast to the belief that equality is something that must be ensured or protected (i.e., given to the other) via an ethical commitment on the part of the anthropologist, here the subjects of research assumes their equality.

This idea is more forcefully present, though hidden, in the opening passages of Lassiter's *Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, where he discusses an exchange with Ralph Kotay, a Kiowa elder and singer and Lassiter's interlocutor or consultant (see Lassiter 1998). In discussing Kotay's demand, "I don't want anything else said above this," Lassiter writes: "In asserting his desire to be heard, Kotay sent an implied moral message about the nature of my commitment to him and his community" (Lassiter 2005: 11).[4] Kotay's desire to be heard, according to Lassiter, is not about "representations being on equal footing" but about the "power these interpretations have in defining Kotay and his community to the outside" (11). It is, in other words, about "who has control and who has the last word" (11). While Lassiter's assessment of this discussion with Kotay is not wrong, I would argue that anterior to this moral message is Kotay's assertion of his own equality as a speaking subject. Put simply, in his "desire to be heard" Kotay, before making any moral or ethical demands on Lassiter, is affirming his equality—an equality, moreover, that precedes the anthropological responsibility to ensure or protect it.

The assertion of equality announced in Kotay's "desire to be heard" arguably resonates across much ethnographic work in different guises, especially as those with whom anthropologists work continue to con-

test and disrupt the conceits of ethnographic authority. The decision of the anthropologist to respond to this assertion of equality in moral and ethical terms, however, risks missing and even burying the fundamentally political thrust of this verification of equality. This is underlined when Lassiter concludes at the end of his discussion that Kotay's demands are "not just profoundly political, but also profoundly ethical" (Lassiter 2005: 11), leaving the reader with the impression that the political thrust of Kotay's desire to be heard is simply a matter of a politics of representation.

Equality and Politics

In this section I want briefly to unpack this understanding of the relationship of politics and equality as it is elaborated in the work of Jacques Rancière before turning in the subsequent section to two recent books that explore the collaboration between anthropology and contemporary art, in which, I argue, the presupposition of equality is at work. It is my contention that although the manner in which Rancière defines politics is germane to the reading of these two recent books, both nonetheless fail to embrace the political dimension within these collaborations, in particular the implications of collaboration as the practical experimentation of equality. However, to appreciate this argument it is first necessary to elaborate the notion of equality and its relations to politics.

If anthropology is to take accusations of misrepresentation and its distortions seriously, accusations that come from those being studied, it is the voice of the ethnographic other, in affirming their equality, that becomes a potential political gesture and threatens to break with the hackneyed notions of a "politics of representation" wherein politics is reduced to power. What is this equality being asserted, presumed, presupposed? The most fully developed discussion of equality, as I am invoking it here, is to be found in Jacques Rancière's recounting of the story of the schoolteacher Joseph Jacotot in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. At the time of the Restoration in France, Jacotot was exiled to Belgium, during which time he undertook to teach French to Flemish-speaking students, whose language he himself did not know. In the process of realizing that his pupils were capable of learning French by themselves, a process not unlike learning

a mother tongue, he developed the idea of a universal education premised on the principle that all people are equally intelligent and that the problem in education is therefore not the transmission of knowledge but to "reveal an intelligence to itself" (Rancière 1991: 28).

All Jacotot has with him is a bilingual copy of Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, which he asks his students to read and write a paper on, in French. Surprised by the quality of his students' work, Jacotot resolves that there is an equality of intelligences and that the obstacle for students is not a matter of "a lack of instruction, but the belief in the inferiority of their intelligence" (Rancière 1991: 39). Taking his cue from Jacotot, Rancière makes the claim concerning equality that it is a "point of departure, a *supposition* to maintain in every circumstance"; that is, the supposition of the equality of all speaking beings.

In the discussion of the equality of intelligence, Rancière notes that it is not the equality of manifestations of intelligence that is the issue (i.e., knowledge) but rather the equality, or non-hierarchy, of *intellectual capacity* (1991, 27).[5] In this sense equality is not something that can be observed or measured, and neither can it be considered a goal or future state (see also Rancière 1991: 46). Rancière makes the crucial point that equality must therefore be approached as it is practiced and verified; that is, it has no value in itself but only in its effects or what he calls its practical experimentations.

Importantly, the principle of the "equality of all speaking beings" does not make equality an ontological principle.[6] Precisely because its value is tied to its verification and practice, in itself equality is empty and without content. There are two points to clarify at this juncture. First, at a banal level, equality is a presupposition to the degree that it is the condition for understanding between two or more people (see Rancière 2004: 52, 1999: 16). Put simply, in order for me to understand you, and vice versa, we must both first assume our equality as speaking beings (versus beings who produce only noise). This presupposition of equality should not be a surprise for many anthropologists, as it clearly underlines not only the practice of a collaborative anthropology but also anthropological practice at large. In this sense equality is not necessarily political. On a second level, however, equality is the source of politics to the degree that in its verification and practice it exposes a "wrong" between the parts of society or community.

The wrong that ties equality to politics, and that is the basis for the

verification of equality, is not simply a contestation of competing views over interests (e.g., the wages of workers). Rather, it is about who gets to speak and make demands.[7] To return to the assertion of Ralph Kotay, this presupposition of equality is verified and practiced when he states his demand to be heard: "I don't want anything said above this." Beyond the literal meanings of his statement is the rhetorical force of his assertion of his equality as a speaking subject. Put differently, the "wrong" is Kotay and his community having historically been excluded as participants in the ethnographic process—a community included as subjects of anthropological research but excluded as equal participants, as equal speaking beings, as beings able to make demands.

To be clear, this is a wrong Lassiter clearly recognizes and appreciates to the degree that the aim of collaborative ethnography is to redress such hierarchical orders within ethnographic practices by making ethnographic subjects equal partners or, as Lassiter prefers, consultants. The problem is that Lassiter frames the problem as ethical, a matter of moral commitment and responsibility, thereby masking and burying the politics of Kotay's verification and practice of equality. But what exactly is being masked and buried? In other words, what is politics?

As I have already stated, politics is the verification of equality; there is no politics without the presupposition of equality, without the practical experiments of equality. In short, equality is the source of political action. But what is politics precisely? To the degree that Rancière's conception of politics goes against what we usually call politics, some clarification is in order. In *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Rancière makes the following reconfiguration of our understanding of politics:

> Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. I propose to call it *the police*. (Rancière 1999: 28)

It is important to keep in mind that in renaming what is typically thought of as politics as the police, Rancière is not using this term in its pejorative sense, as the pepper-spray-wielding forces of law and order. On the contrary, borrowing the term from Michel Foucault's writings on the mode of government in the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries (Foucault 2007), for Rancière the police (*la police*) refers to "an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task" (1999: 29). In this sense the police means an entity neutral and not reducible to control, repression, domination, or inequality or even an order of powers. In his later writings Rancière refers to the police order in terms of the partition or distribution of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*), which connotes a spatial quality, a point to which I return later.[8]

Having renamed the conventional understanding of politics as the police, Rancière thereby reserves the notion of politics to those acts of disagreement or dissensus with the police order. That is, politics happens in shifting bodies from their assigned place, of making visible what was once not allowed to be seen and making heard what was once only noise (1999: 30). Here politics is a disruption of the police order, a disidentification with its spatial and temporal ordering of bodies. Yet it would be a mistake to understand politics as simply opposed to the police order, as a completely separate and distinct logic that seeks its elimination. On the contrary, politics is uniquely the verification of equality, and thus an action (or practical experimentation) that runs up against the police logic in the name of an egalitarian logic. In short, politics is the processing or naming of a wrong in the name of equality through the dispute with the police order (1999: 35). Politics is dissensus.

So what does all this have to do with the politics of collaboration in anthropology? My argument so far has been that although Lassiter and other proponents of collaborative ethnography have diagnosed the problems facing anthropology correctly—from the conceits of ethnographic authority and its subsequent misrepresentations to the necessity of fully acknowledging the equality of the ethnographic other—the inclination to frame this within ethical and moral terms has inadvertently turned anthropology away from the political or disruptive potential of collaborative practices; that is, how collaboration as dissensus can potentially disrupt and reconfigure the anthropological *episteme*.[9]

My own conceit, evidently, is that we consider the anthropological episteme a form of the police, which is to say, a particular "order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a

particular place and task"; in other words, an episteme that configures and distributes the ethnographic scene. Thus the issue is not primarily whether those represented by anthropology are represented in the way they wish to be represented—a politics of representation for which the goal would be to reach some form of consensual agreement and the reassertion of the police order. Instead the point would be to understand how the anthropological episteme led to such a representation to begin with, and to allow for its disruption and reconfiguration by the subject of politics; namely, the ethnographic subject. This should be the practice of a collaborative anthropology.

How does arguing for the presupposition of equality differ from already existing collaborative practices of anthropologists who explicitly see their projects as political? It may certainly be contended that the collaborative work of a number of anthropologists working in and from Latin America—notably Luis Guillermo Vasco Uribe (2011) and Joanne Rappaport (2008), among others (see Field and Rappaport 2011; Field and Fox 2007)—has already put forward a notion of collaboration that attends to much of what I have so far said. As Joanne Rappaport states when talking about Vasco Uribe: "Collaboration is more than 'good ethnography,' because it shifts control of the research process out of the hands of the anthropologist and into the collective sphere of the anthropologist working on an equal basis with community researchers" (Rappaport 2008: 6).[10]

There are indeed striking similarities between these practices of collaborative anthropology and the ideas I have outlined, especially the emphasis on the transformation of anthropology and its decolonization that emerge in a collaborative practice based on the equality of all participants. These include Rappaport's practice of "co-theorization," which she posits as "the merging of differently situated theories" (Rappaport 2011: 27); Vasco Uribe's emphasis on the dialectics of forms of knowledge (intellectual versus material labor), the transformation of fieldwork, and its epistemological status (Vasco Uribe 2007: 22); and Field and Fox's contention that collaboration, in working "in the employ of the community," has the potential to reverse "conventional power relations" within fieldwork (Field and Fox 2007: 9). In each of these instances there is an acknowledgment of the equality of speaking subjects, or better, the equality of intelligences.

Yet if there is a difference, and there is, it is the position accorded to

equality and its relation to politics, how equality "works" as a non-normative, non-ethical condition and presupposition of politics. The conception of politics within these works is very different from the idea of politics I have so far put forward. In short, the politics of collaboration is the commitment to the struggles and causes of those with whom the anthropologist is working, not a disruption or suspension of the anthropological episteme, as I have argued for previously. As Rappaport explains, "what is at stake in collaboration is the bridging of epistemological and methodological differences *in the service of a political agenda*" (2007: 31, my emphasis; see also Hale 2007). In focusing on the decolonization of anthropological knowledge and its production (i.e., fieldwork), my concern here is on politics as a disruptive force within the anthropological episteme.

When Anthropology Meets Contemporary Art

To begin to ascertain more clearly what is at stake in framing collaboration as politics, I want to turn to two recent books edited by Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright on how collaboration between anthropology and art offers a chance for developing alternative strategies of practice for both (Schneider and Wright 2006, 2010). For anthropology in particular, this means "new ways of seeing" and "new ways of working with visual materials" (2006: 25). While neither of these books explicitly engages the notion of politics, nor the concomitant idea of equality, I argue that such a reading can and should be made nonetheless. In fact, to the degree that Schneider and Wright frame the collaboration between art and anthropology in terms of seeking "new ways of seeing," I propose that such a reading be understood as an extension of their project. Further to demonstrate the inherent politics within Schneider and Wright's project, I then turn to my own fieldwork with Palestinian artists living and working in Israel and the challenges they posed for my anthropological work.

Dialogues and exchanges between art and anthropology have a long history, from French ethnology's relationship with surrealism in the 1930s (Clifford 1988) to the avant-garde inspired experiments of the writing-culture debate in the 1980s (Marcus and Fischer 1986) and, most recently, the "ethnographic turn" within contemporary art in the early 1990s (see Foster 1996; Coles 2000). However, given the prolifera-

tion of misunderstandings and the subsequent growing distance between the two over the last few years, Schneider and Wright argue that this relationship is in need of renewal. Indeed, despite the borrowings between anthropology and contemporary art in recent years—mostly a one-way street of artists broadly using ethnographic methods in their processes or occasionally wrestling with theoretical concerns from anthropology—these are clearly different disciplines, with their own rules and methods, their own practices, and their own histories, institutions, and academies. Yet in spite of these obvious differences, which Schneider and Wright argue can nonetheless be "productive points of departure" (2006: 3), there are deeper affinities between the two, specifically the shared and common object of culture or, in short, the representation of others: "Artists and anthropologists are practitioners who appropriate from, and represent, others" (2006: 26).

In sharing a common object of representation, Schneider and Wright see the bringing together of these two practices, through dialogue and collaboration, as a unique opportunity to elaborate alternative strategies of representation, particularly for anthropology. Indeed, if too many of these past collaborations have not been sufficiently explored for how each discipline can extend the other's practices of representation and perception , the principal aim for Schneider and Wright is to "stimulate new and productive dialogues" between the two by exploring their border zones and encouraging their crossings (2006: 1; 2010). Yet, with anthropology still occupied with experiments for dealing with its "crisis of representation," Schneider and Wright are clearly (and justifiably) more concerned with how artistic practices directly challenge the simple textual-based realist paradigm that dominates anthropological representation (2006: 4).[11] In particular they are interested in exploring how dialogues and collaborations between artists and anthropologists might provide anthropology with the necessary strategies for going beyond its trenchant aversion to the visual as either "dangerously seductive" (Schneider and Wright 2006: 6–8) or "ancillary to anthropological knowledge" (2010: 2).

What precisely do Schneider and Wright see contemporary art offering anthropology? My objective here is not to provide a standard review of the two books edited by Schneider and Wright, a recounting of chapters and their findings; rather, I look at what they see anthropology gaining through its collaborations with contemporary art. In par-

ticular I am interested in what I see as their two central insights, one from each book, and how these are articulated and connected. Thus although they were published four years apart, I approach both books as part of the same project and read them together as one argument.

Schneider and Wright put forward two central aims regarding the strategies to be gained for anthropology in its collaborations with contemporary art. First, by working with contemporary artists, anthropologists are provided a unique opportunity to appropriate visual representational strategies that break with traditional anthropological modes of representation. In other words, by adopting the visual strategies of contemporary art, strategies not confined or overdetermined by traditional textual forms of representation, anthropology is invited to consider art as more than an object of research—as something with which to think radically (2006: 9) and, one hopes, through which to be exposed in turn "to the unforeseen and unexpected" (2006: 25). The second aim is that in so doing, anthropology will be furnished with "new ways of seeing," thereby responding to the call for experimentation in representational practices in anthropology laid out by Marcus and Fischer in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.

One of the two key insights to which Schneider and Wright draw attention in pursuing these aims involves how contemporary art allows for, and even celebrates, an ambiguity or free play between text and image, discourse and figure; what they refer to as an "aesthetic resistance" to anthropological modes of disambiguity through contextualization (2006: 12). Here Schneider and Wright direct the reader's attention to the "ethnopoetic" artwork of David and Susan McAllester, *Hogans: Navajo Houses and Songs* (1980). In this piece, ritually sung house blessings, as presented in their original recordings, are exhibited with images of the intimate interiors of Navajo homes, presented alongside literal translations of the songs.

As Barbara Tedlock notes, this artwork disturbs the viewer/listener looking for "smooth translations" (quoted in Schneider and Wright 2006: 12). Interestingly, Tedlock also adds the idea of juxtaposition to her discussion of the photographs by Susan McAllester in the work, noting how they present an "equal reverence for Navajo traditionalism and acculturation" (Tedlock, quoted in Schneider and Wright 2006: 12). The idea of juxtaposition, she continues, "shocks and slows down the viewer who desires either social commentary on Navajo property

or else romantic pictures of strictly traditional hogans" (2006: 12). According to Schneider and Wright, such juxtapositions and the lack of smooth literary translations, mainly on account of their lack of proper contextualization, have made the message of the work ambiguous in the eyes of critics. However, rather than dismissing the work on this basis, Schneider and Wright argue that we should consider how ambiguity creates "productive tensions" between image and text (and, I would add, between images themselves).

A closely related point is raised and elaborated upon by Christopher Wright in his contribution to the second book, "In the Thick of It: Notes on Observation and Context." He argues that questions of contextualization create a tension between art and anthropology, with the latter dismissing the former's claims to anthropological understanding on account of its failing to contextualize its subject adequately (Wright 2010: 72).[12] As the basis for disqualifying artistic claims to anthropological practice, for Wright this accusation is "effectively a policing of boundaries" between the professional anthropologist and the amateur outsider. To be sure, Schneider and Wright argue that the anthropological aversion to ambiguity curtails the "productive tension" between image and text within art practices (2006: 12), which, Wright again notes, effectively excludes "raising any productive, or difficult, questions for the [anthropological] discipline" (2010: 72). Put bluntly, what is foreclosed is precisely the possibility of "new ways of seeing."

The second key insight comes from the second book and focuses on the idea of "incompleteness" (Schneider and Wright 2010: 19–21): "A lot can be learned from the open-ended, 'incomplete' procedures in the arts" (2010: 19), especially insofar as the "inherently open and processual character of the artwork" can encourage critical discussion around the tendency in anthropology to produce texts that "frequently enclose forcible completion" (2010: 20). Turning to George E. Marcus's discussion of "incompleteness as a norm" (Marcus 2009: 28–29), Schneider and Wright put forward that anthropology should embrace incompleteness as a "positive norm for ethnographic practice," one that imagines ethnography as an "open and ongoing 'archive'" (Schneider and Wright 2010: 20).

This norm of incompleteness is exemplified in the final essay of the second book, a series of collaborations between an anthropologist, an artist-anthropologist, and an artist. By framing their collaboration

within the experimental space of visual anthropology Anna Grimshaw, Elspeth Owen, and Amanda Ravetz were able to explore a series of collaborations, both successful and unsuccessful, in which the difficulties of crossing the boundaries between the disciplines became palpable, where the space between was "a critical rhythm of blockages and flows" (Grimshaw et. al 2010: 160). In recognizing that their collaboration was more about the process of "making" versus objects made, the project came to reveal the importance of the open-endedness and ongoing nature of collaborative work (2010: 148). Thus, in opening this critical space where "'making do' in each other's worlds meant allowing well-worn priorities, assumptions and habits to be disturbed" (2010: 161), Grimshaw, Owen, and Ravetz sustain an incompleteness within their collaborative practice.

My own research with Palestinian artists has undoubtedly made me sensitive to the differences and meeting points between anthropology and contemporary art. While my research was not initially collaborative, my conversations with artists often became exercises in exposing the limits of our respective practices, and I was forced to open myself to "new ways of seeing." For example, in my conversations with Sharif Waked, a multimedia artist living and working in Haifa, I found my early efforts to position him and his work often thwarted and undermined. Sitting one evening at a local café in Haifa we were discussing the recent acquisition of one of his works by the Guggenheim in New York City. At one point I asked him how he had been identified in the label accompanying his work: Palestinian? Israeli? Arab Israeli? Israeli Arab? Palestinian Israeli? This, to me at least, seemed a poignant political question for Palestinians living and working in Israel and now being represented within the global art world. My question, however, seemed to annoy him. Without looking at me, he replied, "I don't know—Palestinian, Palestinian-Israeli, Palestinian and Israeli . . . it doesn't matter."

My anthropological fixation on identity, an especially complex issue for Palestinians in Israel, was a preoccupation that I had to abandon in my research, and Sharif was not first or the last to make this point.[13] Some months later, when we met again at his home to discuss and view a series of his works, I asked him about his brusque response that evening and why he had seemed bothered by my question, to which he matter-of-factly replied that I should not get caught up in issues of

identity. I was opening my eyes again to seeing otherwise, as I was being forced to do with each of the artists I met. When showing me his works one afternoon, Sharif said little other than to point me in general directions about what I should pay attention to and what were for him the important points. What particularly caught my interest that day was Sharif's video piece, *To be continued . . .* , the work that was bought by the Guggenheim, and which we had discussed the first time we met. As Sharif started the video he gave me only a few details, the two key elements of the video, specifically the story read being *1001 Arabian Nights* and the video being looped. As I watched I was admittedly unsure what to look at: I listened to the story being told, closely watching the storyteller, the young man sitting before me reading the opening stories of *1001 Arabian Nights*, trying to imagine what it would be like to see this installation in a museum such as the Guggenheim in New York City. At one point, after watching for about ten minutes, Sharif passed to let me know that the video lasts 41:33 minutes, reiterating that it would loop. I slowly became self-conscious sitting there watching a video as he and his wife went about their day. Despite not watching the video in its entirety, I nonetheless was left with a vivid impression of the contradiction between the visual and the audible. But there was clearly more.

At first glance, what we see is the typical martyr video of a suicide bomber: the backdrop is green with a passage from the *Qu'ran*, verse 78 from *Sourat al-Hajj*, in white calligraphy, while in the foreground a gun lies across the table, with a young man (the well-known actor Saleh Bacri) seated facing us. His clothes are unremarkable: a greenish cap and a black sweatshirt with a green army-type vest over it. Our protagonist's presentation is unaffected, a near monotone and steady reading of a classic Orientalist text, with occasional pauses. There are occasional fade-outs, mostly between the stories, and on a number of occasions the camera zooms in for a few minutes and then back to its original position. In addition, a few times the narrator stops reading and looks directly at the spectator, for a short pause, after which he returns to his story.

On the surface is an obvious contradiction: the would-be suicide bomber preparing his final testimony, to be released as a document once his mission has been accomplished. We, the spectators, are now the witnesses. But this very act, the sure end of this young man, his finality and the finality of the video itself, is delayed and even suspended,

not only by the rhetorical force of the story he has chosen to recount but also in the looping of the video. The narrator, our protagonist, has become Scheherazade, and the viewers, we the spectators, have become the King.

Over the months that followed my visit to Sharif's and my viewing of *To be continued . . .*, I continued to think about the video and its explicit juxtaposing of two heterogeneous elements: a document of the final testimony of a suicide bomber alongside the retelling of a fictional story without end. This juxtaposition was, of course, intentional, but to what effect? The suicide bomber who is saved through the recounting of a story without end, whose conclusion must always be suspended for another time? It was tempting to think of Sharif's video in the context of suicide bombers and of the various ideas associated with their image in the West, especially when one considers that the audience for this piece is primarily the Western spectator. Was the juxtaposition with the *Arabian Nights*, therefore, a message telling us that even those taking up the martyr operations are unwilling agents and would do anything to suspend their fate? In other words, in direct opposition to the image of the suicide bomber as a brainwashed religious fanatic, as he is portrayed in the Western media, are we the spectators confronted with an agent, a person unwilling to follow blindly? This seemed an all too facile reading of the work.

Some months later I had another opportunity to view Sharif's video when he agreed to send me a copy. As I watched the video again, without interruption, without any pauses, I found myself brought into its juxtaposition of worlds, a world of documentary—that is, the martyr video genre—and a world of fiction, *Arabian Nights*. To be sure, the artwork as event, by bringing together these two worlds, effectively establishes a proximity between these heterogeneous elements and, in so doing, potentially creates a particular affect upon the spectator, an experience of defamiliarization. As I continued to watch the work I found myself forgetting about the visual message, the martyr testimony, the document with its prescribed identities, and instead I was pulled into the recounting (a reappropriation and self-orientalization) of the first book of the *Arabian Nights* and the multiple embedded narratives in which each story is a suspension, each conclusion delayed and suspended.

The narrative recounting as temporal suspension had the effect of

unsettling the spatial context represented in the documentary message: our protagonist, quite emphatically positioned and motionless in his assigned space of identification, that of the suicide bomber and terrorist, becomes oddly fictionalized as well, in turn allowing for a capacity previously denied, a new form of subjectivity and commonality, to be other than those identities prescribed.

This temporal juxtaposition of the inevitable end implied by the martyr video with the reading of unending stories from *1001 Arabian Nights*, reinforced through the looping of the video, is a transgression of identification in which the "Palestinian" no longer "fits" within his assigned places of identification. That is, it is a disruption of the regime of identification that assigns Palestinians a place in both time and space. Already surrounded by questions of identity, from checkpoints to ID cards and refugee documents that determine where Palestinians can go and live, what their rights are or are not, "*To be continued . . .*" disavows any assuredness of this identificatory system by creating a juxtaposition in which the would-be suicide bomber is not a suicide bomber since that the story he is recounting has no end, and therefore we as the viewers never know when he will undertake his task, if ever. At the same time, as an anthropologist, I too had my episteme suspended and interrupted, my desire for a closed and neatly concluded narrative of identities and resistances foreclosed.

At work in juxtaposition is an "aesthetic experience," a free-play or non-hierarchical relationship within the artwork itself (Rancière 2004). While this aesthetic experience establishes an experience of equality, albeit not the same as the equality discussed earlier, what it allows, according to Rancière, is an opening for the reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible or anthropological *dispositif*: what he refers to as the "politics of aesthetics."[14] On one level this challenges a certain understanding of how to represent and understand others. On another, there is a more radical critique of the anthropological episteme, the "*a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience" (Rancière 2004: 13).

In contrast to anthropology, in artistic representation there are no rules regarding how the other should be attended to or what the subject matter of the artwork should be—anything can be appropriated and represented. Thus, to take this a step further, aesthetic experience

is precisely what is enacted in juxtaposing art and anthropology in their collaborations. While anthropology and art might share a common object of representation, how they interpret and understand that common object is often at odds, the former traditionally seeking representations that leave no excess or supplement, while art purposefully exposes the incompleteness of any ordering.[15] As Rancière explains, "Aesthetic experience eludes the sensible distribution of roles and competences which structure the hierarchical order" (Rancière 2006: 4).

What aesthetic experience activates, particularly in those moments of collaboration between anthropology and art, is a disruption and redistribution of roles and places of anthropologist and the other and, in turn, of what can be seen, heard, thought, said, and done in the anthropological episteme. I would argue that it is precisely in their juxtaposition that anthropology and art allow for a politics of collaboration.

"We are already equal": A Politics of Collaboration

Shortly after I began my fieldwork in 2009, a Palestinian friend of mine told me, in English: "We do not ask for our equality, we are already equal." With only slight variation, different friends repeated this statement on numerous occasions. It was a statement that set not only the tone of my research and my relationships with those with whom I worked but my understanding of the struggle of Palestinians in Israel. It is also a statement that was implicit in my conversations with Sharif, who refused to allow me to assert my authority via a regime of identification and, in so doing, affirmed his equality. As with Lassiter's relationship with Kotay, I had been put in my place. Being ruptured was the spatial configuration of fieldwork, the classic Malinowskian *mise-en-scène*.

One of the central issues Vasco Uribe addresses in his *Rethinking Fieldwork and Ethnographic Writing* is the spatial configuration of the fieldwork, the separation and hierarchy that are maintained in the ethnographic encounter. It is also an issue that runs through collaborative practices generally: the desire to close the space that exists between the anthropologist and the other, between theory and practice, between the academy and the worlds within which anthropology works. As Vasco Uribe states, with a clear nod to the classical Malinowskian mise-en-scène:

> Based on an erroneous notion of practice, the problem of space is frequently hidden, inexplicit, and peculiarly managed. A specific form of territoriality is created for the purposes of ethnographic research, in which there is a space reserved for practice and a different one for theory. But this is not just a case of conceptual differentiation: it is a spatial and temporal separation between the two, with one following the other in time, reinforced by mutual exteriority. One is the world of the "objects of study," and the other is that of the researcher, the "subject." (Vasco Uribe 2011: 21)

This spatial configuration, he maintains, masks a power relationship, a relationship in which knowledge production is under the stewardship of the ethnographer and anthropologist, while the other, the object of knowledge, is relegated to an observable "quantity," an object of interest to be counted, ordered, and regulated. Vasco Uribe then goes on to argue that these power relations are not to be resolved in the text but in the material reality of fieldwork itself (2011: 31); that is, through the reconfiguration of the space of fieldwork, which is to say, its decolonization. While Vasco Uribe proposes to reposition knowledge production in the field, as a collaborative exercise, I would argue that it is through the presupposition of equality that this spatial configuration is disrupted and decolonized.

In arguing for the presupposition of equality, my aim has been to outline a notion of equality that is neither an ontological principle nor an ethical commitment. So what is equality in its relation to politics? As I stated earlier, following Rancière, equality in its relation to politics does not exist outside its practical experimentations. When Kotay makes his demand upon Lassiter, or when Waked produces a work that refuses the politics of identity, both are challenging and confronting the spaces they have been assigned and the orders in which they have been placed. In their asserting and affirming their equality as speaking subjects, a wrong is demonstrated, and those who are not deemed equal speaking subjects speak and make demands. Equality "exists," therefore, when what can be said, heard, seen, thought, and done is disrupted and suspended. It is, in this sense, anarchic.

In the case of a politics of collaboration, such practical experiments of equality suspend and disrupt the border that maintains the distinction and hierarchy between the "anthropology" and its "other," the

classic fieldwork mise-en-scène. When taking equality as an anarchic presupposition, what makes collaboration political is its reconfiguration of the border zone between the anthropologist and the ethnographic other, such that these identities are no longer assigned and determined. In other words, if the task of a critical anthropology has been to "make the Other present" (Fabian 1991: 223), its efforts have failed to the extent that they have "always already" been premised on the absence of the "Other" (Michaelsen 2008: 26). Put differently, the very idea of the Other presupposes absence. The Other—the anthropological Other—is the designation of a boundary and border, redrawn each and every time within the work of anthropology, providing the determination and assignment of spaces and places for those with whom anthropology works.[16] The politics of collaboration, as I have suggested, aims to undo this border, not by granting the Other a voice but rather in listening to the verification and practice of equality with those with whom anthropology works. Thus the practice of collaboration is not political because it is replete with power relations, because power is everywhere and must therefore somehow be navigated, its excesses contained: power relations are not politics. If power is everywhere, as Foucault suggests, it does not mean politics is everywhere (see Nancy 2000). As Rancière notes, "Politics is not made up of power relationships; it is made up of relationships between worlds (1999: 42). These "worlds" for Rancière are the two logics, the logic of equality and the logic of police. As I have argued, the collaborative encounter is conceived as a polemical space wherein the egalitarian logic of those with whom anthropology works confronts the anthropological episteme. The "politics" at work in the presumption of equality, therefore, is first and foremost an anarchic disruption of the anthropological, its suspension and interruption and reconfiguration.

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Notes

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1. Holmes and Marcus understand refunctioning as "drawing on the analytical acumen and existential insights of our subjects to recast the intellectual imperatives of our own methodological practices, in short, the para-ethnographic practices of our subjects" (2008: 82).

2. Of particular relevance is section A: "Responsibility to people and animals with whom anthropological researchers work and whose lives and cultures they study."

3. I place the recent "collaborative turn" within the context of the debates surrounding the politics of representation that gained traction in the 1980s (see Clifford and Marcus 1986). For a discussion of this historical relationship see Lassiter and Campbell (2010).

4. The full statement by Kotay reads: "I'm always willing to give out information like this. But . . . I don't want anything else said above this. Some people who write books, I've read their stories where they build things up that's not there. When people don't know [any better], anytime they hear these things, they believe what you say or write" (Lassiter 2005:4).

5. It is important to note that one of Rancière's key protagonists in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is Pierre Bourdieu. As Kristin Ross explains in her seminal introduction to this book, Rancière is contesting a sociological discourse, of which Bourdieu is a key figure, and which "[derives] its authority from the presumed naïveté or ignorance of its objects of study" (Ross 1991: xi).

6. It would be prudent here to distinguish Rancière's conceptualization of equality from Jürgen Habermas's "ideal speech situation," which is more akin to Rawls's "veil of ignorance" versus equality per se. For Rancière equality is not ontological in the sense that it is not inscribed in human nature or something that exists in reality.

7. A "wrong" is the translation of "le tort." Rancière plays on the meaning of this word in French, *tordre*, as a torsion or twisting of equality in human relations. In this sense inequality is a "wronging or wringing" of the more primordial equality on which inequality rests. See Deranty (2003).

8. It is important to keep in mind the double sense of *partage* as exclusion/separation as well as that which allows participation.

9. I use *episteme* in the sense implied by Michel Foucault to designate what is visible, sayable, thinkable, and doable in a particular era.

10. While I do not have the space here to do so, there is a potentially provocative comparative analysis to be made between many of the ideas argued for by Luis Guiller-

mo Vasco Uribe and Johannes Fabian, certainly the dialectical production of knowledge and dialogue as confrontation. See Fabian (1991).

11. This is not to say that artists get a free pass in either of these books. As Schneider quite forcefully warns in his chapter "Appropriations," which is more or less an extension of the introduction to *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*: "Admittedly, there might be those artists for whom understanding the other is not an issue at all, and who just deliberately play with form, devoid of ethnographically specific meaning. Criticisms of superficiality and aestheticism have been rightly leveled against such approaches. This book is an invitation for artists to engage more profoundly with other cultures though they might not apply the same criteria to ethnography as anthropologists do" (Schneider 2006: 40).

12. By contextualization Wright is referring to the social and historical background considered necessary for understanding a culture, an idea that is premised on the principle of the holism of culture and the interrelatedness of its parts. See Fabian (1995) for a critical view of how context is invoked as a "corrective" in cases of misunderstanding.

13. See Kanaaneh (2009) for a vivid discussion of the strategies of identity among Palestinians in Israel.

14. It is important to point out that when Rancière talks about the politics of aesthetics he is distinguishing himself from Benjamin's "aestheticization of politics" (1968: 242). As Rancière notes, "There is thus an aesthetics at the core of politics that has nothing to do with Benjamin's discussion of the 'aestheticization of politics' specific to the 'age of the masses.' This aesthetics should not be understood as the perverse commandeering of politics by a will to art, by a consideration of the people qua work of art. If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience" (Rancière 2004: 13).

15. Lest I be taken to be putting art on a pedestal, the "effectiveness" of art to which I am appealing is not intrinsic to art per se, its natural disposition. On the contrary, much of what passes itself off as "political art" is questionable in its capacity to contribute to new ways of seeing, talking, and doing. As Rancière clarifies: "Today, indeed, much art continues to assert not only its will, but also its ability to denounce the reign of the commodity, its iconic ideals and putrid excrement. Calls for the need to struggle against the society of the spectacle, to develop practices of *détournement*, continue to come from all quarters. And they do so by invoking the standard repertoire of denunciatory techniques: parodies of promotional films; re-processed disco sounds; advertising icons or media stars modelled in wax figures; Disney animals turned into polymorphous perverts; montages of 'vernacular' photographs depicting standardized petty-bourgeois living-rooms, overloaded supermarket trolleys, standardized entertainment and the excrement of civilization; huge installations of pipes and machines that depict the bowels of the social machine as it swallows everything and turns it into shit. These sorts of rhetorical dispositif still prevail in a good many galleries and museums professing to be revealing the power of the commodity, the reign of the spectacle, or the pornography of power. But since it is actually difficult to find anybody who is actually ignorant of such things, the mechanism ends up spinning around itself and playing on the very undecidability of its effects" (Rancière 2010: 144).

16. Matti Bunzl (2004) makes a similar argument about the implicit hierarchies of Self/Other in recent critiques of anthropology. In his discussion of Gupta and Ferguson (1997) and Clifford (1997) he argues that although an effort is made to challenge the

foundational role assigned to alterity in fieldwork, these authors are nonetheless "reaffirming the paradigm they deplore" by maintaining the assumption of cultural differences or alterity between the ethnographer and the people involved. Bunzl argues that such differences cannot be assumed but instead must be examined genealogically in what he refers to as a "history of the present."

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