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Contents

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In the *Critical Arts* 30 (2) 2016 article, 'Rethinking critique as ethics in higher education institutions' by Mei Yang, an incomplete acknowledgement was printed. We apologise for the omission and any inconvenience this may have caused. Herewith the full version.

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Research articles
Art, ethnography and practice-led research

Kris Rutten

Abstract

Based on the ongoing and growing body of work that can be situated at the intersection of art and ethnography, *Critical Arts* has decided to host an annual themed issue that explores the 'ethnographic turn' in art. The aim of this thematic strand is to continue exploring the questions that are being raised by artists' engagement with anthropological and ethnographic perspectives (and vice versa). In these annual thematic issues, the aim is to further the critical work on ethnography in relation to contemporary art by specifically looking at art *practices* and *processes*, and offer a bottom-up perspective from artists, critics and theorists to explore the question *if*, *why* and *how* an ethnographic perspective is at work. This connects with ongoing discussions around practice-led research in the arts. This introductory article introduces and frames the questions, topics and perspectives that are explored throughout the contributions in this edition of the annual themed issue.

Keywords: art, ethnography, practice-led research

Introduction

In 2013, a double special issue of *Critical Arts* (issues 27[5] and 27[6]) was themed 'Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art'. From these special issues it became clear that discussions about the possible convergences between (contemporary) art and anthropology have taken an important place in current debates about the methods, form and purposes of ethnography, as well as in current debates about

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contemporary art (on this, see also a forthcoming entry on Contemporary Art in the International Encyclopedia of Anthropology [Rutten forthcoming]). Work situated 'at the intersection' of art and ethnography is manifested through ethnographers who collaborate with artists, artists who create projects that bring about ethnographic insights, and art projects that are the result of ethnographic research (Rutten et al. 2013a and b; Rutten forthcoming). Over the past few decades, there has indeed been an increasing number of contemporary art projects that address questions about the theorisation of cultural difference, methodological issues that are being raised by studying and developing knowledge about ('other') cultures and critical reflections on representational practices (Rutten et al. 2013a and b; Rutten forthcoming). These art projects have also been referred to as 'ethnographic aesthetics' (Farber 2016; Hjorth and Sharp 2014; Siegenthaler 2013).

Furthermore, there has been a related interest in anthropology (as an academic discipline) for contemporary art that starts from a critical assessment and uses different possible methods, genres and media formats to communicate about ethnographic fieldwork (as a research methodology). Indeed, the field of anthropology still struggles with the 'crisis of representation' (Clifford and Marcus 1986) that problematises and thematises the importance of form, language and narrative in writing ethnographies. Precisely this confrontation between *content* and *form* is explored at the intersection of (contemporary) art and ethnography in many different ways (Rutten et al. 2013a and b; Rutten forthcoming). The problematisation and questioning of different possible methods, genres and media formats to communicate about ethnographic research, are reflected in the co-called 'sensory turn' in anthropology and ethnographic research (Pink 2009). From this perspective, it is emphasized that the field should develop a stronger engagement with a broad range of visual, performative and material representations (Schneider and Wright 2006; Rutten forthcoming).

The aim of this thematic strand is to continue exploring questions that are being raised by artists' engagement with anthropological and ethnographic perspectives (and vice versa). There has been a notable body of (critical) engagement with the ethnographic turn in contemporary art, starting from a broad range of questions that address the underlying assumptions of these projects about the cultural and geographic 'other' (Foster 1995; Irving 2006). As Leora Farber (2010: 303, also cited in Rutten et al. 2013a) aptly asks:

> 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?

Indeed, it is clear that these questions about 'self' versus 'other' are not new. For a few decades there has been growing concern about identity politics and the politics

of representation (Da Silva 1999; Rutten et al. 2013a; Soetaert et al. 2004; Tomaselli 1999). Farber (2010: 303) even argues that 'given the plethora of theoretical positions which has been covered regarding the ethics of representing, speaking for, of, and with the other, this terrain seems well worn to the point of exhaustion'. Therefore, there is a need to explore whether there may be 'new' or 'other' ways of conceptualising selfhood and otherness, what forms these might take, and which questions are being raised (Farber 2010; Rutten et al. 2013a).

In these annual thematic issues, the aim is to further critical work on ethnography in relation to contemporary art by specifically looking at art *practices* and *processes*, and to offer a bottom-up perspective from artists, critics and theorists to explore *if*, *why* and *how* an ethnographic perspective is at work. This connects with ongoing discussions about practice-led research (PLR) in the arts (for an extended view of different approaches see Farber and Mäkelä [2010]). As Farber and Mäkelä (2010) argue, artists are increasingly integrating research methods into their creative processes in diverse ways. Although this is of course not a new approach, there is 'a significant trend in contemporary art-making that focuses on the production of knowledge' (ibid: 9) as part of, or in relation to, their artworks. Thus, artistic practice has indeed become 'a field of possibilities, of exchange and comparative analysis' in which different modes of perception and thinking are integrated (Sheikh 2006: 192, see also Busch 2009, Farber and Mäkelä 2010). This is also very much the case in ethnographic perspectives within contemporary art.

In what follows, I introduce and frame the questions, topics and perspectives that are explored in the contributions to this edition of the annual themed issue.

The artist as anthropologist

The first contribution continues the discussion on the ethnographic turn in contemporary art by focusing on globally acclaimed artists (see *Critical Arts* 27[6] on Kutlüg Ataman, Walid Raad, Jayce Salloum, Akram Zaatari and Brett Bailey). What these artists share, besides their importance on the global art scene (and market), is that their work focuses on themes such as travel, memory, migration, identity and (the crisis of) representation, which situates their outputs within the ethnographic turn in contemporary arts. While these artists embrace (arguably) 'ethnographic' themes in their artwork (Rutten et al. 2013b), they do this by developing work which has the potential to contribute to the more critical discourse that has been developed since the crisis of representation in anthropology. Such artworks thus offer an important perspective to unravel ongoing debates about reflections on culture in general and ethnography/anthropology in particular (Rutten et al. 2013b; Rutten forthcoming).

This discussion is continued in the contribution by Frank Maet. Drawing on Joseph Kosuth's characterisation of the artist as an engaged anthropologist, Maet argues that today we can consider visual artists such as Bing, Murakami and Sikander as

artists-anthropologists who express and study how cultural imagination is affected by globalisation. First, in line with De Saussure's distinction between signifier and signified, Maet stresses the relativity of the cultural references that are present in their artworks. Because the discussed artists cut across divisions between different cultural expressions of art, Maet argues that they bring an enlarged modernisation process into view, called global modernity. Next, Maet elaborates on the connotations of signifiers. He argues that Bing, Murakami and Sikander play with forms of cultural expression, as well as with the cultural connotations attached to them, to create a new cultural imagination. Finally, the discussed artworks are explored as 'balancing acts' respecting different cultural influences. In reference to Papastergiadis, this is interpreted as an aesthetic cosmopolitanism, and it is argued that the discussed artists respect aesthetic and cultural limits to enable this ethical stance.

Collaborative practice

The next set of articles specifically explores how collaboration between artists, ethnographers and research participants can generate new knowledge about particular contextualised understandings of culture. From this perspective, art is used to create a collaborative and dialogical form of ethnographic knowledge.

Lydia Nakashima Degarrod focuses on the use of collaborative art to create ethnographic knowledge and develop empathy between an ethnographer and a visual artist on the one hand, and nine Chilean political exiles on the other. The discussion is based on the creation of artworks that depict the experience of exile for the art installation *Geographies of the Imagination*. Degarrod shows how the participatory method of making images can visualise the development of empathy and the emergence of an embodied and dialogical form of ethnographic knowledge. The processes of collaborative art making and empathetic development took place throughout a number of emotional, imaginative and cognitive stages. The images themselves became checkpoints for the verification of mutual understanding between ethnographer and informant about exile. The position of the author as ethnographer and visual artist allowed her to observe, while at the same time participating in the creation of ethnographic knowledge.

In the following contribution, Carla Hamer starts from the discussions in *Writing culture* that provided new perspectives on ethnographic writing. She acknowledges that there has been a proliferation of 'sensory' approaches in the social sciences and ethnography, and 'ethnographic' projects in the arts. Hamer explores some of the critiques that both perspectives (art and ethnography) received because of the blurred distinction between their respective methodologies and the privileging of experience over interpretation in their claims to 'truth'. She engages in this discussion

by reconsidering the relationship between photography and 'reality', and repositions the role of photographer-researcher as co-creator of ethnographic knowledge. The focus of her study is a Danish micro-community in Argentina, amongst whom she explores the possibilities as well as the challenges of performative photography as a (collaborative) ethnographic methodology.

Reflective practice

The notion of practice-led research in the arts also raises questions about the so-called 'reflective practitioner'. As Farber and Mäkäla (2010: 11) argue: 'As early as the 1980s, social scientist Donald Schön (1995: viii) stressed the role of the practitioner, whose understanding and knowledge from a particular field corresponds to a perspective situated within the process of *praxis*'. There is a vast literature about the reflective practitioner in general and the relevance of reflexivity in particular (see, e.g., D'Cruz et al. 2007). Reflexivity is often related to Paolo Freire's concept of praxis, which is 'the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' (cited in Enoch 2004: 289; see also Rutten et al. 2010). Within the context of PLR, this implies that '[t]he … issue is … about the self-reflective and self-critical processes of a person taking part in the production of meaning within contemporary art, and in such a fashion that it communicates where it is coming from, where it stands at this precise moment, and where it wants to go' (Hannula et al. cited in Farber and Mäkelä 2010: 15).

In their contribution, Evelyne Deceur, Griet Roets, Kris Rutten and Maria Bouverne-De Bie aim to merge an *insider* with an *outsider* perspective on participatory arts projects. They do so by exploring the concept of a 'researcher template' as a way of enabling reflexivity in practice-led inquiries. Situated at the intersection between artistic, educational and academic work, this template allows the authors to address and reflect upon the complexities and vicissitudes emerging from an interpretive study of the Ghent-based participatory arts project, *rocsa singers*. By discussing the roles of the diverse protagonists within this practice, they highlight three main challenges and tensions: (1) nurturing and supporting diversity; (2) the thin line between directing and going along; and (3) the need to go public. They argue that participatory arts practices offer opportunities to move beyond dominant interpretations and well-known (art) strategies and forms. Such reflexivity allows the practitioner to grasp the continuous and subtle interplay between contextualisation, diversity and responsibility, and to forge new connections between life-worlds and system pressures and priorities.

Indeed, within qualitative research in general and practice-led research in particular, the personal experience of the artist as researcher has been stressed as an

integral part of the research which has led to several self-reflexive research projects, in which artists/researchers use their own experience as part of their research (Farber and Mäkelä 2010).

Autoethnography

Elaborating on the notion of self-reflexivity, the next set of articles focuses on autoethnography as the main methodological perspective. As a research approach, autoethnography 'seeks to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)' (Ellis et al. 2010). As such, it aims to challenge 'canonical ways of doing research and representing others', and specifically treats research as a political act (ibid: 1). Autoethnography is both process and product. As a process, ethnography studies a culture's practices, values and beliefs – e.g. through participant observation – with the aim of helping *insiders* as well as *outsiders* to better understand a culture. Researchers who are engaged in autoethnography, however, 'retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity' (ibid: 8). This distinction is also reflected in the products emerging from ethnography and autoethnography respectively. Within ethnography, the purpose is to provide a 'thick description' to afford insiders and outsiders an understanding of specific cultural practices. Researchers who write autoethnographies, however, 'seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience' (ibid: 13). As Catherine Russel (1999: 280) argues: 'The auto-ethnographic subject blurs the distinction between ethnographer and Other by traveling, becoming a stranger in a strange land, even if that land is a fictional space existing only in representation'. Several contributions in this thematic issue approach PLR from an autoethnographic perspective.

In her contribution, Lliane Loots takes on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of the body as the prime means of knowing the world, starting from the understanding that we *have* a body, *are* a body and *become* a body. These are key concepts for those, like herself, who through the act of choreography tell stories with the body. Arguing for the notion of the embodied 'I' and interrogating the politics of autoethnography, this contribution offers a discussion of the author's process of conceptualising and choreographing *days like these* (2015). Working with Verbatim Theatre (also called Documentary Theatre) methodologies, she began to look at the politics of memory and history. Her interest lay in determining whether there could be a potential cross-over between this theatre-making method and the choreographic process. For Loots, the way she choreographs is essentially 'verbatim' in that she constantly asks dancers to bring their own life experiences – through their bodies

– into the dance theatre that she makes. In discussing *days like these* she offers a critical analysis of her own choreography (beyond the abovementioned encounter and analysis of the process of making). This is conceptualised as a feminist act of responding to the construction and play of knowledge and power within and on the moving, dancing body; both her own body and the bodies of the six dancers she collaborated with.

In her contribution, Yeran Kim argues that the convergence between the artistic turn in ethnography and the ethnographic turn in art is particularly manifested in an artist's life and work. The life and work of a group of young Korean artists in London is analysed by introducing the term 'performative-we' to explore the multisensory and collective form of the performance of autoethnography. To avoid the risk of romanticising the instability and hardship underlying these Korean artists' life and work in London, Kim argues that the artists' voluntary and active performance of *otherness* is crucial in their problematisation of the Western-dominant regime of aesthetics.

'Situating' practice-led research

PLR also raises questions about how creative and curatorial processes contribute to the methodological underpinnings of research exhibitions, and how research outcomes are surfaced and hidden in the materiality of display (Farber and Mäkelä 2010). Biggs (2002) (as discussed in Farber and Mäkelä 2010: 11, emphasis added) argues that one of the principal features of PLR is 'the desire to create artefacts and present them as part of the "answer" to research questions posed at the outset of the creative endeavor. In this sense, the practice-led enterprise is different from many other approaches since it does not simply use objects as evidence, but attempts to present the objects created during the process as *arguments*.' Indeed, these are important questions, because as Siegenthaler (2013: 738) argues in her call for an ethnographic turn in contemporary art scholarship: 'Events that facilitate social interaction and cultural encounter are variously seen as the actual art practice, and only sometimes do they acquire a concentrated and reflective documentation and representation in the exhibition space.'. However, this also raises questions about how and where to exhibit practice-led research. The exhibition and transporting of the work from studio to gallery is an important part of both the research trajectory and the contextualisation of the artwork. It also raises questions about the spaces and places where artistic practice-led art emerges and where it is situated.

In her contribution, Kim Gurney offers an alternative ethnography of Johannesburg by tracking the creation of contemporary art within an inner-city atelier on End Street and into the world at large ('from End to End'). The research is about contemporary

art as a vector of value: it sought nodes of transfiguration and their catalysts, foregrounding practice and process. In this assemblage, Gurney aspires to 'a cultural biography of things', while reflecting on a particular era in the building's life: during the research period, it was put up for sale in a value metamorphosis of its own. The article also tracks the journey to new studios, and the atelier's reconfigured fate, which speaks to other buildings crafting second lives in other cities characterised by flux.

Ethnography and digital culture

Of course, the confrontation between art and ethnography also needs to take into account the role that digitisation plays in the production, mediation and consumption of 'culture'. Indeed, as Horst and Hjorth (2014: 125) claim, '[a] range of ethnographic approaches have emerged to understand and analyse the relationship between ethnography, art and the broader sphere of visual culture'. However, '[w]ith the proliferation of desktop and laptop computers, mobile phones, portable gaming systems, digital and video cameras, tablets with haptic interfaces and a range of other portable media, the nature of contemporary screen cultures has changed' (ibid.). Moreover, the intersection of art, ethnography and creative practice from the perspective of recent shifts in contemporary media ecology has changed, and we therefore need to focus on how these new technologies 'are also reshaping our experiences of place, notions of co-present intimacies as well as new perceptions of scale and dynamics' (ibid.).

In his contribution, Simon Order argues that the dramatic anthropological shifts in music production practices in the post-analogue world have been primarily driven by the ever-increasing functionality of digital audio technologies. Increasingly, technologies themselves are becoming pertinent actors in the music production process. A relatively new trend is a move towards using the mobile tablet computer as production tool. This article emerged from the author's own practice-led research into music production on a tablet computer whilst travelling to international destinations. Using evocative autoethnography he diarised his mobile music production, concluding that the mobility of the practice positively impacted his outcomes. In this article he reflects on a number of questions, including: What factors are at play and could a theorisation of mobile music production be articulated? Mobility is more than simply transplanting music production to another place. Rather, it requires us to reconsider fundamental notions which are central to musical practice. This study theorises a multi-sensorial approach where human mobility and connection with place enhance musical creativity. Music data mobility further amplifies production options. This article proposes that creativity, for the mobile musician, is experienced in a liminal space between the geographical and the virtual.

Vignette

We also incorporate a contribution that serves as a vignette. Within the thematic issues, vignettes are statements and reflections by artists about their practice, which are not yet fully developed as a completed research project (see, e.g., 'vignettes' in Rutten et al. 2013a and b).

In her vignette, Susan Ossman tells the story of 'On the Line', a Riverside, California series of exhibitions, performances, research and participatory interventions that focus on clotheslines to probe divisions of life and art, gender and culture and generation. Who does your laundry? What does an electric dryer indicate about changing relationships to nature? How do movements and conversations around laundry lines differ across the world? Each event associates art and ethnography in different ways, building on earlier work to develop varied modes of spectatorship, participation, research and dialogue. The programme started with Ossman's work: first a painting, then in 2013, the first 'On the Line' exhibition. Afterwards, artists, anthropologists and graduate students developed a 'critique' and then a 'remake' of that exhibition called 'On the Line: A Second look'. The circle of collaborative research and practice widened and produced 'Hanging Out' in 2015. That exhibition was developed as a site for fieldwork, collaboration and performance, leading to a project to expand the widening circle of participation with outdoor pop-up exhibitions and performances in neighbourhoods across the city in 2016. Ossman proposes an engaged insider's account of the process to suggest how focusing on a simple (nearly universal) practice across scenes designed to shift participants' roles and positions, brought something of the estrangement and iterative qualities of fieldwork to collaborative practices and public discussions.

Conclusion

Our aim is to engage critically with the ethnographic turn in contemporary art by focusing on practice-led research and offering a forum to artists and anthropologists to address the issues at stake, in works that can be situated 'at the intersection' of art and anthropology. In this issue we elaborate on some of the discussions and questions that emerged from the preceding two issues, but we also introduce additional questions, topics and perspectives. Specifically, we continue exploring whether there may be 'new' or 'other' ways of conceptualising selfhood and otherness, what forms these might take, and which questions are being raised (Farber 2010). We also elaborate on the different issues and questions that are at stake in practice-led research, focusing on ethnographic research. Thereby we question how creative processes give rise to research questions, arguments and findings, and how creative and curatorial processes can originate research questions and sustain critical perspectives (see also

Farber and Mäkelä 2010). The focus in this issue is on collaborative processes, the reflective practitioner, autoethnography, and the role of art and ethnography within an increasingly changing media ecology.

Of course, the confrontation between art and ethnography also raises questions about PLR in an academic context. In January 2014, the Visual Identities in Art and Design (VIAD) research centre organised a round-table conference on Practice-Led Research Writing at the University of Johannesburg, addressing questions such as: 'How can PLR approaches to writing be used to model new forms of textual outputs in art and design?' 'What are possible PLR approaches in writing?' 'How are articles that employ these approaches to be appraised by peer-reviewers, editors and publishers?' 'What is required in order for PLR-based writing forms to be acknowledged as scholarly outputs?'[1] It is clear that we cannot address all these questions in this special issue, but we hope that the different contributions in these volumes will be exemplary of the different forms artistic research papers can take. I would like to thank all the reviewers and editors of *Critical Arts* for their help in editing this issue, taking into account the academic context of the journal, but also opening up to other forms and genres of artistic/ academic writing.

Notes

1 See http://www.viad.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PLR-programme-and-abstracts.pdf

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The artist as anthropologist of the current globalisation: a view on the present-day cultural imagination in the artworks of Xu Bing, Takashi Murakami and Shahzia Sikander

Frank Maet

Abstract

Drawing on Joseph Kosuth's characterisation of the artist as an engaged anthropologist, Maet argues that nowadays we can consider visual artists, such as Xu Bing, Takashi Murakami and Shahzia Sikander, as artist-anthropologists who express and research how cultural imagination is affected by globalisation. First, in line with De Saussure's distinction between signifier and signified, the author stresses the relativity of the cultural references that are present in their artworks. Because the considered artists cut across the divisions between different cultural expressions of art, he argues that they bring an enlarged modernisation process into view, called global modernity. Next, the article elaborates on the connotations of signifiers. The author maintains that Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander play with forms of cultural expressions, as well as with the cultural connotations attached to them, and that in doing so they create a new cultural imagination. Finally, the discussed artworks are typified as balancing acts respecting different cultural influences. In reference to Papastergiadis, this is interpreted as an aesthetic cosmopolitanism and it is argued that the discussed artists respect aesthetic and cultural limits to enable this ethical stance.

Keywords: artist-anthropologist, cultural imagination, globalisation, Shahzia Sikander, Takashi Murakami, Xu Bing

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Introduction: globalisation as a starting point for new reflections on art

Since the 1990s, the effect of globalisation on art has played a considerable role in (Euro-American) art theory and cultural theory. However, there appears to be no central view on the meaning of globalisation and its effect on art.

One of the last chapters of *Art since 1960* (Archer 2002) is entitled: 'Globalization and the post-medium condition'. Archer (ibid: 213), who speaks of multiple viewpoints, is very sceptical about this condition, suggesting that globalisation is the result of an ongoing expansion of a Western art-historical model into new market areas. In *Antinomies of art and culture*, the editors (Smith et al. 2008) bring together many voices on contemporary art. In the essays, links are frequently made to 'economic globalization', a 'global picture', 'imperialism' and 'empire', but the editors argue that there is no unified view concerning the interpretation of the effect of globalisation on art. The question of what is happening to art in a time of globalisation also arises in Hugh Honour and John Fleming's *A world history of art* (2009). In Terry Smith's overview, *Contemporary art, world currents* (2011), the author refers to global networks, ecology and social media as contemporary concerns. Also, in the 2011–2012 exhibition 'The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds after 1989', curated by theorist Andrea Buddensieg and artist and theorist Peter Weibel, at the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, the themes explored through the works of artists who are active on different continents included living in different time zones; the writing of art history in a global context; and the functioning of art worlds on other continents (Belting et al. 2013).

The struggle to specify the meaning of globalisation for art mirrors the difficulty in defining globalisation in general. Different authors have suggested very different interpretations. Often globalisation is associated with a global expansion of neoliberal capitalism (Barber 1996; Luttwak 1999), while other researchers emphasise 'glocalisation' and focus more on the diversity of exchanges between local and global cultures (Appadurai 1996; Robertson 1992). The complexity of globalisation and the difficulty of obtaining a clear, general view on this phenomenon, are described by the sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour:

> The situation is all the more confusing because, as many anthropologists have shown, people devise new 'localisms' even faster than globalization is supposed to destroy them. Traditions are invented daily, entire cultures are coming into existence, languages are being made up; as to religious affiliations, they may become even more entrenched than before. It's as if the metaphor of 'roots' had been turned upside down: the more 'uprooted' by the forces of modernization, the farther down identities are attaching themselves.[1]

Nevertheless, there have been attempts to distil a single, generalising definition of globalisation, in which the process is defined as a worldwide interconnectedness (Delanty 2009) and 'the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space' (Steger 2013: 15). In this latter view, it is stressed that the globalisation process has speeded up intensely since the late 1980s. Main causes for this movement forward are the breaking down of the Soviet Empire, the neoliberal ambition to establish a single world market, and the revolution in information and communication technology (Steger 2013).

I will follow the generalising definitions, as formulated by Delanty and Steger, because they focus on how different parts of the world are connected and on the effects of these connections – in effect, the underlying focus of all reflections on globalisation, regardless of how connections and their effects are interpreted. To determine how individual artists deal with the relationship between art and globalisation, I focus on the works of three contemporary visual artists: Xu Bing, Takashi Murakami and Shahzia Sikander.

I consider these artists as engaged anthropologists whose works tell, in a personal and aesthetic manner, about the effects of globalisation on cultural imagination. In this text cultural imagination is understood as the ways cultural objects portray the specificity of that culture. I argue that their artworks – all of which refer to a mixed North-American and Asian background – offer us the tools to give content to 'the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space' (Steger 2013: 15). To relate and extend the specificity of the cultural imagination present in the artworks to more general and theoretical reflections on the relationship between art and globalisation, I trace some similarities between the very different artworks and backgrounds of the artists.

But first, I make two preliminary comments: one about the choice of artists and the specificity of their background, and a second about the return to an anthropological interest in the arts.

Xu Bing, Takashi Murakami and Shahzia Sikander as representatives of current West–East relations

Xu Bing (b. 1955), Takashi Murakami (b. 1962) and Shahzia Sikander (b. 1969) have mixed socio-cultural backgrounds. All were originally born and grew up in Eastern home countries, but during their lifetime they have studied, lived or worked for several years in the United States. Their mixed West–East background is reflected in their work, which at present is shown all over the world.

Xu Bing, originally from China, lived for several years in New York and is now President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. He mostly makes

installation art, in which he reflects on the nature of language and cultural exchanges between East and West. Takashi Murakami lives and works in Tokyo and New York. In his work, references to manga style and other Japanese subcultures (e.g., animated films) are very present. His works are shown and sold internationally, on commercial circuits as well as in well-known highly non-commercial artistic settings. Shahzia Sikander, born in Lahore, Pakistan, lives and works in New York, but also teaches in Pakistan. In her work we recognise elements of Indian and Persian miniature painting, but also allusions to Western art history.

These artists are not only well known and internationally respected, they are exemplary exponents of the contemporary art world. Many artists from countries and continents that did not participate actively in the international art scene (mainly dominated by Europe and North-America until the late 1980s) have come to the fore in the last decennia. Asian artists have become influential, but so have African and South American artists, not forgetting numerous artists with mixed backgrounds who are migrants and/or children of migrants (Smith et al. 2008). Of course, all of these works cannot be reduced to a single model. However, through the work of these three Asian artists are noted certain tendencies that characterise the intercontinental influence on the cultural imagination.

Why revisit the artist as anthropologist today?

I regard Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander as personally engaged visual artist-anthropologists, since they confront us with a visual analysis and documentation of their mixed socio-cultural backgrounds. This position is in line with claims made by Joseph Kosuth (1993: 124) in his essay 'The artist as anthropologist', in which he states that artists study and create the culture to which they belong.

According to Kosuth's theory, which he developed in the 1970s, '[t]he artist is a model of the anthropologist *engaged*' (ibid: 117) – a term he coined to identify the artist with an anthropologist who does not study a foreign culture as an outsider; the artist is always already an insider, participating in the culture to which she contributes (ibid: 120–121). In Kosuth's (ibid: 117) view, the artist studies the culture he belongs to and his '(art) "depicts" *while* it alters society'. It is because art is thought to show what is valuable in a culture and because the artist is engaged in that culture, that art has this anthropological and transformative quality.

From Kosuth's (ibid: 124) text we also learn about the way artworks imitate and transform culture:

> The artist-as-anthropologist, as a student of culture, has as his job to articulate a model of art, the purpose of which is to understand culture by making its implicit nature explicit – internalize its 'explicitness' (making it, again, 'implicit') and so on. Yet this is

> not simply circular because the agents are continually interacting and socio-historically located. It is a non-static, in-the-world model.

By documenting and reflecting the cultural circumstances to which it is related, art offers us an active practice-based cultural history (Galloway 2012: vii). However, the literature about the return to anthropology in art is also very sceptical of the reintroduction of an anthropological approach to art (Rutten et al. 2013). The 1995 essay 'The artist as ethnographer', by art historian and critic Hal Foster, voices this criticism on the return to anthropology in relation to art. Foster's main fear is that we fall back into exoticism and that we are fetishising 'otherness': 'If it is true that we live today in a near-global economy, then a pure outside can no longer be presupposed' (Foster 1995: 304).

I agree with Foster in the sense that in times of (economic) globalisation there no longer is an 'outside', so we should not refer to otherness as something different and separate from the world as we know it, nor do we need to turn ourselves into outsiders, by way of incarnating 'otherness' (ibid.). Both movements cultivate an artificially created opposition between the self and the other which is no longer tenable in times of 'a near-global economy'. We should not rely on contemporary artists to celebrate 'otherness', as Foster rightly argues.

In their work Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander reflect on the cultural condition, created by the interchanges of different cultural backgrounds that affect both their work and their personality. They neither celebrate otherness, nor do they search for the other in themselves. On the contrary, they are themselves insiders of the cultural condition they live in. Their artworks show how a specific cultural mixing gives rise to a new artistic imagination in which different cultural images are combined. To study the contemporary effects mixed cultural backgrounds have on the imagination, I recommend regarding the artists as engaged anthropologists who study the effects of their own culture (see Kosuth 1993: 124). Unfortunately, Foster (1995: 307) chooses not to elaborate on the idea of the artist as anthropologist.

Global modernity and the disembedding of cultural practices

In the artworks of Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander, totally different cultural practices are disembedded from their culture of origin, before being recombined. By disembedding cultural practices from the place and time we usually associate them with, they are imbued with new meanings. De Saussure's (1966) sign theory explains how the schism between the form of a cultural practice and its meaning functions.

De Saussure defines a sign as composed of a signifier (the form it takes) and a signified (the concept thereof), while their relationship constitutes the signification (Chandler 2007: 14–18). According to De Saussure, the link between signifier and signified is not essential, but based on chance. A signified is not an absolute

representation of an existing concept but involves an agreement which is accepted by those who stand in relation to the linking (ibid: 18–19). The connections between signifiers and signified express and symbolise the specificity of a cultural choice. Following a structuralist art-historical approach, this is what art can do: it can stimulate the play between signifiers and what they can signify (Bois 2004: 32–39), which is exactly what happens in the works of Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander.

I will illustrate this with examples. Xu Bing invented a *New English Calligraphy*, which is described as

> a fusion of written English and written Chinese. The letters of an English word are slightly altered and arranged in a square word format so that the word takes on the ostensible form of a Chinese character, yet remains legible to the English reader.[2]

The fusion that Xu Bing creates gives rise to a new, modern artificial language which incorporates traditional calligraphy, disembedded from its traditional functionality. When we practise *New English Calligraphy* we only imitate formally and aesthetically the Chinese script, we do not practise the original or functional Chinese alphabet. We are thus not initiated into Chinese culture, but into a formalistic transformation of it. Another important work of Xu Bing makes this formal attitude even clearer. *A Book of the Sky* (1987–1991) is composed of 4 000 'false' Chinese characters, all hand-cut onto wooden printing blocks. We are seemingly confronted with an important message from the sky, but nobody can understand it. The print has thus become a form of its own, independent of any given meaning.

In the work of Murakami, cultural practices also turn into formal presentations that are disconnected from their traditional function. One of Murakami's artistic interventions hints at the excessive absorption in media culture (e.g., manga, video games, animated films) which is prevalent in Japan. In art installations, Murakami confronts viewers with life-size three-dimensional versions of Japanese animation figures. By blowing them up, the unrealistic qualities of these figures become ultra present and the Japanese design of this genre of fiction, which has spread worldwide, is questioned (Arnason and Mansfield 2010: 748–749). In these artistic settings the animation figure is deliberately excised from its traditional fictional and functional habitat of manga, video games or animated films. This process is inspired by movements within Western modern and postmodern art history, such as conceptual and installation art.

But Murakami not only questions the notion of art as an idea, as conceptual artists have done before. He completely overthrows the difference between so-called high and low art. Among others he produced a video clip for pop-star Kanye West, a commercial for Louis Vuitton handbags, and numerous merchandising products which feature his drawings. In doing so, he leaves behind those cultural codes

that were once fundamental to the institutionalisation of the art world and are still responsible for the discrimination between different forms of cultural expression (e.g., advertisement versus art).

In Murakami's work we recognise not only the mixing of different art practices – it is also clear that artistic cultures are becoming more or less detached from their traditional use and meaning, and that different signifiers can be recombined. Not only are functional cultural practices cut loose from the milieu they belonged to, art-historical references are also called into question and detached from the context that once supported them.

Sikander's work shows other examples of playing with the formality of signs. The artist trained in the ancient tradition of miniature painting in Lahore, when it was already considered as kitsch and solely suited for touristic consumption by her fellow students. In that sense her surroundings were responsible for a reorientation in the meaning of a cultural practice. Sikander does not try to reinstate and recapture an ancient tradition: on the contrary, she experiments with its formal qualities by enlarging the format to make the paintings much bigger than they traditionally were. Furthermore, she alters the themes, for instance depicting herself and a contemporary home in Pakistan, instead of the court of a king, which we would traditionally expect (Herbert 2001: 93). Also, she refers to Western artists by bringing in decorative dots to ridicule the belief in abstract painting, as Sigmar Polke did. Another example of a formal treatment is present in Sikander's *Riding the Written* (2000), where she writes words in calligraphic style, transforming them into drawings of horses, without referring to the meaning of the writing.

These examples point to an aesthetic widening and challenging of the link between a cultural practice and its source, the milieu from which it stems. Furthermore, the detaching of cultural practices not only happens at the level of the individual artist, but also in society as a whole, bringing about new cultural practices and meanings.

The process of people and practices becoming detached from their original milieu is usually associated with 'becoming modern', which I understand in the sense of becoming post-traditionalist – a process in which social relations and practices become disembedded from time and space (Giddens 1990: 21). Furthermore, we are confronted with 'a modernity at large', a 'global modernity' (Gaonkar 2001) that can be distinguished from Western modernity, which was rooted in Europe and America. When confronted with global modernity, it is logical that Western modernity will undergo changes, to adapt to a larger, more globalised context. Therefore, Belting (2013: 250) asserts that to be 'modern' in a Western sense has also become a historical notion: '[T]o be "modern" has become a historical notion that in the West might even appear as a local past, in the way that other cultures are viewing their past.'

Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander are exponents of global modernity, which they bring into practice by crossing the borders between the heritages of their North-American and Asian cultural practices in their lives and work. By making cultural practices independent from the milieus they formerly belonged to, new combinations are initiated. The play between signifiers and what they can signify gives rise to new artistic styles, which represent renewed art conceptions surpassing, for example, the distinction between the functional and non-functional use of art. This recombination and recycling of cultural practices, independent of their centuries-old original context, are illustrative of a new artistic condition which goes beyond the dominant principles of 20th-century European and American modernity.

The artists develop a cultural imagination brought forward by globalisation

As elaborated on in the previous section, the link between a signifier and a signified is not fixed but arbitrary (De Saussure 1966). However, the play between signifiers is not only the expression of a detachment from meaning – the signifier itself evokes different connotations, i.e., socio-cultural and personal associations, as Roland Barthes stressed (Barthes 1967, 1972; Chandler 2007: 138). When signifiers are cultural images and practices, the connotations are often associations related to the specificity of the image or culture. For example, the signifier of a Chinese sign, whether it represents a genuine Chinese character or not, is still associated with Chinese language culture.

Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander play with the signifiers of different cultural practices, detached from their tradition, and recombine them, as shown above. Consequently, the spectator can reflect upon the cultural associations brought forward by the detachment and recombination of different signifiers. I elaborate on aspects of the process of attributing and creating connotations by referring to artworks by Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander.

Xu Bing exhibits living silkworms and confronts the public with pigs in the act of mating. These are not only acts of transgression with the goal of introducing a new living species in the art world (because that has not been done before) nor are the cultures of silk production and pig breeding solely exhibited for their formalistic, aesthetic qualities, apart from their functionalism. Although the signifiers (silk production and pig breeding) are removed from their traditional setting and functionality, the formal expressions still carry some cultural connotations with them, pointing to ancient Chinese culture. A signifier might have no explicit link with its reference, yet it remains coloured by the accidental meanings that were and still are attributed to it. The artworks exhibit cultural signifiers cut off from their conventional context, and the public is invited to look at those signifiers as realities

on their own, to ponder the different connotations that remain attached to those signifiers and the new meanings these signifiers can possibly acquire. In this way, certain cultures (silk production, pig breeding) are offered a second, artistic life – a life that does not yet have a fixed goal or meaning, but is genuinely present and not something from the past.

The same sort of cultural-historical play with associations is induced by the works of Murakami and Sikander.

By constantly crossing the border between commercial and non-commercial artworks, Murakami makes the spectator aware that the idea of art as distinct from popular culture is primarily a European connotation, imported to Japan during the Meiji era at the end of the 19th century (Arnason and Mansfield 2010: 748).

Sikander's images contain a mixture of personal, historical, American, European, Indian and Pakistani connotations, where different religions and lifestyle attitudes are mixed. In *Perilous Order* (1994–97), for example, she portrays a gay friend as a Mughal emperor of India who enforced Islamic orthodoxy, surrounded by Hindu nymphs. In *Fleshy Weapons* (1997) she pictures a goddess with many arms to refer to Hindu mythology, but because the depiction of a goddess is blasphemous in Muslim belief, she covers the deity with a veil. Also, the figure has no feet but decorative lines holding her two legs together, as if the figure is independently hovering above everything (Herbert 2001: 95–96). Sikander thus shows how new combinations between art and religion can be imagined.

The artworks of Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander represent how different cultural practices and connotations can be (and are) remixed today, in line with the personal beliefs of the artist. I further illustrate the specificity of these personal convictions by referring to certain notions which the artists put forward in relation to such remixing.

On his website, Xu Bing introduces the concepts 'estrangement' and 're-familiarization' to describe how he wants to make us conscious of our cultural disembeddedness as well as our potential to appropriate (foreign) cultural elements:

> It is the artist's belief that people must have their routine thinking attacked in this way. While undergoing this process of estrangement and re-familiarization with one's written language, the audience is reminded that the sensation of distance between other systems of language and one's own is largely self-induced.[3]

The artist makes people aware that they are 'cultural animals' and that the production and adoption of language play important roles in the functioning of human organisms.

Murakami's exposition, 'Murakami-Ego' (2012), is a self-portrait which gives an overview of the many images that inspired the artist, which he digested and reworked into new forms. In the catalogue he states that he has no ego, that he only understands the surface of things, and that this surface is a collection of many

Eastern and Western influences. Gary Carrion-Murayari (2012: 119) formulates it as follows:

> Gradually, Murakami has erased the distinction between himself and the cultural position he inhabits. The complex iconography he has built may have been extracted from Japanese entertainment, but these images have become Murakami's own icons – or better yet, avatars – which he uses to negotiate the relationship between East and West.

In fact, Murakami creates a world of his own, based on the flow of cultural influences on him, and the creation of this artificial world includes the creation of himself as an artist, his ego.

In Sikander's works there is an aesthetic gesture that reappears quite often: a female figure is depicted without feet, instead the legs move into curling lines which form a closed circuit from one leg to the other. Bhabha (2007: 41), in analysing Sikander's work, calls it 'lost roots' and identifies the artist with this figure. But on an audio recording for MoMa (Museum of Modern Art of New York), Sikander associates it with 'self-rooted', 'self-feeding', 'independent', yet 'disconnected'.[4] She thus establishes herself as a ghostlike personality who lives within a personalised melting pot. Sikander does not want to limit herself to one type of identification (political, feminist), preferring as many labels as possible.[5]

These comments reflect the personal philosophies of the artists, which have guided them in making their work. More specifically, the artists show how and which personal orientations are possible in reaction to their mixed backgrounds. In this respect we can consider them as personally engaged conceptual and visual anthropologists (Kosuth 1993).

The mix of different forms of expression, as present in the artworks of Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander, do not solely tell us something about the contemporary condition of art, but also about the way specific cultural practices (pig breeding, silk production, Japanese entertainment, miniature painting) can be modified to acquire new connotations. The artists consciously analyse and visualise the effects of globalisation they experience as artists and individuals living and working in different places across the world. In that sense these artists illustrate and produce the cultural imagination brought forward by 'the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space' (Steger 2013: 15).

Art as a balancing act with respect to different cultures

How far can we go in creating different modalities to cope with the mixing of different artistic and cultural traditions? Do Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander offer three variations in an endless list of possible outcomes? Bhabha (2007: 41) praises Sikander for the endless questioning she enables, but is it really endless? In this

section I show that the artists are meticulously looking for new balances, which involves the acceptance of limits to what is possible. Even when an artist such as Sikander claims she adopts as many labels as possible to portray her artistic identity, there is a limit to what can be told and shown in a visual work. To illustrate this meticulous balancing act, I describe one of Sikander's artworks in more detail.

Sikander's *Pleasure Pillars* (2001) works as a sort of rebus. We are confronted with an associative network of very different signifiers: an aeroplane, a fantasy creature, dancers, a statue, a lion, a deer, a staircase, dots, etc. A web of conversations arises between the different artefacts in the colourful painting, done in watercolour, dry pigment, vegetable colour, tea, and ink on hand-prepared wasli paper.

The presence of an aeroplane, in combination with the decorative abstract pattern of dots, evokes a bombing. In Arnason's *History of modern art*, Mansfield draws attention to 9/11 and the personal history of Sikander, who lives in New York but is originally from Pakistan (Arnason and Mansfield 2010: 746–747). Is the work a personal artistic comment on 9/11?

Central to the painting is a Greek Venus statue which mirrors an Eastern decorated female body. Between them, literally at the heart of the painting, are two hearts (a red and a blue) which are connected. Does this suggest a connection between two different cultural histories? Does the painting recount an alternative history in which the West and the East are intrinsically linked?

Next to the Venus and the dancing women are two figures that are half human (women) half animal, adding a mythological touch to the work. Women seem to be dominant in the painting, but are they to be interpreted as decorative elements, pleasant to look at, or are they in charge? What are they in charge of? Culture? Dance? Everything that is beautiful?

The painting is full of abstract decorative elements, probably referring to very different cultural backgrounds. The composition is extremely symmetrical. Does this work therefore show that our reality has turned into a decorative pattern, in which life and death, terror and pleasure, past and present, myths and facts keep each other in balance?

It is impossible to distil a one-dimensional story out of Sikander's painting, but the different elements are brought together in a playful and inspiring harmony. The same need to bring together culturally diverse elements in a new, personal and harmonious whole, is present in the works of Xu Bing and Murakami.

Xu Bing is looking to create a language that surpasses the limits of culture – a universal language. *Book from the Ground* (2003–) is

> a novel in symbolic form, which uses icons and pictographs collected from aircraft safety manuals, road signs, sweet wrappers and emoticons to tell the story of a day in the life of a beleaguered city dweller. Incomprehensible at first, it swiftly resolves itself into a narrative that anyone, whatever their native language, can understand.[6]

And Murakami (2012: 179) tells us:

> In my work, I have always wanted to create beautiful things. […] My vision of beauty is based on my desires, my body, my memories […]. I have been creating my own kaiseki banquet. […] The materials I have at my disposal are Japanese art history, manga, anime, otakudom, J-POP culture, postwar history, and imported accounts of contemporary art.

How to understand the newly mixed configurations of Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander? Although the artists set up a visual meeting-point for very diverse references, and mediate this meeting in a beautiful and artistic style, there are difficulties in understanding the artworks. Viewers do not comprehend every detail of the artworks, and it is not clear at all how we have to interpret the interrelations between the different references.

The unity of the artwork consists of a balancing act, in which different cultural images share their potentiality to be connected or blended and participate in an overall, cross-cultural puzzle. All the different cultural references become signifiers with no fixed end, with the ability to take part in newly formed combinations without fixed meaning. The artist is the one who directs the balancing act and guards this open-endedness by omitting too closed or hierarchical combinations between different cultural signifiers and connotations.

To understand on a meta-level what is happening in these artworks, Papastergiadis (2012: 88–92, 95) developed the theory of 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism'. He contends that artists from the 1990s onwards are in search of a cosmopolitan dialogue; they do not want to impose universal claims or promote local meanings, but seek a sort of hospitality in which local and global points of view are interwoven (ibid: 178):

> A contemporary perspective would not aim to standardize humanity or appeal to unity via the annulling of differences. […] Looking for human bonds that do not depend on either the attraction towards cultural equivalence or an instrumental duty of reparation invokes an investigation into the question: What is it to be human without any formal and fixed markers?

I interpret the aesthetic cosmopolitanism which Papastergiadis recognises in contemporary art practices as a balancing act between different cultural signifiers and their connotations. In my view, this implies an ethical stance. It is evident that the visual orchestration of such a balancing act involves a very specific censorship, excluding combinations of visual images that suggest culture clashes or intolerance. More specifically, the visual orchestration of such a cosmopolitan dialogue is the expression of a very specific ethical position: the belief or ideology that different cultures can find a new harmony amidst the effects of globalisation, through an ethical approach to globalisation called 'cosmopolitanism' (Delanty 2009: 2).

Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander make present-day cosmopolitan beliefs or ideologies concrete and visual. If we consider them to be engaged anthropologists, we can add to our analysis that they uncover and shape an ideology that is possible today, namely a present-day cosmopolitanism. This implies taking an ethical and cosmopolitan stance on the effects of globalisation. In welcoming as many worlds as possible, or harmonising different cultural influences (as Xu Bing, Murakami and Sikander do), artistic practices must be self-limited, in the sense that these promote neither fixed fundamentalist or anti-fundamentalist significations, nor strong oppositions between different cultural heritages.

Conclusion

In this article I concentrated on the ongoing debate about present-day relations between globalisation and art, by focusing on the visual artworks of Xu Bing, Takashi Murakami and Shahzia Sikander. I understood globalisation as 'the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space' (Steger 2013: 15) and argued that we should regard the artists as engaged artist-anthropologists of the current condition, who propose a (possible) visualisation of the cultural transitions happening between North-American and Asiatic cultural heritages (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Indian-Pakistani).

My theoretical findings in relation to the artworks discussed here, are the following: although the artists reference cultural practices which used to be locally embedded, their aim is not to restore previous traditions. Rather, they use cultural expressions by cutting them loose from their original milieus, to experiment with them formally and aesthetically. This process introduces a global modernity, in which a strict dependence on the meaning of cultural practices is left behind.

Each formal cultural expression always carries with it connotations inspired by old and new cultural and personal attachments. In playing with signifiers and connotations, the artists develop a new cultural imagination. Their new cultural orientations illustrate how different cultural practices can be reworked, brought together, brought into dialogue or fused. The artists comment consciously on how to deal personally and culturally with the cultural resetting they propose.

Furthermore, it is clear that there are limits to the creation of new cultural connotations. In the discussed artworks cultural differences are respected, even when cultural practices are reworked. The aim is not to favour one cultural meaning, but to create a delicate balancing act in bringing together diverse influences. This form of self-limiting art implies an ethical stance which excluded, for example, fundamentalist or anti-fundamentalist propaganda, and thus embodies a practical form of aesthetic cosmopolitanism.

Globalisation certainly does not have the same effects or content in every geographical region, but the three artists are not merely three new individual voices being added to the already multivocal debate on the relation between globalisation and art. As individual artists they touch on general and global aspects of what can happen to the cultural imagination today, especially when considered according to Kosuth's (1993: 117) description of the artist as an 'anthropologist *engaged*'.

Notes

1 http://public.citymined.org/KRAX_CARGO/teoria/jornadas_2007_material_de_trabajo/latour_bruno_difficulty_of_being_glocal.pdf (accessed 12 January 2016).

2 http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/1994/square_calligraphy_classroom (accessed 15 July 2015).

3 Ibid.

4 http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/27/658 (accessed 15 July 2015)

5 Ibid.

6 http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/texts/xu_bings_cultural_evolution/ (accessed 15 July 2015).

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Collaborative art and the emergence and development of ethnographic knowledge and empathy

Lydia Nakashima Degarrod

Abstract

This article addresses the use of collaborative art in the creation of ethnographic knowledge and the development of empathy between the ethnographer – who is also a visual artist – and nine Chilean political exiles during the creation of artworks depicting the experience of exile for the art installation *Geographies of the Imagination*. Using the creation of the monoprint banner of one of the exiles, I show how the participatory method of making images made visible the development of empathy and the emergence of an embodied and dialogical form of ethnographic knowledge. The processes of collaborative art making and empathetic development had in common the involvement of emotional, imaginative and cognitive stages. The images themselves became checkpoints for the verification of the mutual understanding between ethnographer and informant. As the images were created and revised, they became the basis for sharing imagination and emotions – those of the exiles and my own – which led to a dialogical understanding of exile. Knowledge emerged in the interaction between the words, gestures, emotions, images and memories shared by the project participants. My unique position as anthropologist/ethnographer and visual artist allowed me to observe while participating in the creation of ethnographic knowledge.

Keywords: Chile, collaborative art making, empathy, ethnographic knowledge, exile, trauma narratives

'No, my family never wore this kind of clothing,' Rosita said, shaking her head and pointing at the photo etchings I had made of a group of men and women dressed in the traditional attire of the Mapuche, one of the main indigenous groups in Chile. She shifted her gaze to another set of images I had created depicting Mapuche

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shamans performing healing and agricultural rituals. She knitted her brows, gave me a perplexed look, and said: 'No, we never attended this kind of ritual either.' I had made these etching prints to depict some of Rosita's memories from the time before she became a political exile. Her reaction to my prints showed that what I had imagined when she recounted her memories about her family life, was wrong. Through her review of the prints, I was able to correct my misunderstanding and, at the same time, Rosita had the opportunity to glimpse my view of her. This was one stage in the creation of a monoprint banner, depicting Rosita's memories of her exile from Chile to the United States, for the installation *Geographies of the Imagination*. Through this collaborative and interactive process of creating images, in which I first listened to Rosita's memories before creating images based on those memories, followed by her assessment of the images as adequate depictions of her memories, I learned about her experience of long-term exile, and we each learned about the other.

Rosita's monoprint banner was one of the artworks used in the installation *Geographies of the Imagination* that I designed in collaboration with nine Chilean exiles during my tenure as Artist in Residence at the Centre for Art and Public Life at the California College of the Arts (2007–2008). Over a period of 18 months I created, with the help of the Chilean exiles, 23 monoprint map banners depicting their memories of their journeys of forced migration and nine videos about their experiences of nostalgia. All of these artworks were shown as part of the installation *Geographies of the Imagination* (Oliver Art Center Gallery, California College of the Arts, 29 October – 26 November 2008; Valene L. Smith Museum of Anthropology, California State University, Chico, 28 August – 30 September 2013) (Degarrod 2013, 2012, 2016).

In this article I present the collaborative process of creating the banner of Rosita, one of the exiles, to illustrate the processes of empathy formation and the development of ethnographic knowledge. Using a performative approach, I present and analyse the stages involved in the creation of the images as performative and interactive events in which the exile's narration of her memories triggered memories and transmitted emotions and images to me, which shaped the creation of the first images, and in turn triggered more memories for the participant, leading to revisions and new memories.

The collaborative process of making the images involved the same emotional, imaginative and cognitive stages which are involved in the empathetic process, and the images themselves became checkpoints for verifying the mutual understanding between ethnographer and informant. As the images were created and revised they became the basis for sharing both imagination and emotions – those of the exiles and my own – which led to a dialogical and embodied understanding of exile and migration.

My active participation in the collaborative process of image making gave me an opportunity to observe while participating in the sharing of memories, images and reflections on exile which contributed to the development of empathy. Therefore, I write this article from a dual perspective: as ethnographer and visual artist. My approach to ethnography is reflexive and dialogical (Collins and Gallinat 2013). Because of this, I include my observations of the participants and their memories and reflections, as well as my own memories, emotions and reflections, since these were integral to the creation of the images and my understanding of the internal experience of exile, as well as the development of empathy.

The material used for this article consists of sections from the diaries I kept during the making of the installation, along with drawings, etching prints and the final banners, as well as ethnographic notes and 18 hours of transcribed audio-taped conversations with Rosita (October 2007–July 2008). These conversations were recorded in Spanish, and I subsequently translated them into English.

Geographies of the Imagination

The creation of this installation served two purposes and employed two theoretical approaches. As an art installation, it aimed at honouring the lives of the participants as long-term exiles, while at the same time allowing the audience to participate in the experience of migration and exile in an immersive and multisensory manner. This was achieved through the specific use of space and the alignment of the artworks, the lighting in the gallery, the artworks themselves, and the space and materials provided for the audience to trace their own journeys and reflect on their experiences. The installation occupied three rooms of the Oliver Art Center at the California College of the Arts. In the main room, I aligned nine black DVD monitors with nine-inch screens with headphones, each on a black stand, to cover an area of 40 x 30 ft. The alignment created a large, inverted V to evoke the notion of travel, because of its similarity to the bow of a ship or the nose of an aeroplane. Each monitor played the video of each participant exile in a continuous loop, presenting his/her memories of migration to the US; the subject's reflections about longing for places and memories of their homeland; and his/her relationships to places in California which triggered memories of their homeland. Above each monitor I hung three monoprints of the person in the video, the centre image representing their memory of their journey of migration. On each side was another monoprint, one representing the trajectory of their migration on a world map, and the other an aspect of the current life of the exile (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, *Geographies of the Imagination* (2008). Installation, Oliver Arts Center, California College of the Arts.

Collaborative art making as an ethnographic method for the study of exile

As a research project, I designed *Geographies of the Imagination* to learn about the internal worlds of long-term exiles through collaborative art making. I combined this with traditional ethnographic methods such as interviews, participant observation and archival research. The main method for learning about the internal experience of exiles was, however, collaborative art making, which I used in the creation of both the videos and the monoprint banners.

What do I mean by collaboration? I mean a series of separate yet intertwined activities performed by all the participants, aimed at achieving a common goal: in this case, the public exhibition of the exiles' memories and reflections on exile. Following this guiding principle, the exiles were involved in the creation and design of all the artworks for this installation.

The method used to create monoprint banners entailed several steps:

1. Recording an exile's narrative of his/her journey of migration, conducted in one or several private sessions with me;
2. Creating the images in my studio;
3. A review session, in which the exile assessed each image in terms of fidelity to his/her memories;
4. Repeating these stages until the desired images were created.

This method was not unidirectional: it created an interactive, dynamic and emergent process during which all participants in the project, at all stages of the process, felt inundated with memories, emotions and images about their experience as exiles.

Collaboration was achieved through the separate yet intertwined activities performed by the exiles and me. The exiles contributed to the making of the images by sharing their memories, reflections and critiques in terms of fidelity to their recollections, as well as their aesthetic sense – all aspects which I took into account.

I selected collaborative art making for a number of reasons. First, the study of the experience of exile requires the use of an ethnographic method known to engage with internal imaginary worlds (Edgar 2004; Irving 2007, 2011), as exiles' experiences are mainly internalised and solitary (Said 2000). Exiles have a discontinuous relationship with place and time, due to their forced separation from their homeland and their history. Hence, they tend to rely on their imagination in everyday life to maintain a dual existence: one in their homeland and another in the host country, one in the past and the other in the present. The particular situation of the Chilean exiles in this project reinforced the need for a method that would shed light on their interior lives, because they are no longer involved in the public form of exile which they once manifested when actively denouncing the dictatorship (Eastmond 1997). As long-term exiles, their expression of exile occurs primarily in their interior lives. Second, as an ethnographer I was aware of my limitations in directly accessing the internal worlds of the exiles (Irving 2007, 2011). For this reason, I developed a method that would allow a sharing of imaginary worlds through my direct involvement in art making. Instead of being an observer or witness, I was an active participant in the sharing of memories and images. Lastly, most exiles felt intimidated at the notion of creating images because of their self-perceived lack of expertise, and many believed the experience would be emotionally painful.

I participated in this project as both a visual artist and cultural anthropologist, a dual role that I have used before in the creation of numerous interdisciplinary projects (Degarrod 1998, 2007, 2010, 2013). In my dual role, I merged the views of performative anthropology (that encourages the active engagement of the ethnographer in the creation of ethnographic knowledge, see Fabian 1990), with relational aesthetics (that makes the artist a catalyst of social relations, see Bourriaud 2006). As an ethnographer and visual artist my engagement with the Chilean exiles

was facilitated by my familiarity with their culture, having been born and raised in Chile. I have lived in the US for just as long as the exiles have. While I am not an exile, I share with them a cultural sensitivity and a history.

The exiles as participants

The creation of the installation involved the participation of nine Chilean political exiles who have lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for over 30 years.

The exiles volunteered to tell their stories for both political and personal reasons. As a political gesture, telling their stories was a way of fighting back against the misinformation created by 'the myth of the golden exile', spread during the government of Augusto Pinochet, in which exiles were depicted as enjoying a life of luxury and privilege, while post-dictatorship governments have maintained their silence ('the policy of obliteration') about the exiles. For some of the exiles it was a way to recall the past, since they had repressed any such memories in order to cope with the difficulties of life in exile, and raising their families in a foreign country. For others it had an educational purpose, as they wanted to bring their stories into the public sphere for their children and for younger generations who had not experienced the events of 1973.

The exiles had been forced to leave their homeland because of their political beliefs and their allegiance to the government of Salvador Allende (1970–1973), that was overthrown by General Pinochet in 1973 and who then ruled under a repressive regime until 1989. The participants' exodus was part of the largest migration out of Chile, when an estimated two per cent of the population fled the country to escape arrest or death at the hands of the military regime (Sznajder 2007; Wright and Oñate 2012).

The nine exiles arrived in California at different times between 1973 and 1980. Their lives as exiles, lasting anywhere from ten to 17 years, officially ended with the fall of the dictatorship in 1989, when restrictions against them entering Chile were lifted. All of them, however, chose to remain in the US where they have maintained their identity as exiles, despite being free to return to Chile.

Banners of affective maps: techniques and media

A main component of the installation was banners representing the exiles' memories of their journeys into exile; memories of their movement from Chile to the US as they were recollected at that time. The inclusion of these banners in the installation followed artistic as well as research interests. As visual components of the installation, the banner maps followed the trends set by visual artists (Harmon 2009) as well as geographers (Wood 2010) who reject the claimed authority of normative maps to create maps that express emotions, ideas and imagination, in order to make

political statements. I used the medium of maps – and their association with official and historical documents – to validate and make public the individual journeys of the exiles, whose plight and stories have been ignored and excised from official Chilean history. For research purposes, I used the collaborative creation of maps as a mnemonic device to help the exiles relive and conceptualise their journeys with me.

I selected the art medium of monoprint printmaking to make map banners which would emphasise the uniqueness of each journey. Unlike other forms of printing, the monoprint technique creates a single edition of an image. In each monoprint I combined several techniques: painting directly on the printing plate, the use of stencils and photo etching. I had used the latter method to great effect in the past, to incorporate a sense of documented media reality in artworks, so as to remind viewers that what they were seeing was derived from real events (Degarrod 2010). For the photo etchings I used photographs taken by the exiles or by me, as well as images from newspapers and magazines, which I altered using different proportions of etching ink, mediums and solvents, to create different effects. The images were printed on an etching press on 48 x 60-inch sheets of acetate.

Empathy, collaboration and art making

The collaborative method used to create the images highlighted the process of empathy, an important component in ethnographic research, a vital aspect in the development of rapport and an element of the participant observation method (Kawulich 2005). Empathy has only recently been addressed in anthropological writings influenced by the latest discoveries in the biology of the phenomenon (D. Hollan 2008; Hollan and Throop 2008, 2011a and b; Kirmayer 2008). Anthropological writings about empathy validate the possibility of empathy occurring in different cross-cultural and ethnographic settings.

Empathy has been defined as the experiential understanding of another person's perspective, in which an individual resonates emotionally with the experience of another while at the same time imaging the situation from the point of the view of the other (Hollan and Throop 2011a). This act of emotional and imaginative engagement has also been called resonance, an emotional and imaginative engagement that is beyond words (Wikan 1992). Empathy requires continuing dialogue to be effective (D. Hollan 2008; Kirmayer 2008).

The process of creating images in collaboration with the exiles has in common, with the process of empathy, the fact that both processes require ongoing emotional and imaginative engagement between both parties, to be successful. Such engagement was vital in the creation of the images, as it relied on my emotional and imaginative involvement with the exiles being such that I could understand and convey their memories visually, while the exiles' involvement lay in reviewing the images and

judging their fidelity to their memories. Success or failure on my part in depicting the images created opportunities for both parties to learn about each other, in addition to reflecting on aspects of the experience of exile.

Trauma, performance and memories

The study of internal images of exile involved the emergence of memories of trauma. The participants of this project had to recall and confront memories of a traumatic nature, which they had often intentionally suppressed in order to cope with their lives as exiles. As perceived political enemies of the Pinochet dictatorship, they experienced traumatic events in which they feared for their own lives and those of their loved ones, witnessed the death of friends or relatives, and had been tortured and imprisoned. The nature of these memories amplified the effect that most oral narratives have on their audiences, conveying not only verbal narratives but also, through gestures, emotions, silences and inflections, different types of information and emotion which, in turn, trigger memories and feelings in their audiences (Smith 2009). Audiences obtain a form of enactive or performative knowledge that allows them to experience embodied memories (Collins 2013; Smith 2009). As a listener to the exiles' narratives of exile, I responded with my own embodied knowledge of the experience of suffering similarly to the response of viewers of art based on trauma (Bennett 2003, 2005). As I listened, I experienced sense memories, those feelings and sensations imprinted by past episodes of fear that triggered my own memories of events I had experienced during the period of the dictatorship.

In the following section, I present and examine the process of creating Rosita's banner as a series of performative and interactive events. I present four of the stages in the creation of the images, depicting the beginning of Rosita's journey showing the memories and images that were aroused among all the participants. First, I present Rosita's narrative and my response as a witness to her narrative. Second, I show the creation of the images and the emergence of images based both on Rosita's narrative and my own memories, emotions and images. Third, I present Rosita's revision of the images and show how her viewing of the images which I had created brought to her new memories, emotions and revelations about the past. Lastly, I present the finishing of Rosita's banner. I also show how her viewing of the images allowed a clarification of my views of her, as well as a mutual learning about us.

First stage in the creation of the images: Rosita's narrative of the beginning of her journey of exile

Rosita, a community college instructor of English as a Second Language, has lived in California for over 30 years. She identifies herself as a Chilean of Mapuche descent from a rural village in Southern Chile. She left Chile to escape imminent arrest by

the Pinochet regime because of her activities organising soup kitchens in the slums of Santiago for the families of those imprisoned by the dictatorship. Pinochet's regime viewed the slums as a fertile ground for the establishment of terrorist anti-government groups, and deemed most who dwelt there, and their activities, to be subversive (Schneider 1995).

When I asked Rosita to narrate her journey of migration to the US, she began with the arrest of her father – an event she credits as the catalyst for her eventual forced migration 12 years later. She described the start of her journey thus:

> When my father arrived from the detention centre, a month after the soldiers took him away, he was barefooted, without his hat, had no belt in his pants, and his white shirt was soiled with dried blood. He was a broken man. He stood at the doorway, hunched, without looking at us. For days, he didn't say a word and avoided eye contact with us as if he was afraid that we might catch in his eyes something that he had seen. My father was a proud, proper and decent countryman who never left the house without his hat, nor without clean and pressed clothing. It was early in the morning when they came, a week after the coup d'état. I still remember the sound of the jeeps, a sound that I will never forget. Several soldiers came in asking for my father. They were very rude, shouting, cursing, and throwing things in the house while searching for something that we later learned was weapons. I helped my father to get dressed. I ironed his white shirt, and I brushed his black hat. I saw him leaving the house standing tall and proud. We didn't know when he was coming back. My mother was inconsolable. She sat outside by the grape arbour crying and waiting for my father. I was 12 years old, the oldest of 10 siblings, and my life changed irrevocably that day …

Listening to Rosita's emotional account of her memories, I was flooded with feelings of fear and terror, as well as a lingering feeling of guilt that at first I did not understand, but it made sense as I recalled an event that had occurred during the two years I spent in Chile conducting anthropological fieldwork among the Mapuche (1985–1987) (Degarrod 2016). These years, at the end the dictatorship, were marked by a show of extreme repression and force against people who openly and defiantly demonstrated against the government. This is the memory:

> Teargas bombs kept falling outside my bedroom window. I heard noises of people screaming and gunshots. I was inside a small cottage near the Catholic University. Students were protesting in the streets Pinochet's visit to Temuco. Susana, a nursing student, who lived in the adjacent cottage, shouted to me through the window: There is a young man injured lying outside our garden! I tried to leave the cottage, but the bombing intensified at that moment, and I was forced to stay indoors. I was choking, I couldn't breathe. I crawled to the bathroom where I wet a towel and put it over my mouth. I laid on the floor thinking about the wounded person lying a few feet from me and felt impotent that I couldn't go out to help him. The helicopters spread teargas for over two or three hours. As soon as the smoke had dissipated, and the sounds had died

out, I opened my door to check on the injured man, but he was gone. I saw a large pool of blood in front of my door and the profile of a group of soldiers running carrying the body. I later learned that the young man had been shot in the head. For a week, he agonized with a bullet in his head at the local hospital, and the students prayed every day in the streets with lit candles for his recovery. I felt sad and guilty for not being able to help him during the hours that he had been bleeding laying so close to me.

Second stage: creating images in my studio

At this stage, I created images as a basis for the final images of Rosita's banner. As I made sketches of the arrest of Rosita's father, I kept reliving my memory of the shooting of the young student in front of my cottage. As I experienced feelings of guilt and sadness, the image of the fleeing soldiers carrying the body of the wounded student kept surfacing. Guided by this image and by Rosita's story, I assembled photos of Chilean soldiers taken during anti-government demonstrations to both evoke the *coup d'état* in Chile and the arrest of her father. Previously, I had identified – with Rosita's help – three aspects of her narrative to convey visually: her father's

Figure 2: Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, *Soldiers* (2008). Photo etching.

arrest, her father's return home from the detention centre and Rosita's life prior to her father's arrest.

To create the photo etchings, I selected two photos of soldiers: one of a group of soldiers crouching (in full combat gear), getting ready to enter one of the slums in Santiago (Figure 2). The other was of a soldier standing with his arms before him, his back to a crowd of protesters (Figure 3). I cut out the soldiers from their contexts and created two etching plates, one for each photo. I combined black and blue etching oil inks to create a bluish black and made photo-etching prints to capture the mood that I perceived from Rosita, as well as from my own experience. I rolled the etching plates with these inks and printed them using an etching press on acetate paper.

To represent Rosita's father's return from the detention centre, and guided by her detailed description, I painted directly on a plate, using etching oil inks, the image of a hunched man without shoes or hat, wearing a blood-stained shirt. Because Rosita had described her father as a proud man, I thought it would be insensitive to her feelings to portray his face and show his humiliation, so I drew him with his back to the viewer (Figure 4). I printed one image using an etching press on acetate paper.

Figure 3: Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, *One soldier* (2008). Photo etching.

For the last images, I used the same photo-etching technique that I had employed to depict the soldiers. I created a photo etching of the Mapuche people from photos I took during my fieldwork on reservations near Rosita's town, to convey her ethnicity and her countrified life before her exile. The images represented Mapuche men and women wearing traditional clothing and participating in agricultural tasks, as well as shamans performing healing and agricultural rituals.

Figure 4: Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, *Father arriving from prison* (2008). Monoprint.

Third stage: reviewing the images

Rosita looked at the images I had created and spread over her kitchen table. Her eyes darted around, before stopping at the painting of her father. She was quiet for a while, then grabbed the piece of paper and followed the contour of the image with her fingers as she sobbed. Composing herself, she said, nodding: 'Yes. That is how he looked when he came back from the detention centre.' She turned towards me and said softly: 'I am glad that I didn't have to create this image. It would have been a very sad task. I am glad you did it!' She paused, then thanked me for not showing his face in the painting, admitting that she was relieved the viewers would not see his face and witness his humiliation. She was grateful that I had represented her father in a way that was true to her memories.

Next, she reviewed the images of the soldiers. I was surprised to learn that the soldiers had been in disguise when they came to her house on the day of her father's arrest – a fact she had omitted during her earlier narrative. Looking at the set of images, she said: 'That is how they looked when they were inside my house!!' Rosita pointed at one of the photo etchings I had made of three crouching soldiers, and revealed that she had been deceived by their disguise. 'When they arrived they looked like peaceful peasant angels. They looked innocent. They were dressed as

farmers. They looked more like these soldiers, but innocent,' she said, pointing at another image which showed a row of standing soldiers. 'They had their guns hidden in their backs, but when they got inside the house, they pulled out their guns and went around destroying everything in the house,' she said. Rosita paused, looked at me and said with a trembling voice: 'I was the one who opened the door to them. If I had known their intentions, I wouldn't have opened the door and would have warned my father so he could have escaped….'

I realised that she still felt angry about the soldiers' deception and her role in her father's arrest, so I asked if I should create an image showing the soldiers in disguise. 'No,' she said, 'I am not going to be deceived again.' Pointing at the etchings, she said:

> This is how they really were. They had their hands behind their backs, and I didn't see their weapons. They were concealing them and not revealing their intentions. They were looking like angels. 'Don't worry,' they said, 'we are not going to do anything bad to you or the house.' At that age, I was 12 years old, you see people coming to your house all the time and nothing bad had happened. I believed them.

As I watched Rosita's emotional reaction to the images of the soldiers, and her emphatic request to use images that represented what she should have noticed that morning when she opened the door, instead of reliving her deception, I understood her desire to create a more just past. The plasticity of art making gave Rosita an opportunity to change, albeit momentarily, her images of the past.

Later in our conversation she shared her feelings of guilt for not warning her parents about the arrival of the soldiers. While I was surprised by her revelation that the soldiers had disguised themselves, I was not surprised about her feelings of guilt, because I felt she had transmitted those feelings to me during her earlier narration. As a witness to a narrative of trauma I had experienced guilt, stored in my body by my experience during the shooting of the student near my cottage. It was a moment of resonance in which I engaged emotionally and imaginatively with Rosita, because I shared with her similar feelings and experiences (Rosaldo 1989; Wikan 2012).

When I asked what would have happened if she hadn't opened the door that day, she said: 'My father would have escaped. If I hadn't opened that door, things would have been different. Everything goes back to that time.' Rosita narrated the consequences of her father's arrest on her family: 'My mother was depressed for a long time after that. She would just sit at the arbour without moving. I was the eldest, so I had to take charge of the situation and feed my brothers and sisters.' Her father lost his job, with no chance of finding another because his arrest made him an enemy of the regime, and people were afraid to be associated with him. Rosita had to quit school and moved to Santiago to work as a domestic. She became involved in political activities in the slums that led to her eventual exile. Pensive, she looked

through the window and asked out loud: 'Would I be here if I hadn't opened the door?' After a while she turned, looked at me and said: 'I would be here, perhaps, but without these bad memories.'

The last set of images that Rosita viewed that day were what I had imaged about her family life. When she contemplated the images of the Mapuche, she shook her head and said: 'No. My family never wore this kind of clothing,' referring to a group of women dressed in traditional garments. I also learned that her family never participated in Mapuche traditional rituals. When I first listened to her narrative – influenced by my years spent conducting fieldwork among the Mapuche, and by her self-denomination as a Chilean Mapuche – I retained an image in my mind of a traditional individual who lives on a reservation and performs customary rituals. I had forgotten that a great percentage of farmers in the area where Rosita's family lived are *mestizos*, people of Mapuche descent who do not identify with the native people. Primarily Christian, they see themselves as different from the Mapuche, whom they view as inferior. I realised that I had not reflected on the contextual character of ethnic identification (Hall 1990). While Rosita identifies in the US as Mapuche, her family might not identify as such. Also, her self-identification in Chile might be different, subject to the complexities of varying social contexts.

I must have looked quite embarrassed about this misunderstanding, because she looked at me with sympathy, and said:

> I think this has a potential educational value. If you want to use it to educate people about Mapuche culture, you should include it in the banner, but my family never wore this type of clothing. This one (pointing at the shaman playing the drum), no. We never followed these beliefs.

Looking at a group of men wearing ponchos, working in the fields, she said: 'Yes, the men in my family wore ponchos. It would be fine to represent people participating in cultural events. But my parents do not participate in Mapuche events.' I believe that at this point Rosita, in seeing the images I had created of my perception of her family and their life in rural Chile, was seeing herself from what she thought was my perspective. She saw me as an educator (a profession that we had in common, of which she felt proud) and as an anthropologist interested in indigenous peoples. I realised she wanted to spare me any embarrassment by emphasising the educational aspect of the project. I reassured her that the project was primarily about her experiences as a long-term exile. We agreed that it would be better to eliminate those images and retain the image of her father and the soldiers to recount the start of her journey of exile. Rosita, like the other exiles, edited the images I had created, to suit her current feelings about events from the past.

Fourth stage: back at the studio

The banner was finished after a series of meetings with Rosita in which we discussed colours and layout. For the final images of the beginning of her journey, I printed the image of her father surrounded by two soldiers. To symbolically separate the images of the soldiers from the father figure, I combined the techniques of photo etching and painting directly on the plate. The background colours for this section were a clear blue to convey the brightness of an early spring day, and a reddish pink to convey the end of the day. Rosita wanted to convey both the morning of the event and her youthful age of 12 as full of promise, but the end of the day as representing the end of her innocence.

The final banner had three levels: for lower level, she chose her father's arrest and the two soldiers. The next level consisted of her years working as a domestic until she made her journey to the US. The last level represented her life in the US. The end of her journey was changed several times, as Rosita pondered about it. At times, she thought her journey had ended with her marriage, but at other times she thought it should be the day she obtained her Master's in English as a Second Language. She also considered representing her love of books and learning (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, Rosita's banner at the exhibit (2008).

Collaborative art making, empathy and the dual role of artist and ethnographer

The collaborative creation of images reflecting the start of Rosita's memories of exile made visible the development of empathy between Rosita and me, which was accentuated by the traumatic nature of her narratives. These traumatic memories made evident the transmission and intensity of the feelings and emotions she communicated to me in her narratives, and their effect on me as I created the images. Through Rosita's active participation in reviewing the images, I verified my understanding of her and also learnt something about my view of her. Rosita's comments shed light on an aspect of the empathic process which tends not to be written about: the emotional and imaginative work of the one who is empathised with or studied (Hollan and Throop 2008).

The review sessions were the grounds in which the development of empathy and knowledge of exile were verified. The images themselves played an important role in clarifying and transmitting information and contributing to a better understanding among the participants. Certain qualities inherent in the images served to further the understanding between the exiles and me. Images are, however, redundant when compared to words (MacDougall 2006: 48); they are relational and present themselves all at once (Sousanis 2015). For example, when Rosita told me that she was a Chilean of Mapuche descent she did not refer to all the elements involved in her description. As a listener, I created an image in my mind of Rosita and her family based on my own experience. It was only when Rosita saw the image of what I had imagined that she corrected me and enlightened our mutual understanding.

Drawings, paintings and prints play an important role in the creation and transmission of knowledge, by making the invisible visible (Afonso 2004; Butler-Kisber 2010; Canal 2004; Mitchell, Theron and Stuart et al. 2011; Theron, Mitchell and Smith et al. 2011). Viewing the drawings, paintings, stencil monoprint and photo etchings I had created to portray specific moments in the memories of the exiles stimulated the imagining of possibilities and scenarios, and intensified the participants' emotional engagement. As Rosita viewed the images I had created, she shared more memories and reflections, while envisioning and participating in the creation of different depictions of her past. It is the plasticity of these art techniques that can recreate specific aspects of the narrated memories as well the envisioning of other scenarios.

The performance of narrating memories also transmitted images, sensations and emotions to the listeners. Rosita, like the other participants in this project, transmitted to me more than just words – she transmitted memories, images and emotions that, united with their memories, shaped the images I created. In turn, those images

triggered additional memories and images in all the participants, thereby creating a dialogic and interactive process among them.

My unique position as both ethnographer and visual artist gave me a vantage point from which I could observe the creation of ethnographic knowledge, while being a co-creator of that knowledge. In this dual role I was a catalyst of images and of memories. I was able to participate in and observe the creation of a form of knowledge that was always evolving, as the exiles and I interacted through our memories, images and senses in an emergent process of inquiry (Collins and Gallinat 2013; Harris 2007).

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A collaborative methodology between photography and performance in ethnographically informed research

Carla Hamer

Abstract

This article starts from the discussions in *Writing culture* that provided a new perspective on ethnographic writing. The author acknowledges that there has been a proliferation of 'sensory' approaches in the social sciences and ethnography, and 'ethnographic' projects in the arts. The article explores some of the critiques that both perspectives (art and ethnography) received because of the blurred distinction between their respective methodologies and the privileging of experience over interpretation in their claims to 'truth'. The author engages in this discussion by reconsidering the relationship between photography and 'reality' and repositions the role of the photographer-researcher as co-creator of ethnographic knowledge. By focusing on the study of a Danish micro-community in Argentina, she explores the possibilities and challenges of performative photography as a (collaborative) ethnographic methodology. The author discusses the critical and experimental possibilities of a performative photographic approach in ethnographically informed research, and reflects on a collaborative project that involved staged photography and dance.

Keywords: collaboration, ethnography, methodologies, photography, practice-led research

Introduction

Historically, the relation between photography, performance and ethnographic research has been controversial. On the one hand, photography has very often been

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present in a piece of performance or live art (Briers 1986). Either because the artist performed exclusively for the camera, without the presence of an audience, as in Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* (1960), or the photographer acted as witness and recorder while an artist performed in public, as in Marina Abramovic's or Vito Acconci's pieces, photography seems to have been given the power to 'preserve the immateriality of an event' (Irvine 2004). But performances are concerned with the ephemeral, direct experience, in opposition to the idea of art-as-commodity, and in its recording, photography has been accused of taking away their 'fugitive' quality (Briers 1986).

On the other hand, the acceptance of photography in the social sciences has also been problematic. While the use of visual methods in social research is being progressively accepted, discussions between realistic and reflexive views still exist (Pink 2007). Realistic, observational methodological approaches question the objectivity and authority of the photograph within ethnographic representation, while positivist understandings of the photograph as 'evidence' still remain (Mjaaland 2013: 53; Pink 2007). Realistic positions either use photography as a document, a second-order illustration of ethnographic text, or simply object to its use within the spheres of qualitative research (Ball and Smith 2012; Mjaaland 2013; Pink, Kürti and Afonso 2004: 58). However, there is a growing interest from both sides – experimental film within socially informed research (Caterina Pasqualino, Christian Suhr, Rane Willerslev, Christina Lammer, Brad Butler and Karen Mirza) and photography within ethnographic projects (Susan Meizelas, Aïm Deüelle Lüski, Robert Barry, Thera Mjaaland, Dave Lewis) – that contest the so-called 'realist paradigm' (Azoulay 2014; Green 2003; Schneider and Pasqualino 2014; Schneider and Wright 2006).

This photography-led enquiry aims at developing and testing a particular 'performative' approach for the interpretation and transmission of research findings. This work suggests that a reformulation of the space of the photographic frame, from a performance framework, repositions the role of the photographer-researcher to that of co-creator in a dialogical partnership. This article reflects on the methodological approach to two different stages of fieldwork in Argentina, in 2014 and 2015, that have been used to study the Danish micro-community in Buenos Aires. I first reflect on the particular performative methodology that guides this research and how it connects with discussions around the ethnographic turn and performative approaches within this area. Thereafter I provide a brief outline of the history and present situation of the Danish community in Buenos Aires, and how it connects with the history of migration in Argentina and its present status. Finally, I reflect on work done in collaboration with Beatrice, a research participant, and a dancer.

Reflecting on an art-based methodology in photography-led research

This project aims to apply a performative perspective to the reconsideration of the indexical relationship between the photograph and the photographed, based on an understanding of the photographic event as a performative act which 'points at' experiences. As defined by Austin (1976), the performative refers to statements that function as a bond between the act of saying and what is being said. These 'verbal performances', performative statements as in 'I bet you', differ from what Austin calls 'constatives' or speech that states/describes something (cited in Gould 1995: 20). Performatives have no 'reference', or rather their reference points back to themselves; it is the act of saying or 'the name perform[ing] *itself*' (Butler 1995: 197).

A performative approach to photography does not relate to the constative utterance in its capacity to describe or represent, but to the photographic event it inscribes. This different relation liberates the photograph from being confined to a mere record, trace or document of a 'pre-photographic reality', and allows a different experience and a more experimental relationship with the medium (Tagg 1988: 3). The term 'experimental', within this project, does not try to signify the testing or implementation of new styles, elements or techniques. Rather, this work is guided by exploring a different conceptual position and epistemological perspective in the sense of the kind of knowledge produced. Alyssa Grossman (2014: 132) explains this understanding of the 'experimental' from a visual anthropology perspective as 'the ideas and approaches mobilised in the processes of its conception and realisation that land it on experimental terrain'. The experimental aspect of this photography-led research work resides in the grounds and assumptions that guide its methodology.

Immersed within the intermediate area between art and anthropology known as 'the ethnographic turn', this work aims to contribute to an existing body of knowledge on collaborations between photography and ethnographic research, by bringing together experience and interpretation (Kwon 2000; Rutten, Van Dienderen and Soetaert 2013). The project is concerned with practices that tie together experience and interpretation within art-based research. Rather than being fixed to a particular plan, the work directs itself in a critical and creative process that aims to reflect on the challenges of combining a performative approach and photography with ethnographically informed research.

The personal background that guided this research is a familial relationship with Danish immigrants in Buenos Aires, a previous involvement in art performance, and an interest in the use of photography to create conceptual art. This research

involves a re-encounter with said Danish community after a lengthy absence. I was first received as 'familiar and strange', someone who shares childhood memories and an understanding of their history yet does not completely 'belong'. Neither introducing myself as an outsider researcher, nor trying to immerse myself in or blend into the community, seemed to be the appropriate way to approach the group. However, making explicit this dual relationship of being an outsider yet familiar with the community and explaining the kind of art-based research that guides this work and the methods used, provoked interest and engagement. Because of its creative and collaborative possibilities, the performative approach of this work involves a dynamic collaboration between participants with interchanging roles in the co-creation of meaning.

As Michael Crotti (1998: 14) suggests, choosing a methodology should be the first step in the research process. In this way, a photography-led research project on a migrant community in Buenos Aires, that collects and reflects the narratives of their experiences, determined the research question: 'What particular methodologies lend themselves to the transmission of transcultural memories?' An answer to this question came after preliminary field research in April 2014.

During the first encounter with the 'field', an initial impression of the current Danish community was of a somewhat reduced yet growing, mixed community gathered by the church and their priest. Danish traditions are now being shared between an older generation of Danish nationals, their Argentine descendants and non-Danish relatives. A distant and 'objectivist'-related approach, that would freeze a stable reality to be discovered, would not appreciate or understand this eclectic group. Because of its official and documentary connotations, this objectivist epistemology would also have created distrust, distance and a sense of power in my relationship with the research participants (Berger 1988: 12; Crotti 1998). However, at the same time, a purely immersive approach – trying to be and feel like the group I am studying – would have been neither appropriate nor fair.

From an arts perspective, artist Nikki Lee works on photographic projects that demand her complete immersion in the research context, in a seeming transformation of her identity into that of her participants. Her work has been praised for its ability to 'call into question notions where identity is seen as a unitary thing' (Allison 2009). Lee's art projects have, however, also inspired strong criticism for the exaggerated value given to the researcher's experience and the centrality of the subject of research, in a 'We-are-the-World' approach (Kwon 2000: 84). However, beyond the critical and positive views on Lee's art, we may object to the problem of acknowledging the primordial element of 'respect' for research participants.

A sense of empathy and respect for others seems to reflect the group of people now gathered to keep alive a sense of community around the Danish church in Buenos Aires. From this initial understanding of the group, and preliminary findings,

the methodology for this research (which guides the choice of methods) aims to establish a relationship of mutual collaboration, in the sense of working together to create meaning. Richard Schechner (2004: 13) describes this kind of collaborative approach when discussing the relationships between theatre and anthropology:

> Who is to determine what the native eyes see or what his heart feels? … I prefer to let the 'natives' speak for themselves. I acknowledge that I am seeing with my own eyes and also invite others to see me and my culture with their eyes … we are then in a position to exchange views.

In a similar way, the artist Raul Ortega Ayala (2014: 101) explains the shift in his art-based research practice, from that of participant observer to a collaborative methodology, by comparing it to the possibility of being 'guided by', rather than being self-driven. Beyond ideas of collaboration and the co-creation of meaningful proposed realities there is, however, a theoretical and epistemological position that guides, informs and justifies the process. In other terms, the difficulties of formulating a methodology extend further than the type of methods/procedures used within the research project. Since every methodology is grounded in a theoretical perspective or philosophical position, which is at the same time embedded in an epistemology, this photography-led research starts from the possibility of knowing through art, or what has been termed an art-based methodology (Crotti 1998; McNiff 2008).

The main distinction of this performative approach to photography, in studying the Danish community in Buenos Aires, is its focus on the process and experiences (rather than the representations) that arise. This work suggests that using performative photography as an approach to knowing is about embracing a wide range of social behaviour and blurring the distinctions between participants. The kind of knowledge that is produced involves the body relating to the spatial dimensions of its environment, and celebrates the entire photographic act – from the preparation, to the shooting and viewing of the photograph (Grierson, Barrow and Horn 2009: 129–130). Performative photography can be understood in different ways and involves the use of different methods, but its main feature is a critique of realist, photographic perspectives.

The photographer and social anthropologist, Thera Mjaaland (2013: 54), for example, worked in a dialogical, collaborative manner with the people she photographed during her 'Ethiopian Encounters' project. Through their photographic encounters, the photographer and photographed created (in a playful manner) portraits of how they wanted to be seen, rather than how the conventional viewer might expect them to be (Mjaaland 2009: 395). We can suggest that 'Ethiopian Encounters' acknowledges and involves the viewer in 'playing with' the photographer and the photographed. But the project also suggests a subtle critique of the realist tradition

by 'bringing it on stage' in a creative way that, simultaneously, subverts it (Mjaaland 2009).

Developing a photographic methodology for this research implied, as previously explained, a shift from an objectivist epistemology that finds meaning 'outside' the perceiving subject, to a constructionist epistemology that understands meaning as constructed between the different actors (Crotti 1998). Art practice and research that study social realities, as in the work of Lee, and other sensory engagements in qualitative research, seem to have narrowed the original aim of closeness and 'shared experience' to a focus on the experiences of the researchers (Crotti 1998: Dicks 2013). Moving away from the object by focusing solely on the experience of the subject, Crotti (1998) argues, not only has implications for the theoretical perspective but might also imply a subjectivist epistemology where 'meaning is imposed on the object by the subject'. In contrast to realist photographic practice that is concerned with the production of 'truthful' representations, and is also different from immersive projects, this research is concerned with the production of knowledge that arises through the 'photographic encounter' and from working together with participants.

Drawing on Ariella Azoulay, the photographic encounter does not refer solely to the relationship between photographers and those being photographed, but includes the viewer. According to Azoulay (2014: 48–49), photography was initially just a method for capturing images from the perspective of a device facing outside. Instead, photography for that first generation of photographers (and contemporary ones like Deuelle Luski or Susan Meiselas) was also a way of 'being within', with a photographer and a camera standing inside the event.

Performative approaches in photography and practices that incorporate the photographer as part of the photographic event have increasingly interested contemporary photographers and visual anthropologists (Azoulay 2014; Grant 2014; Green and Lowry 2013; Vason 2015). However, these approaches have not been developed as methodologies for photographic research that can contribute to new ways of knowing.

'An encounter with Beatrice' through dance and photography

This project explores the usefulness and relevance of using performative photography as a methodology and therefore aims to experiment with different methods and practices. 'An encounter with Beatrice' is an experimental work done with one of the research participants and a dancer. Because of the close relationship between photography and memory, this work combines photography with dance by re-enacting and reconstructing visually the informants' stories (Edwards 2008; Hirsh 2014). In this way, a performative photographic methodology solves the paradox of

giving voice and corporality to the immateriality of the experiences and memories of the research participant.

To facilitate the reading and understanding of the process, it would be appropriate to refer to the work as divided into three stages within the performative photographic approach, namely *encountering*, *collecting* and *re-enacting*. Each starts from different time and spatial frames, and involves different collaborations. The order of the description and discussion of the three stages in this work does not intend to be linear. The reality is that the process involves movement and changes in direction. For example, 'encounter' does not necessarily and consistently refer to the moment of first meeting the community which informs this study, but could also be part of the process during the encounter of the dancer with the people's stories, or the encounter of an audience with the photographic material.

The first fieldwork that was conceived as photography-led research in Buenos Aires, in April 2014, was mainly exploratory. Therefore, the results were photographs, videos as well as recorded and transcribed conversations. I had made arrangements to meet members of the Danish church in Buenos Aires prior to my travels, and had exchanged emails with Beatrice who sent me a detailed description of her views of the community and the church, and the reasons why she was separated from the group. We arranged to meet at her house where we practically spent a day together. We filmed our encounter by placing the video camera where it would ideally frame us together as participants. Beatrice had prepared the 'setting', and cared about the way she was going to present herself in front of the camera. I took still photographs of her posing or showing objects and pictures that reference Denmark, her nostalgic origin.

However, when I returned to England and looked at the photographs I noticed that Beatrice was unquestionably posing for the camera. The results seemed like a simulacrum prepared for the camera and for the purposes of the research. Some photographs suggested elements of what Michael Fried (1998: 4) would call the 'theatrical', referring to figures, depicted in pictures, who appear to be acting or behaving a certain way for the beholder. While I am interested in certain qualities of the theatrical, such as the inclusion of the artist and beholder within the frame of the picture, the photographs of Beatrice suggested the opposite, indicating a separation between the photographer and the photographed. At the same time, there was no reference to her stories in the pictures, which offered a representation of her at that moment, not her memories.

Beatrice's story is incredibly rich in its correspondence with social and historical moments in Europe and Argentina. She arrived in Argentina in 1940 with her parents and younger brother after a long journey from Denmark following the German invasion. Beatrice's mother never settled or got used to life in Argentina. She preserved her language and never learnt Spanish, so Beatrice became her translator

from a very young age. Beatrice mentioned that her childhood had not been easy, as she was educated in the same way as children in Denmark: 'At home they lived as Danes, but then outside they met a completely different world.' Curiously, when Beatrice refers to a 'different world' she means the Italian migrant community which represented the largest such group in Argentina, and mainly settled in Buenos Aires (Bjerg 2013). Beatrice now believes there is a great deal of racism in Argentina against immigrants from Latin American countries who, in recent decades, have arrived in their numbers. She explains that in the past 'there were no immigrants from Latin American countries, who in Argentina today are being discriminated'.

While Beatrice is completely honest in her description, her views are those of someone who arrived in Buenos Aires during one of the 'modernising projects' which have existed (with variations) since the 19th century. Attempts to 'modernise' the country meant, in simple terms, importing European modernity and in so doing, inserting Argentina in the international market (Guano 2002). The Buenos Aires which Beatrice inhabited during her childhood, while different from Denmark and perceived as hostile – was in fact an 'enactment' of a European and cosmopolitan city where immigrants and their descendants were in the majority (Bjerg 2013). However, the Argentina that Beatrice describes today is a country which has, since the 1990s, received an increasing number of people who 'crossed the border' from other Latin American countries (Mc Ilwaine 2011). While Beatrice felt 'different' at school surrounded by (mostly) European nationals or their descendants, she now no longer recognises the country, with its growing number of non-European immigrant communities. However, the saddest issue in Beatrice's life was her separation from the church, which for her does not feel 'Danish' anymore.

The complexities of Beatrice's life story required a different way of understanding the photograph in terms of switching the interest in the product to a focus on the event, or as Azoulay (2014: 51) suggests:

> Indifference to the possibility that through this apparatus, the exterior will be made an object and appear in its distinct typicality. This is no indexical indifference but rather a renewed understanding of the index not in analogical terms of two stable images, the one outside ('the world as a picture') and the one caught inside, nor in terms of capturing that which is present at a given moment and will not return….

The idea of valuing the event, and the experience of 'being with' my participants while shooting the photographs, guided a second fieldwork trip to Buenos Aires. This second approach did not consist of recording as much photographic or video material as possible, but revolved around rather spending time with, and talking to, the people who participated in the research.

I went to see Beatrice again, and this time did not take any photographs. Instead, we spoke for long hours and only our voices were recorded. Perhaps because she did

not have to think about being photographed and posing for a camera, the conversation seemed more spontaneous and fluid, and full of details of her memories.

If the method of encountering and collecting material had changed, the strategy for interpreting and presenting the material had to be different. I used Beatrice's story in an experimental manner to trial an embodied way of interpreting and knowing. The work produced was collaborative, involving dance and photography, and consisted of re-enacting the participant's memories for a camera with me as photographer, audience and co-performer in the scene. The work was produced in collaboration with Beatrice and a dancer. During the first stage, the video, voice recordings and transcript of my second trip to Argentina were shared with a dancer, whose dance was photographically recorded. These photographs were then discussed through emails and conversations between the three participants: Beatrice, the dancer and myself, in order to find 'meaningful' elements, movements and gestures that would trigger and evoke connections with Beatrice's own experiences.

During the second stage of the work, the dancer re-enacted the photographs once again, but with special consideration for the preceding feedback and discussions. The dancer's costume and hair were styled, as were some of the movements. The shoot took place in a drama studio, with the space of the photograph purposely

Figure 1: Carla Hamer, *Test 1* (2015). Photograph.

marked and enclosed by three video cameras recording simultaneously. While my image (as photographer) is not present in the images, the videos alternatively show and hide my presence. There is always a moment when I appear in the frame, before disappearing again.

Connecting the past to the present: lives and experiences in Argentina

The majority of Danish immigrants in Argentina arrived between the second half of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th. The country received only a small fraction of the almost 360 000 Danish nationals who emigrated. The largest group of Danes in Argentina settled in the rural south of the Province of Buenos Aires (Bjerg 2001: 18). According to the historian, Maria Bjerg, the church soon became the main centre for restructuring social networks. Members of the congregation were committed supporters of newcomers, providing them with the necessary information to set up farms or find jobs, predicate their Lutheran faith and control the development of Danish schools where children would be educated as if they were still living in Denmark (ibid: 19).

Because of its originally very small population, Argentina felt the impact of mass migration: by 1914 more than 30 per cent of the inhabitants were immigrants, the majority European (Baily and Míguez 2003). Moreover, 'between the 1880s and World War I, for example, in the Argentine capital, Europeans constituted one-half of the total population and nearly three-quarters of the adults' (ibid: xiii). The number of immigrants arriving at the port of Buenos Aires in the 1880s exceeded 100 000 per year – the largest number of immigrants after the United States (Baily and Míguez 2003).

Research suggests that mainly young men arrived, generally after having been invited by, and with the support of, others. While important government policy was in place to attract foreign communities, this type of immigration informed, promoted and supported by an individual prevailed in Argentina (ibid.). Contrary to the situation regarding foreign settlers in the United States, migrant communities in Argentina were better positioned, socially, being better skilled, more employable and having more job-related opportunities than many of the original residents. However, in the case of the two main migrant groups in Argentina, the Spaniards and Italians, a large percentage eventually returned to their country of origin. Many had only been interested in short-term contracts that would allow them to earn some money to take back 'home' (ibid.).

The Danish migrants were far from the largest immigrant community, outnumbered by the Italians, Spaniards and French (ibid.). The community had first settled in the 'Argentine Pampas' in the south of the Province of Buenos Aires, which had attracted

the newcomers with its rich agricultural possibilities (Bjerg 2001: 81). The city of Buenos Aires homed a smaller fraction of earlier Danish settlers living in Tandil, and later in Tres Arroyos, Necochea and Coronel Dorrego (ibid: 148).

One of the first Danish pioneers to settle in Tandil, in the Argentine Pampas, was Hans Fugl in 1848. Fugl induced many Danes to follow him to the 'New World', and established connections that allowed communication between the two countries, to attract new settlers in Argentina. During his lifetime, Fugl travelled across to Denmark to expand and promote the migration of new groups to Argentina and to send technical resources to Tandil. Fugl also created job opportunities for new Danish settlers by offering them jobs or finding them possible employers. As a political leader, Fugl also appointed the first priest for his community – a role that would gradually grow in importance, as Bjerg (2013: 154) explains, to that of 'spiritual and ethnic leader'. This relationship with the priest acting as leader and protector, seems to have continued.

In *Mass migration to modern Latin America*, Bjerg (ibid: 157) describes the development of that first Danish community, as organised and preserved by their church, gradually being reproduced in other parts of the country:

Figure 2: Carla Hamer, *Memories 2* (2015). Photograph.

> As time went by, more Danes settled in the southern Province of Buenos Aires, the community grew, and new religious congregations were created that emulated the internal organisation of the 'mother church' of Tandil. In those churches, schools for the immigrants' children were promptly opened along with mutual aid societies, labor and associations. These institutions had a strong impact on community life and helped develop a profound sociality that tied the people together and assured their social and cultural reproduction.

Since then, the once flourishing and expanding Danish community in Argentina has considerably decreased, with the gradual ceasing of European migration to the country post-1950 (Bjerg 2013). As Schneider (2006: 9) states, Argentina is a country that, until the mid-20th century, was perceived as a 'European migrant nation'. Conversations with the remaining members of the Danish community confirm this view and their resistance to the later changes. What some Danish immigrants and their descendants currently complain about is the growing influx of people from other Latin American countries, descendants of early Spanish colonisers and indigenous people (Schneider 2006). It seems significant that when meeting the committee group at the Danish church, they spoke about and showed photographs of the city of Buenos Aires in the 1950s, where everything seemed to replicate a Western European capital. During our conversation they told me the city had its own Harrods, for example, and buildings had been built using European materials and in the European style.

By 1911 Argentina was one of the ten richest countries in the world thanks to staggering exports of agricultural commodities and livestock. The ruling elite emulated the best in neoclassical and academic European architecture amongst its counterparts in the Old World. This gave Buenos Aires, the provincial capital, the fashionable summer resorts and the estancias a distinctive 'European outlook' (Guillén 2004: 17). However, the end of the first of the Peronist governments (1946–1951) marked the decline of the image of prosperity the country had previously reflected and heralded the beginning of troubled economic and political times (Basualdo 2011: 306; Garcia Hamilton 2005: 532). The country went through many changes and if it once imitated a 'Modern European' identity, under the presidency of Carlos Menem, it looked to the United States as its model (Guano 2002).

As previously described, the findings from preliminary field research in April 2014 provided some understanding of the current Danish community in Buenos Aires as being in the process of redefinition and hybridisation. During a conversation with their current priest, he explained that due to no new Danish nationals moving to the country, the community in the city of Buenos Aires (smaller in number than in other areas) has been forced to intermarry, thus people of different cultural backgrounds and affiliations have helped the community to survive. The consequence of these changes, and the acceptance of non-Danish descendants, as well as divergent racial/

sexual alignments (the church was the first in the country to marry homosexual couples) within their church group, has led to the attrition of members. However, during my stay there was also a sense of 'openness to the outside' and an assimilation of typically Argentinian traditions, such as the incorporation of *mate* (an infused drink which originated from an indigenous tribe in the northeast of the country) during church meetings and activities. This process of assimilation, added to collective and individual memories, affinities, cultural and religious interests, seems to be what now binds the Danish community together (Schneider 2006).

Conclusion

The approach employed to study the Danish community in Buenos Aires is directly connected to the characteristics of this research and my relationship with the group. The community has changed due to historical, political and economic reasons: the once homogenous group of Danes and first-generation descendants has become a hybrid, eclectic group, gathered together by their priest, whose role of leader within the Danish church has been preserved. Reconsidering the indexical relation of the photograph to the 'real' from a performance framework allowed me to capture 'a photographic event', rather than a photograph. Understanding this approach as a methodology opens up the possibility of generating methods of experimentation, engagement with the process, and collaborative dialogue between research participants. The case study and method used suggest that the 'invisibility' of the participant's memories became visible by being reinterpreted and photographed. At the same time, the resulting photographs provided another narrative and layer to the story, but no less meaningful and 'real' than others. By considering contemporary perspectives and approaches that use photography to study communities, the aim was to explore the possibilities, rather than the restrictions, of the ambiguities of photographic images and a realist understanding of photography. This work is interested in photography not as a trace/referent to an external picture, or as a way to capture a past action, but rather as a form of creating the event of 'being with an "other"', while creating images that may (or may not) have similar features to the event itself. This work suggests that doing research about other people's lives from a photography-based, performative perspective is about taking responsibility rather than assuming control or ownership, or making assumptions about objective representation.

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‘A singer is a group’: creating a ‘researcher template’ to uncover complexities in the participatory arts project *rocsa singers*

Evelyne Deceur, Griet Roets, Kris Rutten and Maria Bouverne-De Bie

Abstract

In this article, we seek to merge an insider with an outsider perspective on participatory arts projects, by engaging with the ethnographic turn in arts and promoting the idea of a ‘researcher template’ (Goodley 1999) as a way of enabling reflexivity in practice-led inquiries. Situated at the intersection between artistic, educational and academic work, this template allows us to address and reflect upon the complexities and vicissitudes emerging from an interpretative study of the Ghent-based participatory arts project, *rocsa singers*. While revealing the roles of the diverse protagonists within this practice, we highlight three main challenges and tensions: (1) nurturing and supporting diversity; (2) the thin line between directing and going along; and (3) the need to go public. We argue that participatory arts practices form a tempting field to move beyond dominant interpretations and well-known (art) strategies and forms. ‘Having one foot in and one foot out’ invites us to become aware of this potential, to grasp the continuous and subtle interplay between contextualisation, diversity and responsibility, and to forge new connections between life-worlds and system pressures and priorities.

Keywords: complexities, ethnographic turn, participatory arts, researcher template, triple act

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Introduction

> I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me.
> (Freire 1970: 100)

When Claire Bishop published her essay *The social turn: collaboration and its discontents* in 2006, she raised provocative questions about what she terms 'participatory arts', the expanded field of relational arts practices that has boomed since the early 1990s and currently goes under a variety of names, such as socially engaged art, experimental communities, dialogic art, community arts and collaborative art (Bishop 2012). According to Bishop (2006a), these projects are framed either as ideological endeavours aimed at activating and restoring non-hierarchical social bonds, or as (potentially) disruptive phenomena that challenge and trouble conventional (art) perceptions and boundaries. Her plea to value participatory arts both on an aesthetic and a socio-political basis, and to withdraw prescriptive approaches that prioritise ethical judgements on working procedures and intentionality over artistic criteria, is motivated by her frustration with the lack of critical discourse that combines sceptical distance and imbrication (Bishop 2006b). On the one hand, she criticises the fact that very few observers are able to gain an encompassing overview of long-term participatory arts projects: 'Students and researchers are usually reliant on accounts provided by the artist, the curator, a handful of assistants, and if they are lucky, maybe some of the participants' (Bishop 2012: 6). Although these observers or so-called 'outsiders' can offer a quick glance behind the scenes, the dynamics and tacit logic of these projects are often only superficially discussed. On the other hand, she asserts that an insider position also engenders blind spots, as 'the more one becomes involved, the harder it is to be objective – especially when a central component of a project concerns the formation of personal relationships, which inevitably proceed to impact on one's research' (ibid.).

In this article we seek to merge an insider with an outsider perspective on participatory arts projects in a reciprocal and critical fashion. This critical orientation is grounded in reflexive and critical ethnography – an approach which is crucially concerned with (self-)reflexivity (Carspecken 1996; Denzin 1997, 2003; Kwon 2001) and refers to an ongoing methodological discussion within ethnography: To what extent can ethnographers occupy and claim a position of authoritative authorship? (Carspecken 1996; Kwon 2001). Today, ethnography seems to be less concerned with accurately and objectively representing the 'other' and their practices from a more distant outsider's perspective. As Denzin (1997: xiii) argues: 'Self-reflexivity in ethnography is no longer a luxury, [...] the writer can no longer presume to be able to present an objective, non-contested account of the other's experiences.' Contemporary ethnographers aim to relate their own cultural frame to

that of the 'other', looking at cultural practices in a self-reflexive, inter-subjective mode 'wherein the situated and motivated position of the ethnographer him/herself is highlighted as an integral part of the production of knowledge' (Kwon 2001: 76) and 'the informant and the ethnographer are producing some sort of common construct together' (Pinxten 1997: 31). Critical ethnographers stress the importance of the political nature of this self-reflexive positionality,

> being committed to producing and performing texts that are grounded in and co-constructed in the politically and personally problematic worlds of everyday life [...] working with others, he or she takes positions on the critical issues of the day, understanding that there can be no genuine democracy without genuine opposition and criticism. (Denzin 2003: 239–240)

In this respect, Carspecken (1996: 3–4) speaks of a value orientation in which critical ethnographers are 'concerned about social inequalities and [...] positive social change', and use their work 'as a form of social and cultural criticism', since they believe all knowledge is fundamentally mediated by power relations. This positionality requires scholars

> who are committed to taking risks, persons who are willing to act in situations where the outcomes cannot be predicted in advance. In such situations, a politics of new possibilities can be imagined and made to happen. Yet, in these pedagogical spaces, there are no leaders and followers; there are only co-participants, working together to develop new lines of action, new stories, new narratives in a collaborative effort. (Denzin 2003: 240)

Although there is an artistic parallel to this concern with self-reflexivity in many contemporary arts projects, recent attempts at engaging in such critical endeavours have mainly confirmed the legitimacy of a subject's authority and power (Kwon 2001). In an attempt to go beyond this overvaluation of personal experience as the basis for knowledge, we align ourselves with practice-led research according to the idea of Farber and Mäkelä (2010: 10–11), who argue that 'it is not to say that creative practice is a research in itself, but it can be a vehicle for an inquiry, which adds to knowledge or understanding'. In order to enable reflexivity in our practice-led inquiry, we adopt the idea of a 'research template' (Goodley 1999). This template refers to a critical and subjective stance that is developed at the intersection of the prior and ongoing experiences of an educational practitioner who is simultaneously involved in the evolving practices under study as an academic researcher. By means of this template, we try to reveal the underlying and (often) invisible complexities, dilemmas, slippages and failures in the participatory arts practice of the *rocsa singers*, a singing group of 35 members from different backgrounds, which was active between 2007 and 2013 in Ghent, Belgium.

In the next paragraphs, we first briefly outline the ways in which participatory arts are approached and perceived in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium). Second, we describe the background and origins of the project *rocsa singers* by referring to its context and the participatory and artistic approach. Third, we explain the features of the construction of a researcher template, which underpins our ethnographic perspective as a way to further the knowledge and understandings of contemporary participatory arts. Fourth, while consciously employing a dual involvement, both as practitioners and researchers in this participatory arts project, we present a critical personal narrative to delineate the roles and perspectives of the professionals and singers. We shed light on the dilemmas, complexities and opportunities which emerged during the project, but have thus far remained veiled. In the discussion, we address how the creation of a researcher template in a 'triple act relationship' (Roose and De Bie 2009) with the artists and the other researchers contributes to the reflexivity of the educational practitioner/researcher in the development of both practice-led research ventures and participatory arts practices. Finally, in the conclusion we stress the need for an ethnographic perspective in and on participatory arts (with specific reference to practice-led research) to challenge dominant terms and grasp the continuous interplay between contextualisation, diversity and responsibility.

Participatory arts

De bisschop (2009) studied the different 'meanings' of community arts based on a discourse analysis of the Flemish cultural policy and press. She argues that since 2000, official and structural support for this kind of participatory arts project has caused a growing need amongst protagonists to define the essential nature of these practices that are very diverse in terms of form, goal and process (De bisschop, Rutten and Soetaert 2011). Although the emphasis on combatting poverty and realising the 'right to culture' initially served to legitimise community arts projects, De bisschop (2011: 70) shows that during that last decade in Flanders those projects were solely judged and rewarded in terms of artistic merit: 'All justifications that are external to the art and culture domain are taboo, with the exception of the criterion of social process, which is only just acceptable because it ended up in the assessment criteria almost by accident.'

At first glance, the Flemish context thus seems to be in sharp contrast to Bishop's observation (2006b) of governments prioritising social effects over considerations of artistic quality. Yet, De bisschop (2011: 67) reveals that the position of community art practices in the *Arts decree* has not prevented 'ideas like "art that is socially committed is no longer art", "art serves no purpose but itself", or "art that serves a social goal is instrumental art and therefore not artistic"' from emerging. Community

arts organisations strongly believe that they are often harshly treated and not taken seriously by the regular artistic sector as such (Kerremans 2009). The emphasis on the aesthetic aspect, the 'artistic urgency', seems to have resulted in a bracketing off and neglect of other possible functions that community arts already have and could have for society at large (De bisschop et al. 2011; Gielen 2011).

Today, in Flanders, the focus on community arts as a mainly artistic concept is gradually being replaced by a call for 'participatory arts', referring to both a social and an artistic practice operating at the intersection between the public and the private, between conformity and subversion, and between engagement and aesthetic aspirations. In the recently published *Manifesto for participatory arts practices* (Trienekens and Hillaert 2015), four main characteristics of participatory arts practices are put forward: a focus on the context, a participative process, artistic directorship and a transformative prospect. In the interplay between these four dimensions, the authors assert that bridges can be built between system pressures and priorities on the one hand, and the real and imagined life-world of emotions, events and experiences on the other. They stress the critical potential of participatory arts practices in a system-world that increasingly demands benefit, usefulness and effectiveness, and they warn against an instrumentalisation of community arts that neutralises and even erodes the power to challenge dominant structures and generate unexpected connections (Trienekens 2004).

Below, we look deeper into what this position entails, between life-world and system, between inside and outside, between compliance and contestation, and what the role of the professionals involved in participatory arts practices may imply. Therefore, we study the participatory arts project, *rocsa singers*, which is exemplary in many ways.

Rocsa singers

Using the four characteristics listed above (contextual, participatory, artistic and transformative; Trienekens and Hillaert 2015), the project was first and foremost strongly rooted within its context. The *rocsa singers* originated in Rabot, a small quarter in the north of Ghent, the third biggest city in Belgium. Rabot is the prototype of an urban setting that is marked by de-industrialisation, explosive poverty and growing diversity. It is what Doug Saunders (2012) would call an 'arrival city': a place of constant change and movement, a gateway that offers opportunities for social and economic mobility to different newcomers. However, the neighbourhood is generally characterised as a deprived ghetto. Illustrative is the title of a 1999 report dealing with the bitter undertone amongst local residents: 'Where my home is, I do not want to live' (Blondeel 1999). Fifteen years later, the Statistics Department of the city of Ghent once again confirmed the image of a very densely populated area (9.611

residents/km^2), with many children and youngsters (28.2% are younger than 20), ethnic minorities (51.3%) and the biggest number of citizens on low incomes within the entire city (Stad Gent 2014). In 2006, the local government decided to launch the urban redevelopment programme Bridges to Rabot, to reconnect the neighbourhood functionally and mentally to the city centre. Against this background, the participatory arts organisation *rocsa* was contracted to set up 'participatory initiatives in a creative way' (Stad Gent 2006). The contract slotted into the much broader Ghent policy strategy to support participatory arts and culture as vital tools to empower people and reach out to neglected communities (Dienst Cultuurparticipatie 2012). By 2006, *rocsa* had built up expertise with the project *Neighbourhood Palace* (1996–2003), for which a wooden tent that served as a mobile cultural centre travelled through the 19th-century neighbourhoods of Ghent (including Rabot), and with showcasing two multi-disciplinary spectacles, *Heroes of Ghent* (2002) and *Until Here* (2004), which brought together over 150 citizens and artists from different backgrounds. With the Rabot contract the organisation could build on its existing experiences and focus on one central location in the city: the Rabot quarter.

The idea to start the *rocsa singers* project came from Rabot residents who loved to sing but could not read music(al notes). In terms of the second characteristic, participation, this starting point is quite crucial, since participatory arts practices can be constructed in either reductionist forms or democratic and transformative ways. Whereas a reductionist approach to participation refers to an instrumental strategy that confines participation to the identification of citizens within the existing socio-political order, participation might also be about creating opportunities for political existence and learning from the political existence of citizens, in questioning or disrupting the social order in democratic and transformative ways (Biesta 2012). The *rocsa* team, formed by two educational practitioners with a background in theatre, fine arts and multimedia (and certainly not in singing), were very much aware of these different approaches. For them, working with the neighbourhood's residents presented an opportunity to create an in-between space that neither coincided with the discourse of the policy agenda of the city, nor was exclusively part of the everyday lived experience of residents (Bhabha 1994). The idea was that by creating this space, professionals and local residents would be able to collaborate as equals, that they could express common concerns and stage the 'unknown' talents of 'forgotten' citizens beyond any limitation or stigmatisation (rocsa 2009).

Regarding the third characteristic, artistic directorship, the *rocsa* team affiliated Rik Debonne, a classically trained pianist and long-serving music coach with extensive experience working with (non-)professional actors in theatre and cabaret. While acknowledging the residents as partners in the artistic process, Debonne regularly rehearsed in the Rabot community centre. During this process, he was assisted by one of the educational practitioners of *rocsa* who served as a 'Jack-of-all-trades'; her

role varied from making everyone feel comfortable during the rehearsals and shows; creating schedules, promotion flyers and posters; to watching over the budget and gathering props. Almost a year after their first gathering, the group decided they were ready to perform. In April 2008, multi-instrumentalist Rudi Genbrugge joined the crew. He practised the solo songs and assisted with the group harmonies. As the first performance was very successful, the project continued. In 2013, when the singers stopped their activities, they had notched up about 20 concerts on different stages across Flanders.

In discussing the fourth characteristic, the transformative potential of participatory arts, we engage with the abovementioned idea of a researcher template (Goodley 1999). To comprehend and better understand whether (and if so, *how*) the process of the *rocsa singers* also questioned the existing social inequalities experienced by the participants and opened up possibilities to alter specific views, perspectives, power relations and positions, we specifically analyse the roles and dilemmas of the artists and educational practitioners involved.

The researcher template

In an ethnographic research approach, knowledge is considered to be situated, local, historically specific and grounded in human activity and culture (Angrosino 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2003). According to Denzin (1997), critical and (self-)reflexive ethnographic researchers do not study or write to capture the totality of a culture, but immerse themselves in the everyday life-worlds of people inhabiting this culture. They do so by being there, alongside them, trying to capture their experiences and interpreting (reflectively) slices and glimpses of localised interactions to understand more fully both others and themselves (Carspecken 1996; Pinxten 1997). In this vein, practitioners' use of ethnography to raise new or alternative understandings of practices has given rise to a reconceptualisation of ethnography: the self-reflexivity of the researcher, where one relays engagement with a particular situation (experience) and the assessment of its meaning and significance within a broader context (interpretation) (Kwon 2001), is considered to be 'a resource, not a problem, for a theoretically and pragmatically sufficient answer' (Banister, Burman and Parker et al. 1994: 13). Roets and Goedgeluck (2007: 91) assert that this reflexive 'knowing' of the ethnographic researcher refers to an ongoing process of building up knowledge while learning from the experiences of people in the culture under investigation 'explicating cultural, pluralist meanings and creating new ones'. Whereas ethnographic research was originally perceived as 'making the strange familiar', practice-led ethnography moves one step further: it 'renders the familiar strange [...] turning a critical eye onto practices, dynamics, policies and meaning-

making within familiar cultures' (Goodley, Lawthom and Clough et al. 2004: 57). As such, it invites us to look again at the cultures we may feel we already know so well.

From this perspective, Goodley (1999) introduces the concept of a researcher template, which is created at the intersection between his/her dual role as ethnographic researcher and educational practitioner. This template, he states, can provide 'a working subjective framework through which to control, temper, assess and check observations and analyses' (ibid: 24). His experiences of being involved in practices as an educational practitioner prior to, during and after the research, resonated with his experience of being a researcher and sensitised him to uncover subtle and intricate understandings in the culture under investigation. In our view, this researcher template might present a productive way in which to shape the ethnographic turn in contemporary arts. Not only does it move beyond the forced polarity of educational practitioners/researchers who position themselves in their role as either insider or outsider, but it also acknowledges 'the possible multiplicity of the subject positions that we occupy, which often locate us fluidly in ever-shifting positions and assign us changing roles' (Mutua and Swadener 2004: 3). In the same vein, rather than situating the researcher as an 'engaged and competent outsider' (Van der Kamp 1996: 122), Roose and De Bie (2009: 114) deal with this insider/outsider tension while grounding their research venture in a 'triple act relationship'. This relationship refers to the distribution of different roles for researchers and practitioners, which involves a 'multi-logue' between, for example, a researcher working on the insider/outsider tension, practitioners working from an insider perspective, and researchers who are positioned as outsiders to enable the reflexivity of their joint venture.

For this contribution, we started from this idea of creating a researcher template or triple act relationship, as the first author of this article was also involved as an educational practitioner in the participatory arts practice *rocsa singers* prior to, during and after her research. At the end of September 2011, when she left this job to work as an academic researcher at Ghent University, she continued to be involved in the *rocsa singers* project on a voluntary basis. During the entire process, from 2007–2013, she witnessed how the project unfolded. In collaboration with the two involved artists, who are well placed to 'denaturalise the obvious, [...] to de-familiarise experience, to make it new by making us see it in a new way' (Rutten and Soetaert 2011: 9), and the other researchers and co-authors of this article, she co-created a researcher template or triple act relationship. As a result, a multi-logue was conceived between the first author working on the insider/outsider tension, two artists working from an insider perspective, and three researchers reflecting as outsiders on the knowledge thus generated.

In an attempt to merge the experiences of the first author as an educational practitioner with her experiences as an academic researcher, in collaboration

with the artists and other researchers involved, and as the result of creating this researcher template, we composed a 'critical personal narrative'. Mutua and Swadener (2004: 108) discuss this rapidly growing genre in educational research by referring to insights produced by the researcher/educational practitioner that are situated between a narrative and a more sweeping analysis, and writing 'in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life'. In that sense, while composing and representing a critical personal narrative of the *rocsa singers* project, we draw on a complementary variety of research methods. First, the first author documented her experiences as a form of narrative that interrogates critical subjectivity by placing the self within a social context and documenting the interactions within the group. Second, in 2014, one year after the project ended, she additionally conducted open, qualitative interviews (Bogdan and Biklen 2007) with the two artists involved (hereinafter referred to as 'A1' and 'A2') and eight singers (in the following numbered 'S1'–'S8'), to uncover their perspectives on their respective roles in the project.

Complexities in the *rocsa singers*

In the next paragraphs, we bring together the experiences and insights of the first author, the artists and the singers. We start from the two analytical research questions mentioned earlier, namely (1) whether (and if so, *how*) the process of the participatory arts practice *rocsa singers* questioned social inequalities and transformed views, perspectives and power relations and positions; and (2) what the roles and dilemmas of the artists and educators in this process were. Hence, we highlight three critical challenges and complexities: (1) nurturing and supporting diversity, (2) the thin line between directing and going along, and (3) the need to go public.

A singer is a group

'What is typical of the group is that there is no one typical.' (A1)

Although *rocsa* was initially engaged in Rabot to increase the cultural participation and competence of 'groups and individuals who find themselves in a situation of (social) cultural discrimination' (Dienst Cultuurparticipatie 2012: 157), the organisation instead embraced difference and diversity as productive inevitabilities (Braidotti 2006; Soenen and Verlot 2002). While building up 'social knowledge' (De Bie, Oosterlynck and De Blust 2012: 31) and exploring different problems, talents and opportunities within the neighbourhood, the *rocsa* team did not limit its scope to working with the poor or disadvantaged. In fact, the team never determined a target group or asked people if they *could* sing when they started the project. The

fact that some residents *wanted* to sing, that they were 'interested in singing' (S1), was enough to engage two artists who wanted to collaborate with 'an everyday, but uncommon group' (S3).

This uncommon group consisted of 25 (and in 2013, up to 40) women and men aged 15–75, with diverse backgrounds and abilities, but with a shared eagerness and enthusiasm to sing. They were 'people of all ages, classes, faiths and everything else that rather divides than unites us in modern society' (Légat 2008: 1). Giving this group a forum to show their capacities and exercise expression (Biesta 2012) demanded 'perseverance and appropriate efforts of the team members involved' (S4): arrangements were made for a babysitter when a single mom turned up at the weekly rehearsals with a screaming baby; transport was organised for a cancer patient to ensure that she could come to the community centre (and the clinic, later that week); a singer was carried up the stairs in her wheelchair when the elevator broke; before the shows, dinner was prepared so that everyone got something decent to eat and drink; the song texts were written out phonetically and little crib-sheets were made for those who could not memorise their lines.

This 'silent support in a right way' (S3), this 'watching over the group' (S7) made the singers feel they 'were not treated as clients, but as people' (S8). One woman noted: 'Often you see what I call "target group sectarianism", but not at *rocsa*. The gap between origin and mental health, age and race disappeared' (rocsa 2009: 6). Although people had their own reasons for joining the *rocsa singers* rather than any other 'ordinary' choir, music class or conservatory, they 'were never asked to explain or justify their problems' (S4); 'we could just be there' (S6). One of the artists affirmed: 'We never said "look, she had a tough time, but she will make the best out of it" [...] If you do that, you are not working with people, you are only interested in yourself as a creator [...] Such an attitude disgusts me' (A2). The focus was on 'making music as a group' (S2). Yet, although everyone agreed on the strong team spirit and supportive atmosphere, 'it was not like we regularly visited each other' (S3). For some, the *rocsa singers* were like family, 'seeing everyone week after week, someone who asks you how you have been, how your holidays were ... ' (S5). Others enjoyed 'being among different people, [...] being treated as equals [...] to sing, to get to know each other and to get rid of simplistic prejudices and negative stereotypes' (S8) about the poor, the elderly, people from the middle class, from other races, etc. In this respect, we understand the artists' preference for the term 'singing group', instead of 'chorus':

> A chorus focuses on the sound of the group; the individual characters are secondary. The *rocsa singers* are not a chorus, but a singing group, where sing-alongs mingle with solo songs and polyphonies in various genres, and where matches are made between different life-worlds and skills. (A1)

However, at times, the focus on making music, the group process and especially the 'individual care' (S3) also masked the structural disadvantage, inequality and even poverty influencing the lives of the singers. What do you do when a singer has no more money left to buy food that month, when someone is suddenly evicted from her home or when another admits she has been struggling with an alcohol addiction for years? The group listened, looked for a way out; occasionally the educational practitioner even introduced singers to specialised help or called in assistance. Still, the fact that this framing of their problems was never addressed, that the singers were approached on an individual, local level, perversely caused that no broader, structural causes or solutions were found. In that sense, the project seemed to contribute to a dominant understanding of problems of poverty, disadvantage and structural inequality that are not framed as social problems situated within social policy and society, but as individual problems positioned within the individual and the community (Lister 2004).

Directing and going along

'Giving voice, both literally and metaphorically.' (A2)

The main ambition of the *rocsa singers* was to move beyond 'the pleasure of singing' (A1). The artists conscientiously and continuously 'studied the possibilities within the group: What is the potential? What do we need, what do we already have?' (ibid.). As the majority of the *rocsa singers* could not read musical notes,

> we explored the different voices with an Indian tonal system, for which no prior knowledge is needed. [...] Everyone begins with the same keynote 'sa' [...]. Whether you are an experienced singer or not, whether you can read musical notes or not, everyone starts on the 'same wavelength'. (ibid.)

By doing so, a singer attested, 'you push your own boundaries, without really noticing. [...] It is up to you to decide how far you will or can go; anything goes' (rocsa 2009: 5).

Artistically directing a diverse group whose members are generous in sharing their perspectives and capacities is challenging and requires a certain authority to keep open the tension between engagement and experimentation. Both artists emphasised their 'great responsibility' as they wanted 'to get the most out of each participant; we did not want others to have compassion for the group. We refused to use the "weaknesses" of some singers to make an artistic performance' (A1). For the singers, the fact that they 'were taken seriously [...], that the pleasure of singing did not stand in the way of artistic quality and vice versa' (S1) was crucial: 'Okay, singing is a way to bring people together, but that is not enough; [...] it also has to be "good"' (S8). The artists wanted 'to move beyond the obvious and the mediocre', they wanted 'to

stimulate and challenge' and 'find a balance between innovation and recognition' (A1). Their task was 'to let the singers excel and feel good by practising a lot, guiding them, but also by sometimes telling them "Maybe you have to reconsider your solo song [...] Maybe you set the bar too high?" [...] We have to protect people from failure' (A2). 'Of course,' one director admitted, 'as good musicians we can "save the show", we can drown out the "bad" singers and not give them the chance to bring something personal' (A1). He believes that the *rocsa singers* 'dared to show "vulnerability"; we dared to take risks' (ibid.), but they made sure that 'laughter never turned into mockery, astonishment never became embarrassment' (A2).

During the weekly rehearsals and especially in one artist's small living-room where each member tried out his or her solo song for the first time, we witnessed how this line between directing and listening, authority and trust, artistic concept and social context became thinner and blurred. When a singer, after several attempts, kept having troubles with the rhythm and the melody, the artists suggested a 'more appropriate song'; when another singer came up with the idea to sing the Slave Choir from Verdi's *Nabucco*, they explained that the vocal and instrumental capacity of the *rocsa singers* was too limited; or when someone else wanted to perform the melodramatic Spanish *Ay pena, penita, pena*, complete with costume changes, wigs, make-up and matching choreography, they recommended that she first concentrate on her lines before bothering with the presentation. There was always room for contradiction and discussion; the artists never insisted, they merely made suggestions to the singers.

Throughout the project, 'the great courage and creativity of the singers' (A1) and 'their openness and determination to sing and to perform on stage *sans gêne*' (A2) struck the artists. In the interviews, they acknowledged that they in turn 'learnt a lot of the singers' (A1) and 'discovered latent talents' (A2). One of the artists even applied for an EU Grundtvig scholarship and went to work for the Irish *Tallaght Community Arts* centre, where he developed 'a course on music, body and movement' (ibid.). Touring with professional musicians and actors 'pays the bills', but he has the feeling that 'as a musician, he has nothing more to prove' (ibid.). He lost his heart to the participatory arts and is now gathering funds to go back to Ireland to 'accompany a group of people, just like the *rocsa singers*, with the same respect, [...] starting from their possibilities and make them shine on stage' (ibid.).

The public

> 'Connecting and confusing.' (Deceur, Roets and Bouverne-De Bie 2012: 30)

Before the first public performance of the *rocsa singers*, the group struggled with how to bring the process and practice behind the scenes into play. How could they represent themselves not only according to an artistic finality (De bisschop 2011), but

also as a contribution to democratic processes of meaning making about difference and diversity in our society (Gielen 2011)? While entering into an engagement with the significance of this social finality and potentially transformative performance, they realised that a plurality of repertoires of interpretation by a diversity of audiences was possible. As a result, they started to embrace this open-ended and dialogical politics of representation and interpretation as an opportunity: a singer who gets stage fright because she suddenly realises that her family will be waiting in the audience; someone else who swoons during the first show; another who falls offstage; a man who always forgets the refrain of his solo song; someone who unexpectedly, in the middle of the show, arrives ('sorry I am late'); another who, just before her solo number, runs off to the toilet; … For the public, apparently, nothing seemed wrong; 'in a way, it looked like it was all part of the act [...] the singers sat on stage with tables and chairs, just like friends in a café' (A1). 'Hence, the artificial distance between audience and performers was questioned' (rocsa 2009: 8),

> 'the singers' stress level was reduced as they could help each other out, and the public felt at ease. [...] We did not just shut down the lights, close and open the curtains; we started singing and thus 'forced' the audience to be silent, not by hushing them 'because the play is about to begin'. No, as Rudi [one of the artists] started playing his accordion, the people stopped talking and listened. Then, slowly, the lights went down. (A1)

Whereas the first shows in 2008 and 2009 took place before a public of mostly friends and family, the group gradually gained confidence and won over a wider audience's attention and appreciation. People were confused, moved and charmed: 'How is it possible that so many "ordinary" men and women got the guts, the creativity and the pleasure to put a show on stage?' (rocsa 2009: 5). 'Of course, the audience saw that the diversity of our singing group was unique,' one singer confessed, 'but that was not our focus' (S10). Rabot was no longer just a deprived context, 'people could see both the shabby beauty of the project and our artistic quality' (A2).

Nonetheless, in 2010, as the *rocsa singers* received their first request to perform during a large-scale artistic festival, the balance between artistic content and entertainment, between integrity and putting the group on display, was challenged. The singers were asked to form a 'complaints choir', in which people literally sing about their complaints. Although the participants were thrilled to perform before an audience which included local government officials, the artists and educational practitioner responded quite dismissively. After discussing their grievances with the Ghent cultural centre, they agreed that 'as it was expected from Rabot residents and from people in participatory arts projects to complain', to write a contrary, swinging, four-part harmony: *'t Is overal iet*, freely translated as *Forever finding fault*; a song in which people who grumble and whine were ridiculed. And also in the promotional material, they made sure that the singers were not presented as poor or

disadvantaged, 'which is policy language, [...] labels that they put on people' (S5); instead, they listed everyone's name.

Over the seven years, the artists and educational practitioner kept stubbornly to this strategy 'to present and represent the *rocsa singers* in the best possible artistic and social way' (A1). Every new show and new request revealed fresh (unknown) qualities and allowed for 'meaningful moments' to emerge (Biesta 2012). The *rocsa singers* steadily overcame their fears: 'One of the singers, who was initially rather reluctant to invite her family and friends, in the end asked for a group discount' (A1); somebody else decided to follow her dreams and sign up for the Antwerp Jazz Pop-studio; one singer auditioned for a professional play and was selected; and another, after hesitating for more than three years, sang a solo and surprised everyone. These unexpected outcomes reflect the potential of the project to allow (and even influence) individuals and communities to view themselves in a different way. However, whilst the *rocsa singers* embraced partnerships with professional artists and government-linked institutions and stretched their social and artistic clout, they became overwhelmed by a growing demand to identify and measure their impacts and outcomes. How did they remediate the deprived situation in Rabot? In what way did they stay on track, remain innovative? What was their sustainable outcome?

In the last year, budget cuts and a lack of funding on the one hand, and the call to privatise the project, to create a 'self-regulatory spin-off' with a self-reliant financial position on the other, brought down the experiment and the singers as a group. Efforts to keep the project going gradually suppressed all creativity and the singers dropped out one by one. The deception was great. In 2013, the artistic directors and educational practitioner decided to take the honourable way out: to end in beauty, they performed in their own, familiar setting to an audience of 800 people.

Discussion

We have problematised the notion of an insider or outsider perspective in participatory arts projects, by engaging with the ethnographic turn in arts. In an attempt to generate a critical, self-reflexive and nuanced view on the roles of the diverse protagonists in these practices, and the challenges and dilemmas at stake, we adopted the idea of a researcher template (Goodley 1999). This template refers to a subjective framework that allows us to merge skeptical distance and immersion in participatory arts practices and to contribute to a practice-led theorising of emerging complexities and points of contention. In our practice-led research venture we construed this researcher template within a triple act relationship (Roose and De Bie 2009), between the first author of this article as an educational practitioner (insider)/researcher (outsider), the

two artists being involved as insiders in the participatory arts project *rocsa singers*, and the other researchers and co-authors as outsiders.

The creation of this researcher template within a triple act relationship with the artists and other researchers contributes to the (self-)reflexivity of the involved actors in their development of both this practice-led research venture and the participatory arts practice under study. With reference to the significance of reflexivity in practice-led research, the researcher template challenged the educational practitioner who was also involved as a researcher, to develop research insights that were open to scrutiny and contestation (D'Cruz and Jones 2004). Rather than developing an introspective or distant account of her own struggles as an educational practitioner/researcher, the researcher template pushed the first author of this article to situate and position her own perspective within her social context (Mutua and Swadener 2004), and to document the dynamics and perspectives of the different actors involved in the creation of the *rocsa singers* as a participatory arts project. As such, the research venture opened up a multi-logue in which the findings and knowledge claims were perceived as questionable issues, since the educational practitioner/researcher was reflexively aware of her role in the research process and subjected her insights to the critical scrutiny of both the artists and the other researchers involved.

In relation to the emphasis on reflexivity in participatory arts practices, the researcher template also invited us to address questions about the critical potential, values, finalities and logic of the project. This involved becoming aware and identifying both the transformative outcomes and the shortcomings of the *rocsa singers* (Trienekens and Hillaert 2015), which were constructed in a space in-between a system-world that increasingly demanded benefit, usefulness and effectiveness, thus impacting the life-worlds and concerns of the singers themselves. With regard to its potentially transformative outcomes, (1) the singers did not intend to form an 'ordinary' chorus or to play music; they were a singing group, differing in shape, composition and convention. For *rocsa*, the context was not just a setting, it was the condition in which possibilities and creativity were found and examined. Those who *wanted* to sing, *could* sing; reading musical notes was never a precondition; (2) artistic values were never contested; art was perceived as a form of articulation for all group members across different cultures and backgrounds, without exception. The responsibility of the artistic directors was essentially for nurturing the artistic process and making art; and (3) in their performances the singers joined quality and equality, familiarity and strangeness, project and process. Their concerts connected, but also incited confusion, as they showed 'ordinary people's skills and know-how' (rocsa 2009: 9) that had been there all along but were never recognised as such.

As a major shortcoming, however, the project potentially did not change the structural social inequalities influencing the lives of the singers. Although the project could challenge taken-for-granted power relations and social inequalities that are

rooted within the social order, the outcomes were inherently uncertain. Instead, according to a democratic and transformative approach of participation (Biesta 2012), priority was given to the open-endedness of the process, to simultaneous (sometimes even paradoxical) meanings and logic. Such a position requires reflexivity and creativity towards the process, assumptions and representations made. This meant not only 'doing something' when a singer showed up with a box full of unpaid bills and unopened envelopes, when another burst into tears in the middle of a rehearsal, or when somebody took too many sedatives before a show. It also implied making the hard decision to stop the project the moment the artists and the educational practitioners felt that the choice to work and engage with different people and organisations, to leave space and place for participation and the unexpected, to enjoy the pleasure of singing together and be proud of shared artistic realisations, was scrambled by encroaching instrumentalism and policy-led management-speak.

Although our study shows that stopping engendered new, unexpected levers (some singers joined another singing group or signed up at a conservatory; one artist even applied for a scholarship to further develop 'a talent I discovered (partly) at *rocsa*' [A2]), we contend that the meaning of the *rocsa singers*' quirky contrariness in society and arts is more important than its scale. Surely, the problems and issues raised in this project are identifiable within other, similar participatory arts initiatives. Yet we believe that only by revealing the struggles behind the scenes and constantly questioning *why* things are done and shown in a particular way, participatory arts can become critical of existing power relations and focus on the creation of new perspectives and transversal connections between life-worlds and systemic forces.

Conclusion

Employing a researcher template and setting up a triple act relationship between insiders, outsiders and insiders/outsiders can enable reflection and discussion which benefit both the development of practice-led research and the construction process of participatory arts projects. A multi-logue served as a forum where ideas and expertise could be exchanged, where participants could step out of their actual roles, look at practices and processes from another angle and draw on alternative ways of knowing. The need was stressed for an ethnographic perspective in and on participatory arts (with specific reference to practice-led research) to grasp the continual interplay between contextualisation, diversity and responsibility. While exploring the participatory arts project *rocsa singers*, we thus questioned and noted the boundaries between academic research and engagement in-situ, ethics and aesthetics, participation and direction, struggle and consensus, amongst others. Different perspectives and roles were revealed, and focus was put on the meanings and logic that coincided and complemented each other in practice.

We found that artistic, educational and academic work can intersect and be mutually beneficial. Despite the fact that the three arenas have different objectives and understandings, in a crossover, by having 'one foot in and one foot out' (and in case of the first author, this is even quite literally so) axioms can be investigated and new leads identified. In our view, participatory arts practices, balancing between social and artistic dimensions, process and product, form a tempting field for moving beyond accepted interpretations and well-known art strategies and forms. The *rocsa singers* proved that one does not need to learn solfège in order to sing, that artistic direction depends on interdependency, and that a concert can be a prelude to something more. We hope our venture will form a starting point for uncovering other (participatory) arts experiences and engagements to become the object of public concern and attention.

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The autoethnographic act of choreography: considering the creative process of storytelling with and on the performative dancing body and the use of Verbatim Theatre methods

Lliane Loots

Abstract

This article, which takes on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of the body as the prime means of knowing the world, starts with the understanding that we *have* a body, *are* a body and *become* a body. These are key concepts for those, like me, who tell stories with the body – the act of choreography. Arguing for the notion of the embodied 'I' and interrogating the politics of autoethnography (see, for example, Holman Jones 2005), this article offers an encounter with my own process of conceptualising and choreographing *days like these* (2015). Working with Verbatim Theatre (also called documentary theatre) methodologies I looked at the politics of memory and history, for a potential crossover between this theatre-making method and the choreographic process. The way I choreograph is essentially 'verbatim' in that I am constantly asking dancers to bring their own life experience – through their bodies – into the dance theatre we create. In looking at *days like these* (2015) I offer a critical analysis of my own choreography (beyond the encounter and analysis of the process of making). This is done as a feminist act of responding to the constructions and play of knowledge and power within and on the moving, dancing body: both my own body and those of the six dancers with whom I collaborated.

Keywords: autoethnography, choreography, dance, feminism, FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, Verbatim Theatre

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Theatre is a place of stories. At the quintessence, all theatre and performance is an act of storytelling. Sometimes it is the telling of one's own story, sometimes the telling of stories reflected in one's imagination, sometimes it is the stories of history, politics and the lives of others. The performative imperative to tell stories is, perhaps, a need to reflect ourselves back to our world, to reflect our world back to us, and to try and make sense of our physical, lived-in realities. Early modernist Antonin Artaud (1931), for example, declared that theatre's double is life; that all performance events should supposedly hold up a mirror to life, its 'double'. Beyond this, postmodernity (see Connor 1997) has allowed us to give up the claim to 'truth' in our storytelling and instead we sit with ideas of *our* truth; stories that speak into the gaps left by histories written by conquerors – be these (for example) race, gender or nation-orientated. Writers and activists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1981) ask us to 'de-colonise the mind' so that we, as Africans, can begin to re-remember and re-tell our stories in a way that sheds the legacies of the colonial 'cultural bombs' (ibid: 3) that have devalued and often annihilated our stories, and our ability to tell them. Most early second-wave feminist activist writing and critical social engagement (see Tong 1989) have made it abundantly clear that global paternalistic imperatives silenced women's stories. Contemporary feminism's response, in all its ongoing and multifaceted diverse engagements with patriarchy, has seen women (and men) and people living with divergent sexual orientations (for instance), beginning to tell, re-tell and re-claim space to speak their stories.

Beyond this, much current postcolonial critical storytelling (see Spivak 1990) asks that we begin to look at the ethnography and anthropology of who tells whose story, and look into the profound politics of allowing space for those historically silenced, in the grand canonical paternalistic claim to 'rightful storytelling', to begin telling their own stories into the gaps of history.

I, too, am a storyteller. I am a theatre maker, choreographer, dancer, academic, teacher and feminist. This article brings together some of my differing selves as I begin to interrogate, through this academic text and the processes of writing and reflecting, on my own artistic process as a dance maker and choreographer. I tell stories in two mediums: the linguistic and the physical. As with all good storytelling the starting point is always the self; and more acutely for a dancer and choreographer (and feminist), the body. This written article thus aims to be one text written *with* a body answering to another text written physically *on* and *through* a body – the corporeal act of dance-making. I claim Randy Martin's (2005: 59) notion of 'dance as a continuing site of self-recognition' and take up the autoethnographic turn (see, e.g., Holman Jones 2005) of looking into the embodied self as a site of meaning-making and, indeed, storytelling. Theatre dance is my corporal storytelling medium as I focus specifically on offering this linguistic encounter with my own process

of conceptualising and choreographing *days like these* (2015) with FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY.[1]

The embodied 'I' – the lived body as storyteller

As a choreographer, a storyteller of and on the body, the act of making and doing is mostly instinctual. This intuition or instinct is not, however, simply *a priori*, but has arisen from years of technically training the body (the honing of instincts?), of creating and making, of failing and succeeding, of falling and physically finding one's feet again. It comes from being in a body dedicated to the craft of physical storytelling through dance. What I am arguing, perhaps, is the age-old rejection of the Cartesian mind/body split: the assumption that the body is the dark unknown and that the mind is light and reason. The French existential philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty rejects this dualism and places into sharp focus the centrality of the body and embodied experiences, both in terms of knowledge production/creation and meaning-making processes. In *The phenomenology of perception* (1962) he puts forward the idea that the lived experience of the body, by its very visceral being, denies the detachment of subject from object. The idea of the body as something which can both think and perceive allowed Merleau-Ponty (ibid: 9) to coin the phrase 'the lived body'. 'I am not in front of my body, I am in it or rather I am it … If we can still speak of interpretation in relations to the perceptions of one's body, we shall have to say that it interprets itself' (ibid: 150).

This idea of the body 'interpreting itself' gives rise to an understanding that human existence is unthinkable or unimaginable, separated from the body – we need a body to think and feel with (Carroll 2011: 252). Fundamental to Merleau-Ponty's theories is thus the idea of embodiment in which, he argues, we never perceive the world as pure consciousness; consciousness is always enmeshed or tangled up in the visceral flesh, bones and blood of the body:

> The body is primarily a way of being in the world. It is a form of lived experience which is fluid and ever-shifting. And it is also a way of interacting with one's environment, of shaping it and being shaped by it. (cited in Cavallaro 1998: 88)

Concurring with this, Nick Totton (2010: 21) suggests that 'the experience of "having" a body is intrinsic to human experience and a necessary component of "becoming" a body'. The mind/body dualism of subject/object is thus no longer valid but, rather, as Shelley Budgeon (2003: 50) suggests, the body should be seen as 'events that are continually in the process of becoming – as multiplicities that are never just found but are made and remade'.

This body that is 'event', that is in a process of being made and re-made, reveals this idea of the body as performative.

> The body is always performed, staged and presented; the theatres [sic] of the body are raw materials by which the ritual drama of everyday embodied life are produced. (Waskul and Vannini 2006: 2)

The human body, my body, the performative body, is embedded in social practices where the body is not something we 'have' but rather something we 'become' or 'do'.

In support of this, Thomas Csordas (1990) attempts to claim power back for the body by defending the concept of embodiment. Embodiment, Csordas argues, implies that the body is something other than, more than, and added to, the physical body. Embodiment is concerned with the ways in which people 'inhabit' their bodies so that these become 'habituated' (Scheper-Hughes 1994). Embodiment thus is/becomes 'all the acquired habits and somatic tactics that represent the cultural arts of using and being in the body (and in the world)' (ibid: 232).

Hence, understanding that we *have* a body, *are* a body and *become* a body that we *inhabit* (or 'habituate'), a body is key to engaging the world and our experience in it. These are key concepts for those, like myself, who tell stories with the body – the act of choreography. Taking up Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body, my body, as the prime means of communicating with the world, what starts to emerge is the phenomenology of speaking from the embodied 'I'. This embodied 'I', the self as the knower and the storyteller (on and with the body) becomes the self-referential conveyer of theory and process; of personal history and memory. This is – by its very performative nature and by the idea of a body becoming (Totton 2010) – a political act which understands the embedded power plays that act through and on the body and are the very substance of a choreographer's storytelling on and with the body. As Nancy Kreigar (2005: 350) states:

> Bodies tell stories about – and cannot be studies divorced from – the conditions of our existence; bodies tell stories that often – but not always – match people's stated accounts; and bodies tell stories that people cannot or will not, either because they are unable, forbidden, or choose not to tell.

The choreographer as ethnographer and as autoethnographer

Unless I am choreographing a solo on and for myself, which I will then perform with my body on stage, my act of dance theatre storytelling is a communal one where I act on, am acted upon, by other bodies – the dancers. Kreigar's (ibid.) 'bodies [that] tell stories' include my own and those I engage with in the creative process. As a choreographer I am thus consciously an ethnographer who works out the stories of other bodies, who uses my craft to read meaning into other (dancing) bodies' constructions of evolving self, identity, culture and being. An adult dancing body

does not, for example, walk into the rehearsal studio as a blank slate; that dancer comes with history and memory written on the embodied self. As a choreographer I can choose to avoid this body history by trying to work for physical constructions of a (potentially impossible) 'neutral body', or disciplining my own physical technique and way of moving onto this other body (all of which are and have been present in the history of contemporary and classical theatre dance). Alternately, I could understand the power of the dancer's body full of its own history and memory and its own 'becoming' (Budgeon 2003: 50) and work from a place where I seek not to control and discipline, but rather to create a dialogue of storytelling. This dialogue must, of necessity, begin with myself – my own body – and so any act of choreography is also an act of autoethnography.

Autoethnography is a contemporary movement towards personalised (mostly qualitative) research. Nicholas Holt (2003: 18) defines autoethnography as 'highly personalised accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture'. This research methodology emanates from one's own experiential body. Peter McIlveen (2008: 15) elucidates that

> the prominent features of autoethnography as writing about oneself as a researcher-practitioner, not an autobiographer, is a specific form of critical enquiry that is embedded in theory and practice.

This linking of theory and practice (perhaps another outdated Cartesian division that assumes we can only make sense of the world outside of living in it?) is important in autoethnography, as various criticisms of this methodology claim that a singular point of view (one body?) does not allow for truthful social, political and cultural reflection and theorising. As a feminist choreographer working in South Africa, who better to investigate my own process and my own work – work that emanates from my body – than myself, the embodied 'I'? Far from offering a singular (and thus potentially untruthful?) account, my body claims its right to tell stories (both verbal and choreographic). Postcolonial feminist writer, Gayatri Spivak (1990), argues that 'neutrality' and 'truthfulness' in speaking almost always assume the central hegemony of a white, middle-class (usually) First-World male, and is thus a violence on the female body which does not embody – or seek to embody – the powerful (and mostly debilitating) discourse of the centre. As Spivak (ibid: 62) states: 'Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?' Dance is one example of the visceral and lived experience of using the body to write and create meaning; of exerting the 'I' into a position of agency. And through my own agency as autoethnographer, perhaps I begin to embody the compassionate working methodology of becoming a choreographic ethnographer who enables rather than dis-ables/silences/disciplines

other bodies against developing Spivak's (ibid.) beautifully named 'rage against … history'.

Further, I am reminded by Sarah Wall (2006: 9), in fighting to remember the early second-wave feminist slogan and point of visceral theorising: 'the personal is political', that

> those that complain that personal narratives emphasise a single, speaking subject fail to realise that no individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of constructed meaning. There is a direct and inextricable link between the personal and the cultural. Thus, rich meaning, culturally relevant personal experience, and an intense motivation to know are what typify and strengthen autoethnography.

Linking the personal and the cultural – Verbatim Theatre as source/methodology

FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY employs six full-time professional dancers. I name them as an act of acknowledging their bodies: Jabu Siphika, Julia Wilson, Zinhle Nzama, Sifiso Majola, Tshediso Kabulu and Sifiso Khumalo. They range in age from 23–35, and some have been working with me for over nine years of the company's 12-year history. In this time of moving, dancing and lifting one another, where the leaking sweat of our dancers' bodies has connected and rubbed off on one another, I have found myself in the position of listening and learning some of the life stories of these dancers. During coffee breaks I have listened to small stories told about raising children, to bigger stories of loss and love, illness and what might be on offer for dinner that night. In short, as a choreographer and teacher, I have been participant and witness to their 'bodies becoming' (Totton 2010: 21). But, like every audience for a story, this is never a neutral engagement. The continued legacy of race and apartheid systems within South Africa, gender and gendered differences, age gaps and differences in mother tongue have, for instance, also meant that the listening to and telling of stories are layered with history and politics. And, furthermore, the body itself is marked by difference; race and gender, amongst others. So, while in the dance studio and in the act of creating a dance performance, we experience what Chandra Mohanty (1991: 8) calls a 'common context of struggles' within an 'imagined community': the reality of our 'lived bodies' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 9) is that we are diverse and different. This very diversity and difference is, in the context of South African history, not always a place of meeting but can be (and most often has been) a place of misunderstanding and violence.

I became fascinated by the dual possibility of a temporal, imagined common context – which I saw as the public space that theatre and performance temporarily offer us – and the divergence of our lived bodies which, in essence, are our own personal bodily stories and the cognate becoming we experience in storytelling. My

engagement with the visceral, lived bodies and shared life stories of the dancers I work with offered my own body – as storyteller and dance maker, too – the chance to see how we abandon the grand narratives of history that have so often been written and have silenced us, to find a performative place where we can accurately (truthfully?) speak ourselves into agency.

Wanting this dance, which allowed the personal and the divergent to speak truth from the lived body, I became fascinated by the Verbatim Theatre movement which began in Europe in the early 1960s[2] and witnessed a major rebirth in the early 1990s in Britain and America. Verbatim Theatre has emerged in theatre history at times of social and political distress, where this methodology of theatre making is seen as 'truthful' and offering documentary proof or even testimony. Loosely referred to as Documentary Theatre, it has, as its core, a methodology where text and spoken word are generated by interviews with real people. As Cantrell (2012)[3] notes:

> In its strictest form, verbatim theatre-makers use real people's words exclusively, and take this testimony from recorded interviews. However, the form is more malleable than this, and writers have frequently combined interview material … or used reported and remembered speech rather than recorded testimony. There is an overlap between verbatim theatre and documentary theatre, and other kinds of fact-based drama, such as testimonial theatre (in which an individual works with a writer to tell their own story) and tribunal theatre (edited from court transcripts).

Verbatim Theatre requires the theatre maker to engage a community around an issue, to use the actual spoken words of those who find themselves (bodily and politically) in the situation. The final theatre work, which is then constructed out of these lived stories, thus carries the mark of being 'real' and 'authentic'. Early on in Verbatim Theatre history, interviews were recorded on tape machines/recording devices and actors would sometimes spend hours of rehearsal time using these recordings to get not only the words right, but also the dialect, intonation and original speech rhythms – such was the attention to detail around authenticity or the transfer of the real story to the performer/actor. Essentially, though, the final performance of the stories was assigned to an actor, and the final construction of the theatre work was left to a director/playwright.

I was interested to see if there could be a potential crossover between the Verbatim Theatre-making method and the choreographic process. For me, having spent nearly 20 years doing choreography for the stage, endlessly creating dance and performance dance, had led to a weariness with the sheer monotony of making 'dance steps'. This no longer holds any interest for me, and the choreographic methodology of the all-knowing dance-maker coming into the studio instructing unsuspecting bodies to imitate and replicate steps given from 'the master' seemed to echo all the power plays I have spent my life trying to deconstruct, be they colonial, gendered, paternalistic or

racial. If I am to claim my own 'body becoming' (Totton 2010: 21) and the agency of embodiment, then surely as a feminist, artist and activist, I should afford this to those I work alongside – the dancers.

The evolving methodology of my own choreographic embodied process has begun to draw on Verbatim Theatre methodology, in that I am constantly asking the dancers (in a collaborative process) to bring their own life experience – through their bodies – into the dance theatre we make. Working with guided improvisation and guided physical dance play in the studio, I ask the dancers to take verbal or physical ideas which I give them, and ask them to generate dance material on their own bodies – material that is both personal and 'fits' the idiosyncrasies of their own individual body movement patterns. In this way the dance material becomes deeply personal and is physically resolved on the body doing it. I then use the dance material and cut, edit, re-arrange, re-shape, create duets, and sometimes re-choreograph in a manner that suits my vision of the whole. The dancers thus present me, their choreographer, with the stories they write on their own bodies. As a choreographer, I thus begin to think of myself as a type of 'collector of stories' – some are my own, but others come from the dancers I am working with.

days like these (2015)[4]

days like these (2015) began with the little stories the dancers and I exchanged; the small moments of personal narrative and storytelling shared and offered in everyday conversation in the meeting of our seven divergent South African lives; stories often told during a tea break, after a technique class, or between the making and doing of the daily life of a dancer. These narrative offerings often stayed with me as they offered a visceral and physical glimpse into other lives. Sometimes I was struck by the familiarity (of losing a grandparent or being ill) and sometimes it was the stark difference that gripped me (of dancers growing up in an apartheid-defined township, of being a young black boy forced to witness racial violence).

As a curator/choreographer, ethnographer and autoethnographer, I began *days like these* (2015) by planning a clear two-month rehearsal process. The first part was spent away from the dancing, moving body, when I asked the dancers to travel within their own lives and bring, instead, in written form, specifically focused stories (or what we called 'memories') of their lives. I asked them to focus on three themes I had chosen: politics, love and loss, and food, and to bring three memories/stories for each theme. I stressed that no memory was too big or too small to be considered, and that we would simply recount these to each other without censuring or editing. I also emphasised that for this phase we would not record stories but simply listen and select. I imagined, stepping into the process, that it would be like a story swap and that I would, verbatim style, begin to pick those stories that resonated with

my own bigger vision of the work – a vision that began to acknowledge that small and seemingly insignificant memories, when placed and performatively structured against one another, begin to tell a bigger story of what it means to be a contemporary South African. As Wall (2006: 9) echoes, I was interested in this 'link between the personal and the cultural'.

The reality of this phase of process, however, surprised all of us. What was intended to be a one-week process took two weeks and involved a deep and very personal dialogue between us. The six dancers punched in with stories that had us laughing, crying and acknowledging our intense race, class, gender and sexual differences, while allowing us to weigh in on our shifting commonality. The telling became a cathartic process, not unlike giving testimony. Surprisingly, it became clear how many stories there were and how much (in hindsight and as the process got underway) we needed to be telling them. One of the dancers, Zinhle Nzama, shared after the process that she had been 'terrified that I would have nothing to say and no stories to tell', but as the process evolved, she remarked: 'I found I had literally hundreds of what we called "memories" and had to actually sit at night and decide what to choose to tell – this was a surprise for me.'[5]

Despite the clear and negotiated goal of using these stories – verbatim – in the final performance, what also emerged was the need for all of us to be able to articulate when a memory/story was to be kept open for only ourselves in the rehearsal room, and when it could be offered for shared public telling. The overwhelming need to speak and listen, during this phase of the rehearsals, thus meant that some of the insights offered were not intended for the final performance. Some memories had to remain personal, being too close to the bone and the blood. Postcolonial feminist Gayatri Spivak (1990: 62) points out it is not only about who speaks but also about who listens, therefore as the ethnographer/autoethnographer I willingly reclaimed the rehearsal and theatrical and performative space as a moment of both speaking and listening. Echoing this, the dancers and I were amazed, on the nights of the final performances, how the audience, in an unprecedented manner, all wanted us to listen to stories they had to tell; stories that keyed into the final performance choices. The dancers and I were literally cornered by audience members after each show. It seems that we had dug into a 'personal and cultural' (Wall 2006: 9) need to speak and to be heard.

What also intrigued me in the initial storytelling phase was the manner in which the dancers demanded that I, as the curator and collector, should also tell my own related stories. I think the feelings of exposure and vulnerability shift if everyone participates, so that the idea of a dispassionate 'collector' is done away with. I was not exempt from bringing my own memories to the process and revealing my own histories. So, while it was clear to me that this work would be about the real lives of

Figure 1: Filmic still from *days like these* (2015). Section one: *Sifiso Khumalo and Clermont Township*

the dancers and that their stories would form the fabric of connected meaning, my own embodied storytelling self-stepped into the process.

Like a Verbatim Theatre director, the final selection of stories and the ordering were left to me. Once selected, we worked with Durban filmmaker, Karen Logan, to record them. The recording of these spoken stories was thus the second verbatim telling and we decided to film the stories being told in a close-up shot for greater intimacy. Furthermore, the final theatre projections would be views on hanging cloth on stage, thus allowing the talking heads to be taken *into* the dance happening on stage. This was a way of keeping both the verbal and physical dance storytelling connected. Once I had selected the stories and what narrative would go into each section, I left the filmmaker the choice of how the stories could and would be broken up and interrupted by each other.

We finally ordered the sections according to each dancer and to the choice of his/her selected main narrative. *days like these*, for example, starts with Sifiso Khumalo's section which we called 'Clermont' in recognition of his growing up as a young back boy in that township during apartheid. His story and section also carried the political narrative of Julia Wilson and Jabu Siphika, and thus the embodied narratives of whiteness from Wilson, and of being taken away from a township home to live in the relative safety of the rural areas (via Siphika) are all spliced with Khumalo's memories of violence and warfare.

Figure 2: Filmic still from *days like these* (2015). Section six: *Julia Wilson and The Grandmothers*

In Julia Wilson's section [Section six: *Julia Wilson and The Grandmothers*], for example, we collated all the stories about grandmothers, love and loss in such a way that Wilson's own memory of a World War II grandmother who cooked in the army trenches splices with various other memories, across race and gender, of the loss of a grandmother who was the primary parent (in the case of Zinhle Nzama) and the need to leave a grandmother behind in the rural areas when moving to an urban area in search of work (Sifiso Khumalo). The tenderness of love across three generations is embodied and offers one of the few transient moments of narrative connectedness in *days like these.*

The filmic visual storytelling took on a further layer in *days like these* as I asked all the dancers to identify one physical place in Durban that they felt offered another visual key to who and what they are. Karen Logan travelled with them to these public spaces and filmed them performing selected solo dance material they had generated with me in the studio. These 'place films' as we called them were projected onto the back cyclorama of the theatre and formed the final loop (setting) into the interior landscape of the performance of *days like these*. As mentioned above, Sifiso Khumalo chose a prominent road in Clermont township, while Julia Wilson chose an overgrown, unused and neglected public children's park near her home (the home she grew up in).

What I have not discussed thus far, finally, is how we used the storytelling and collecting process to come back to the body, to generate the visceral stories of the final dance performance.

Turning the speaking voice into the speaking body

In discussing the idea of 'embodied writing', Anderson (2001: 84) brings a very nuanced understanding/experience to the process of writing, 'relaying human experience from the inside out and entwining in words our senses with the sense of the world, embodied writing affirms human life as embedded in the sensual world in which we live our lives'.

For me, Anderson's idea of a sensory moving from 'the inside out' appears to link directly to the idea of choreography, where movement takes on a state of 'becoming' (Totton 2010: 21) as impulses – be they physical, psychological or intellectual – drive the body to move or be moved. Given that our bodies are not something outside of ourselves, that we are our bodies (Waskul and Vannini 2006), as we dance and choreograph we begin to tell stories – our deeply personal stories – that invite an audience to find a 'sympathetic resonance' (Anderson 2001, 84) which by its very nature is 'visceral … and kinaesthetic'. This is the speaking body, and it suggests that internal corporeal movement from 'the inside out' (ibid: 84) is how meaning is made and, in turn, sympathetically understood or read.

In *days like these* I began to understand my role as a choreographer as reflecting both ethnography and autoethnography, in that I took on Klein's (2007: 1082) notion that choreography is a 'creative act of setting the conditions for things to happen, the choreographer as navigator, negotiator and architect of a fluid movement that he/she, himself, herself is part of'. Thus, just as I set the conditions/framework for phase one of the rehearsal process (the excavation of our stories/'memories'), I was equally aware that the process of finding the dance language and dance material (the excavation of the speaking body's memories) would work in a similarly archaeological manner. Thus, while my corporeal body was present in the rehearsal room, creating and finding my own embodied dance language and choreographic signature for *days like these*, I was equally mindful of the six other bodies of the dancers who, quite literally, brought their embodied histories – histories written on their bodies – into the process.

Roche (2011: 105) speaks about dancers as 'a fluid and mutable body-in-flux with the creative potential to significantly influence the outcome of the choreographic process'. I am, of course, strongly interested in how this idea of working on and with other bodies – dancers' embodied selves – challenges the traditional and often hierarchical relationships between dance maker and dance performer. I am interested, too, in how this choreography of excavation and 'negotiation' (Klein 2007: 1082) thus allows for difference as I begin to navigate my way through identities and embodied histories of race, gender, sexualities and even age, that are not my own. In fact, these embodied differences, like those in the unearthed spoken 'memories', become the very fabric that holds together *days like these* (in process and in performance).

As a choreographer I worked with improvisation where the dancers' individual bodies were asked to resolve various tasks as they related to the different verbal stories/memories selected. We mostly worked on our own stories/memories, where dealing with the male rape of a gay friend (by men out to punish homosexuality as 'un-African') was choreographically resolved by the dancer (Tshediso Kabulu) who had offered this story. But into his embodied memory/performative space, I placed two other male bodies/dancers that were equally able to find a corporal connection to acts of social and gendered violence perpetrated by one man against another, and so the end performance starts to layer difference and, cognately, an 'imagined community' (Mohanty 1991: 8). In this way, the idea of embodied improvisation keys into the methodology of Verbatim Theatre, where the visceral dance language comes from the speaking body of the dancers – and my role as choreographer/navigator/negotiator (Klein 2007: 1082) is to frame, to generate the impulse for creation, to edit and fix dance languages, and to be the 'architect' (ibid.) who imagines the final structure and asks a team to build with her.

In the end, too, questions arise around who takes ownership of the final performance work. Given the embodied input and sheer labour of the dancers, the nature of Verbatim/improvised choreographic processes and my desire as a feminist to create non-paternalistic hierarchies within my creative methodologies of choreographing, I am left wanting (maybe needing?) to share ownership.

Strategies for this (by no means complete) involve (1) always crediting the dancers as co-choreographers of a creation (e.g., the programme for *days like these* states that the work is 'choreographed by Loots in collaboration with the dancers'); (2) intentionally not putting my own name on posters and publicity material but rather promoting each performance season by selling it as FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, to consistently profile the communal sense of the company; and (3) (perhaps most significantly) making sure that when dancers work with me, they are consciously made aware of our working methodology and working processes, which may not be to every dancer's taste. Some dance training still focuses exclusively on a very narrow physical definition of a body, in such a way that, for instance, height of leg, turn-out and ability to do four turns, constitute training. Such training does not (and will never) prepare a dancer for improvisation and cognate embodied dance work. I am more interested in a speaking body; a body understood to have corporal history and memory; a body that, through physical dance training *and* embodied living, continues to be in a state of 'becoming' (Totton 2010: 21) – a body that is willing to think, feel and speak. This is, as I write autoethnographically, what moves me from the 'inside out' (Anderson 2001: 84) and is, in its own way, finally, a choreographic act.

The waltz that ends it all

I chose to end *days like these* with a type of embodied and visual confession. After the intensity of the interior and simultaneously public storytelling of text and body, of memory and flesh, the dancers return to the stage: the men in suits and the women in evening dresses, so that the body is covered and dressed, ready for performance. The six dancers carry with them a swathe of white cloth. In a performative act, facing the audience head-on at the front of the proscenium arch of the theatre, the dancers tie the cloths over their faces, effectively cutting off any expression or sense of individuality. To the strains of Leonard Cohen's *Dance me to the edge of love*, the dancers couple off and begin a Viennese waltz that continues to circle as the lights fade to a final black-out. This is simultaneously a parody of the waltz of life (the circles of time and memory that *all* bodies endure and survive as part of the human condition) and the glamour of the waltz, set against the violence of shrouded faces that echo apartheid's water torture methods used against detainees (and recently made public through images of Guantanamo Bay prisoners).[6] It is also, finally, reminiscent of René Magritte's 1928 painting *Les Amants* (The Lovers), where a man and a woman kiss intimately, but with white shrouds over their faces. It echoes both the deeply intimate act of lovers kissing and their anonymity; their presence and concealment.

This is, for me, the final statement which I wish to make as choreographer and storyteller with *days like these*, but also for this text – written on a laptop with words, it is no less a visceral encounter between mind, heart and body. In the presence of the storytelling body and the embodied sense of self, there is always concealment and camouflage. Like the choices a choreographer makes about what finally goes onto the stage, and like our internal process of deciding which stories were private and which could be made public in *days like these*, our sense of bodily survival (much like the making of theatre and the telling of a story) asks us to construct, re-construct and de-construct, in an endless interplay of private and public. For me, this is a profoundly gendered understanding of my craft, my art, myself and my body. And, finally, this too is the value of ethnographic or autoethnographic studies: that we keep meaning open, fluid and multiple in an interplay of self, in relation to a constantly shifting world and to the practice of making art. This is a democratising and feminist impulse that honours multiple voices and processes, and opens up rather than shuts down.

Notes

1 FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY, of which I am the founder, artistic director and main choreographer, is based in Durban, South Africa. In 2015 the company, which works in the evolving genre of African contemporary dance, celebrated its 12th year as a professional full-time dance company (http://flatfootdancecompany.webs.com/)

2 See, e.g., http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/an-introduction-to-verbatim-theatre (accessed 25 April 2015).

3 http://wwwdramaonlinelibrary.co,/genres/verbatim-theatre-iid-2551 (accessed 25 April 2015).

4 *days like these* was first staged at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre (a proscenium arch theatre in Durban) in March 2015. It was performed by FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY with choreography by myself, in collaboration with the dancers. It featured film and video installation by Durban filmmaker Karen Logan, and lighting by Wesley Maherry. *days like these* was subsequently invited to be performed at the artSpace (Durban) Gallery on 26 June 2015, where it was restaged for a thrust or surround gallery-type performance space. In July 2016, *days like these* was invited to Grahamstown and the South African National Arts Festival main festival platform.

5 These comments were taken from personal interviews, debriefings and discussion sessions which I conducted with the cast collectively after the process of making *days like these*.

6 See, e.g., http://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/21/americas/guantanamo-bay-prisoner-book/ (accessed 15 July 2015).

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Performative-we: multisensory and collective performance of selected young Korean artists in London[1]

Yeran Kim

Abstract

The convergence between the artistic turn in ethnography and the ethnographic turn in art is particularly manifested in an artist's life and work. In this article, the life and work of a selection of young Korean artists in London are analysed from an autoethnographic perspective. The term 'performative-we' is suggested for the multisensory and collective form of the performance of autoethnography, which is conducted for the pursuit and realisation of the beauty in aesthetics and truth in ethics of the self. The specificities of the young Korean artists' performative-we may be categorised as follows: denudation and the masquerade of the self in terms of singularity; collective implementation of art in society; and the invention of the aesthetics of otherness in a political aspect. In attempting to avoid the risk of romanticising the instability and hardship underlying the artists' life and work, it is argued that their voluntary and active performance of otherness is crucial in the invention of an alternative mode of life in terms of ethical concerns, the intervention in the Western-dominant regime of aesthetics, and the creation of new affective sensorial collectivities of the performative-we.

Keywords: aesthetics, autoethnography, dissensus, ethics, otherness, performative, performative-we

Introduction

The 'ethnographic turn in contemporary art' is intrinsically associated with the artistic turn in contemporary ethnography (Rutten, Van Dienderen and Soetaert 2013). This circuit of the ethnographic turn in art and the artistic turn in ethnography

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requires us to rethink the relation between life and art. This is because life and art, which are conventionally regarded as separate, are in fact integrated. As regards art, which is generally thought to refer simply to objects or particular experts, Michel Foucault (1997: 261) argues that 'everyone's life becomes a work of art'. As regards life, ethnography or the study of humans in a literal sense, is seen to be more concerned with the ethical values of human life and reflexive subjectivity, particularly in postmodern anthropology (Goodall 1991). The ethical pursuit of the truth of life is analogised with the aesthetic realisation of 'beauty' in the stylisation of life (Brigstocke 2013; Foucault 1997). Art is thus no longer considered to merely indicate a beautiful object, but also (more profoundly) implies the question of stylisation of existence or 'the arts of living' (Foucault 1989, 1997).

The convergence between the artistic turn in ethnography and the ethnographic turn in art is particularly manifested in an artist's life and work. Given that the idea of art is equally involved in the realms of ethics and aesthetics, the artist's life and work represent the concrete site on which the two realms intersect – the intersections between life and art, ethics and aesthetics, and experience and expression, in the way the artist's ethical approach to experiential life is expressed in his/her aesthetic practices, or vice versa. Further, contemporary artists' ethnographic approaches have endeavoured to reflect upon politico-ethical reflexivity (De Ruiter 2015). As Westmoreland (2013: 734) notes in alternative art scenes in Lebanon, the artists with their 'practice-based accounts' of selves and society, seek to provide 'culturally-inflected meanings, patterns and structures of the embodied knowledge' from minority perspectives of interweaving art *and* anthropology. The ethnographic turn in art may, in this sense, be configured as a creation of alternative aesthetics and simultaneously as a radical formation of ethical values of life.

My narrative of the ethnographic turn in contemporary art is based on a study of selected young Korean artists living and working in London. My discussions begin with the theoretical framing of the 'art of existence', particularly from the perspective of an aesthetic turn in ethics. This is followed by reflections on the ethical turn in ethnography. In articulating the two flows within the artistic turn in ethics and the ethical turn in ethnography, it is suggested that artists' practice of their life and work configures an ethnographic performance of art, in particular in terms of an autoethnographic performance of the self. The uniqueness of contemporary artists' performance of autoethnography is interpreted in the feature of multisensory and collective performativity. The term 'performative-we' is suggested for the multisensory and collective form of the performance of autoethnography, conducted for the pursuit and realisation of beauty (in aesthetics) and truth (in ethics) of the self. Autoethnography is thus – in my framework – entitled to have aesthetic, ethical as well as anthropological values. Following the theoretical account of the performative-we, I attempt to analyse certain Korean artists' art practices as exemplary instances

of aesthetic and ethical performance of autoethnography. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with, and ethnographic observations of, 19 Korean visual artists, curators and designers, conducted in London from March–July 2014. Their artwork is also interpreted with the multimodality analysis methodology (Kress 2009), focusing on multisensory and collective features which are composed of, and operated with, visual, sonic and somatic elements, as well as collaborative relations and interactions, in the creation of a variety of contextual and communicative effects in society.

Korean artists in-between Seoul and London

This study was conducted in the living and work-spaces of a selection of young Korean artists based in London.[2] Moving to London has become increasingly popular among young Korean artists, particularly since the late 1990s, as the model of the British creative industries has had a significant influence on arts and culture policies and creative industries in South Korea (Lee 2014). Also, while the group of Young British Artists (YBA) has garnered great fame worldwide (Rosenthal and Adams 1998),[3] young artists in Korea who move to the UK are considered to be actively engaged in a global 'trend' in contemporary art (Sim 2007a). British visual art attracts Korean artists because the UK arts scene appears to be firmly supported within the public system, is open to aesthetic exploration and experimentation, caters for social diversity and cultural difference, and is provocative of a subcultural spirit of youthfulness and resistance (N. Kim et al. 2011).

Despite their ambitions and aspirations, however, young artists who are starting out in their careers and move to London find it difficult for economic, cultural, social and legal reasons. Unlike European Union nationals, foreigners are permitted to reside in the UK only with a specific official, economic and legal status. Moreover, Koreans more so than Westerners are faced with difficulties when applying for and maintaining full-time jobs in the UK, because of linguistic, social and cultural barriers. Given these hardships, most young Korean artists enter universities as students and pay steep tuition fees. One short-term option is entering a residency programme with an art institute, in the face of stiff competition. Having overcome the hurdles associated with living and working overseas, many young Korean artists are becoming increasingly ambitious and active in advancing their careers and entering the global art scene. Having grown up in the postmodern milieu of art and culture since the late 1990s, when Korean art began to be integrated in the global system of art marketisation and commercialisation (J. Kim 2015; Sim 2007b), the younger generation of Korean artists has strong orientations towards transcultural identities and hybrid art styles, which are expected to catalyse their 'participation in the art world dialogue' (Moon 2011). This means that these young artists believe they

are no longer subject to orientalism (which is viewed as an old paradigm), trapped by a single nationality and ethnicity, or subsumed into an international totalitarian domination. Instead, they anticipate looking forward and joining in the decentred and pluralised global art world, which appears to be blossoming with an openness and richness of ethnic multiplicity and cultural diversity (Park 2014).

However, such a romanticised vision of the art world may run the risk of being overly fantasised (Sim 2007b: 79). With the ironically coerced freedom 'not to work', young Korean artists who live and work in foreign countries (including Britain) are faced with contradictions between aesthetic enthusiasm and aspirations of creativity and autonomy on the one hand, and actual economic burdens, cultural differences, social instability and marginalisation on the other. The clash between dream and reality may cause feelings of isolation and depression, and a loss of confidence. Moreover, this situation may lead to the attitude of the 'normalisation of self-precarisation' (Lorey 2006). Neoliberal and capitalist forces have become increasingly influential when they encounter the current dominant order of the globalised art world, which is 'market-driven' and 'contaminated by commercial media' (Morgan 2003: 3–4). It is not surprising that those who are creative yet precarious producers working in cultural fields are vulnerable to the forces of exploitation, because of 'their own belief in freedom and autonomy' and 'self-realization fantasies' (Lorey 2006).

Drawing on the critical account of global art, the points I would like to make are: (1) while I agree with Lorey's critique of the current 'biopolitical' regime of governmentality which is particularly at work in art practice, this study focuses on a selection of young Korean artists' actual practices of otherness in London. That is, not *because of*, but *despite* struggles and pain, what kinds of aesthetic style and ethical value do they invent, not only in confrontation with, but also in creative alternation and articulation of, the positionality of otherness? These questions are concerned with the reflexive and performative relations the young Korean artists make with their works, which means the creative conflation of the ethical performance of the artwork and the aesthetic actualisation of the ethics of living as otherness; (2) my interest in the ethnographic turn in art is particularly focused on the artists' autoethnographic turn to the self. This is because in 'minor' works, the notion of self can be considered only from a collective and political perspective (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). In minor works, the self appears to be the condensation of social complexities and is associated with the invention of collective languages which are potentially a challenge for the major, dominant ones (ibid.). The nomadic artists' autoethnographic turn to self may, hence, be able to generate a certain kind of collective language of minorities in the host society; (3) relates to the multilayered complexity in the formation of transcultural and hybrid identities through art practices. 'Hybridity' and 'transculturalism' have been popularised in postcolonial accounts of culture (Bhabha 1994). The creative roles which diaspora communities

and cultural migrants have played in the creation of multicultural diversities in global art have been frequently observed (Clarke 2011; Y. Kim 2006), yet the frictions and frissons the artists actually experience in the alienated position as other have not been sufficiently considered. Transcultural hybridity, rather, has been regarded as a natural result of migratory life, but the reality of strenuousness, contradiction and inventiveness, embedded in the affective process of the formation and expression of the self as other, has yet to be explained. Questions remain unresolved: In what heterogeneous senses and sensibilities, with what various elements and methods, and for what novel values and virtues, do they incessantly get through alternative arts of existence and expression and alternate subjectivities? (4) Last but not least, is the political effect of the artists' autoethnographic approach to the self in altering the established aesthetic regime. Autoethnographic practices in art might not merely be a self-satisfactory monologue, but (more significantly) may be a political project in the sense of creating alternative senses and sensibilities within the incessant process of producing a 'dissensus' in the global regime of aesthetics (Rancière 2010).

Ethical turn of ethnography

An interest in the art of existence (which Foucault theorises in terms of ethics) is growing and taking a variety of directions within contemporary anthropology. The 'crisis of representation' marked a turning point in contemporary anthropology (Marcus and Fischer 1986), followed by the emergence of a variety of 'post-ethnographies' challenging conventional anthropology (Goodall 1991). While conventional anthropology with scholarly authority is based on a predetermined differentiation between the subject and object of knowledge, post-ethnography aims to break up such an epistemological hierarchy by attempting to create 'alternative sense-making and dialogical writing' (ibid: 155). Thus, an 'interpretive turn' in ethnography configures a 'radical empiricism', insofar as the latter welcomes alternative interpretive methodologies, such as the estrangement of the self, the destabilisation of subjectivity and the creation of sensual textuality based on dialogical self/other relations. Such a methodological experiment is expected to implement the activation of 'potential energy' from diverse emerging movements within postmodern ethnography (Goodall 1991).

In a similar vein, Denzin (2014: 1) proposes the term 'interpretive autoethnography', which focuses on the 'life experiences and performances of a person'. In the tradition of biography, the uniqueness of interpretive autoethnography lies in the fact that it moves outward and becomes contextualised in culture, discourse, history and ideology – all of which fabricate a writer's life. Events occurring in a writer's life at certain historic moments are accordingly regarded as the 'sites where structure, history and autobiography intersect' (ibid: x–xi). Thus the divisions between

personal and social, memory and history, story and performance are erased, and these constructs are fused to the extent of acknowledging that 'a life is a social text, a fictional, narrative production' (ibid: ix).

Another important aspect of contemporary autoethnography is the 'performative turn'. Spry (2001: 709–710) underscores the 'personally/politically emancipatory potential of auto-ethnographic performance' in the invention of a 'self-narrative', i.e., a critique of the situatedness of self with others in social contexts. In 'position[ing] myself as active agent with narrative authority', the performative autoethnographer renders the emancipation of her body and voice out of shadows, and sets herself in the foreground of the 'enfleshed' epistemology and ontology. Nevertheless, performative autoethnography is not dominated by the author's univocal occupation, but diversified in and interwoven with multivocal and conversational performances which sprout from the 'copresence' of self/other/context. Thus, a 'performative-I' facilitates a 'performative writing' that enables the self to create as a 'performative participatory engagement with others' (Spry 2007: 341), based on the convergence of self-reflexivity and cultural refraction (Spry 2001, 2007).

The agency of ethnographic performance, situated in the overlapped position between the subject/object, knowing/known and doing/done, generates a new form of articulation of the self/other/context. This is where the first person of 'performative-I' emerges (Pollock 2007). The performative-I, who is the 'passionate, excessive, errant, collective and often exuberantly irregular I', may be 'excluded by the systematic reproduction of sameness' and become the 'effaced "I"' (ibid: 240). But significantly, she is never subsumed under the hegemonic order of subjectification, as the 'performing/becoming "I"' exercises an ontopower of becoming and creation, and her performance of writing opens up an 'ethical space'. The performative-I is brought into new fashions and points of identifications and alliances in the ethical space of writing, while embodied differences in race, gender, sex and class are repetitively mobilised and morphed towards the creation of 'ethical ends' of life.

Performative-we: politico-aesthetics of otherness

In the sequential loop of the aesthetic turn in ethics and the ethical turn in ethnography, my proposed term, *performative-we*, refers to the anthropological turn in art, particularly the autoethnographical turn. Performative-we is, in ethical terms, a collective formation of the performative-I. The expansion and pluralisation from *I* to *we* replaces the fiction of autonomous selfhood with the collectivity between subjectivities that may be singularly decentred, fragmentary and incoherent, but collectively become open, multiple and diverse. This collectivity is not, however, unification into one but interrupting, intersecting and interweaving, with further

differences in the ongoing process of creating commonness out of the uncommon (Lingis 1994).

Performative-we, in an aesthetic respect, takes on a multisensorial mode, seeking to create an incessantly diversified, transformable and dialogical 'multivocality' (Bakhtin 1981). Drawing on the multisensory and multivocal nature of performative autoethnography, I suggest that art practice is a quintessential form of performative autoethnography, because art practices operate with heterogeneous, multiple modes of sense and sensibility in the perception, cognition and expression of the self. Performative-we is also a social project. Compared with performative-I (singular), performative-we may have the potential to generate communities of minorities, engendering collective interactivity and sharing beyond the monolithic finitude of the isolated Is. Last but not least, performative-we possibly provokes the aesthetics of otherness, engendering the emergence of 'dissensus' within and without the normative regime of aesthetics in politico-ethical terms. Dissensus refers not simply to a confrontation or conflict between interests, opinions or values, but to the 'manifestation' of a gap in the distribution of senses and intelligence in the present 'sensory world' (Rancière 2010: 80). Refusing to separate aesthetics and politics, Rancière eventually calls for an 'ethical turn' in politics and aesthetics, which should not be reduced to a 'simple appeasement' of arranging various types of dissensus in 'consensual order', but should be oriented to the 'ultimate form of the will to absolutise this dissensus' (ibid: 201). This means that absolute dissensus stands for 'its own way' of 'implementing a collective power of intelligence', against domination by any privatised and state powers (ibid: 80).

Autoethnography among selected young Korean artists: aesthetic and ethical performances of the self

Based on in-depth interviews with and interpretations of artists' artwork, it is insightful that several young Korean artists say 'my work is my self-portrait'. The specificities of their performative-we may be categorised as follows: denudation and the masquerade of the self in terms of singularity; collective implementation of art in society; and the invention of the aesthetics of otherness in a politics. Each theme is connected respectively with the theoretical ideas discussed earlier, but specifically to the current study on performative-we: the aesthetic turn in ethics, the ethical turn in art and the political actualisation of the aesthetic dissensus.

Denudation and the masquerade of the self

Denudation (more specifically, self-denudation) has literal and symbolic meanings. Nudity, for example, is considered the loss of 'grace' in the tradition of Western Christianity (Agamben 2011: 64). Moreover, as asserted by Giorgio Agamben

(2011), nudity signifies an 'appearance' that is the sublime in which the 'vacuity' of the 'non-unveilable' is revealed. Nudity, hence, ultimately makes for the 'place of inappearance' to the extent that 'nothing appears by means of this appearance' (ibid: 86–87). Chanhyo Bae, a male Korean photographer in his 30s, mainly uses photographic self-portraits, while the uniqueness of his work lies in his performance of cross-cultural and retrospective transvestism (see Figure 1). In performing transvestism, he wears female costumes worn during the English imperial dynasties, to produce a series of images in which an Asian man (Chanhyo himself) masquerades with icons symbolising the nostalgic fantasy of the glory of British imperialism. His

Figure 1: Chanhyo Bae, *Existing in Costume 1* (2006). C-Print. 100 x 80 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

performance of hyperbolic femininity negates the seemingly unchangeable order of gender and geopolitical identity, which is rooted in our normative sense of time (inversion between past and contemporary) and space (transfer between east and west). The performance of gender/geopolitical/historical 'heterology' (Rancière 2010) has a double effect which nullifies the supposedly fixed identity of the Korean man and plays the game of conducting different modes of identification.

A series of Chanhyo's experiments, in which his identities are expressed as constant alterations across different positionalities, could surface in his calm but radical revolution of the self; i.e., his denudation of the self.

> Chanhyo: I wanted to work hard but did not know how and what to do when I first entered university in London. I went back to Goodge Street (in London) in one night, where rubbishes of fruit boxes are dumped out on the street. I saw two Korean men coming and asked them to take a photograph of me. Then I wholly undressed myself. I felt very weird. I took off every piece of clothes including knickers. What I felt was something like being deserted, lonely and repressed. The experience of denuding felt very odd to me, particularly besides the dumps of rubbishes.

Intriguingly, Chanhyo's naked body is transformed into an artistic object, not a beautiful body in the conventional sense but an abject one. He identifies with something which is not splendid but rejected, like rubbish. In the recreation of the denuded body as art, his life is also redressed as the art of existence. In his experience, the voluntary decision to relinquish grace and denude himself undermines and ruptures the myth of the fixed image in his photographs. His hands, the only objects exempt from the ritual of masquerade in English royal female costumes, are bare. Naked hands are the frail but necessary appearance of the denuded body, which exposes the 'vacuity' of the 'non-unveilability' of identity. Placed centrally against the body in masquerade, the naked hands mark both the 'impossibility' of accomplishing pure, monolithic identity, and the 'inevitability' of becoming impure and fragmented identities encompassing different positionalities (Ganon 2006). Further, Chanhyo's strategy of appropriating but wittingly tweaking the history of England in his self-portrait has the political effect of denuding the postcolonial myth of imperial power and fantasy.

Collective implementation of art

Most of the young Korean artists I met, cautiously and seriously navigate and engage with various social bodies across heterogeneous constellations of visual, sonic and haptic sensoria in virtual space on the internet. Digital media, in this sense, are adopted as 'mnemotechnics' or a 'technics' of memorisation, which enables the exteriorisation, accumulation and transmission of long-term social memories from generation to generation (Stiegler 2011). The artist's practice of exploring and

interweaving multiple memories and stories within society is entwined within the practise of art, eventually leading to the social performance of autoethnography as collective art.

Young In Hong, an artist who produces installations and conducts performances, adopts the virtual space of the internet as a reservoir of popular memories and stories. She also uses the internet and social media as instruments to elicit popular participation in her performance projects. Many collaborators (ordinary, anonymous men and women) voluntarily gather and work together to produce an event. Due to the nature of her collaborative performance, Young In cannot predetermine or confirm what each such event will be like, or how it will play out in reality. For example, 5100: Pentagon, performed at the Gwangju Biennale in 2014, was Young In's project to commemorate the political history of Gwangju, a monumental city symbolising the history of Korean democratisation, culminating with Gwangju's protest against military despotism in May 1980. It is said that hundreds of thousands of citizens (the exact numbers of dead, missing and injured are still debated) were killed by the national military. Young In's performance adopts tragic memories through her design of certain choreographed poses and movements, reflecting citizens' gestures of resistance, seen in actual footage at the Gwangju protest, and archived on various internet sites. Groups of participants are invited to perform these gestures with their own bodies. The participants' performances signify not only a remembering but also a reinvention of political memory, sometimes to the extent that young participants who were born after the Gwangju atrocity, and thus did not actually experience it, have a role in provocatively making visible, enunciable and sharable the painful memories through their fresh embodiment of history.

Young In notes that she 'prefers not to appear' in the performance scenes because her intention is to leave the performance as a 'space revealing emptiness and trace'. Regarding the open, transformative and unpredictable nature of her collaborative performances, Young In stresses that she anticipates not the successful completion, but rather the 'failure' of the performances.

> Young In: (The performances) are always faced with lots of conflicts and disagreements, but this (condition) ironically drives me to rush towards a vision of failure. I will continue this trial to rush to failure. My place of failure is exactly where the participants are expected to fill up. I am always very, very anxious (before the start of a performance). But I think art is no longer something secure. This is why the matter of failure becomes more and more important. We walk and talk to one another during the period of preparing the performance, and in this process, not only myself but other participants are continuously changing. Change is anything but fearful and we never fail to change ourselves.

Thus, in Young In's performative event, a variety of people (including the artist herself) gather in the shared process of becoming *we*. If initiated by the artist, each

participant is seen and felt to be changed, and reformed through numerous relations and interactions, in which many different bodies respond, contact and collaborate in the invention of being-togetherness. In desperately pursuing the failure of her own authority and inviting others to stand in that empty place, Young In's performance nullifies the myth of an autonomous and rational individuality, and constructs the affective-relational form of performative subjectivities which are not only fragmented, dispersed and disturbed (as in a post-structuralist's view), but also co-present, conversational and collaborative. This collective embodiment of virtual memories envisions the historic emergence of 'affective politics' (Massumi 2014), which takes place in a cross-generational and cross-sensitive resonance of the pain, hopes and desires which encompass different bodies' formations of performative-we.

Invention of the aesthetics of otherness

The final instance which I draw attention to, is the aesthetic mode of otherness and its political implications for the young Korean artists' performance of autoethnography. Regarding the aesthetics of otherness, the multimodal nature of art enables it to better facilitate the animation of multisensory elements of autoethnography, than the literary form of self-writing (Foucault 1997). Further, from the perspective of the politics of otherness, it is significant that the uniqueness of the artworks of certain young Korean artists in London may stem from their social position as minorities. The idea of the aesthetics and politics of otherness is interpreted in three aspects of performances: the creation of new materiality in terms of artwork, the conducting of counteractive gestures in terms of performative agency and the affective-sensorial constellation of otherness in terms of self/other/context.

As regards the creation of new materiality, Hayoung Kim's approach is worth noting. Hayoung often appropriates cartoon images from popular culture (e.g., Japanese Manga and Korean advertisements) to produce oil paintings. Her intention is to criticise the materialistic consumerism which has saturated contemporary global popular culture. Korea in particular has become famous for its high premium on body management technology (e.g., plastic surgery, cosmetics and fashion). Positioned as the Asian other in London, she struggled to find the appropriate materials to express effectively both her vital sensibility (cultivated in Asian youth culture) and her thematic criticality (crystalised as social critiques in her visualisations). In her view, the ephemeral nature of contemporary popular culture and its critique both needed to be expressed through a 'light material', which would configure its fleeting, instant and temporary nature, in juxtaposition to the authoritative weight of the traditional canvas.

Serendipitously, Hayoung came across drafting film in a shop window in London. The semi-transparency of the film, along with the fact that it is not a conventional

artist's material but is generally used in architecture, corresponded with her critical stance towards consumer culture and her ambition to challenge the authority of Western aesthetics through a different sense of materiality. She incorporated the drafting film in her oil paintings, and coins the self-styled genre 'screen painting' (see Figure 2). Her definition of screen painting is that a work is produced on drafting film, to reveal every coloured layer of brush-stroke which is accumulatively added by her. Different from conventional oil painting, in which only the final layer of brush strokes is shown because the increasing thickness covers earlier traces of paint, screen painting transparently shows the entire effort that goes into completing a single artwork – from the initial sketch through several layers of colour to final polishing. The invention of screen painting is not simply an innovative painting skill, but configures an action of resistance to the norm of *perfect* art; alternatively, Hayoung's screen paintings suggest the critical values of potentiality and processual birth of a novel style of art.

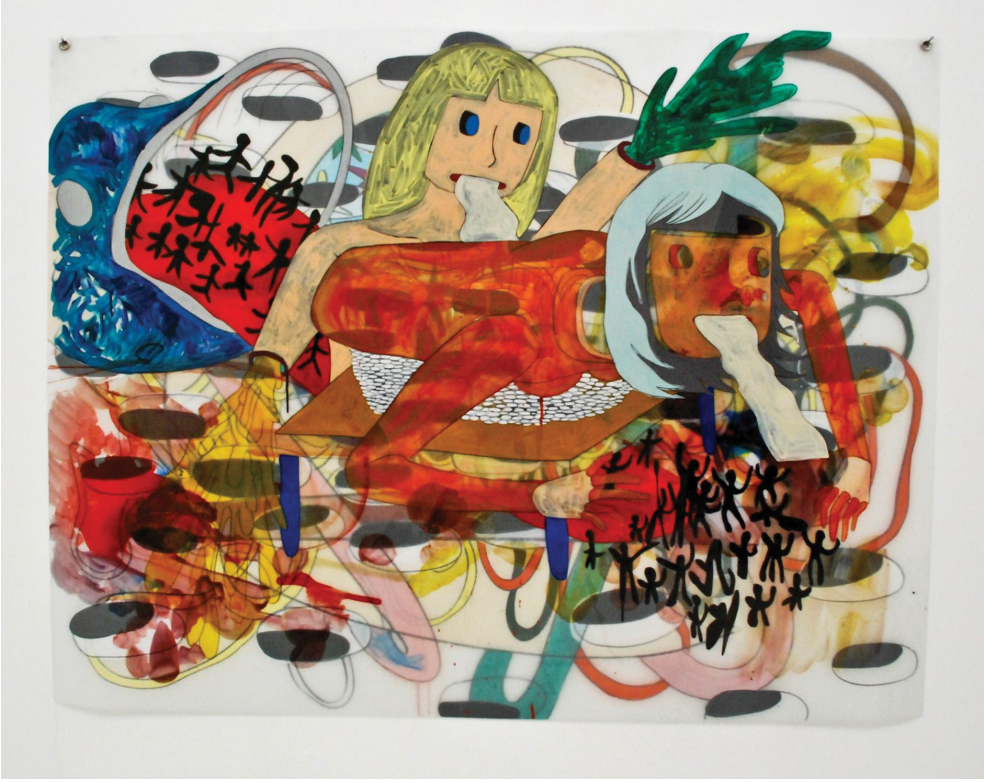

Figure 2: Hayoung Kim, *Do Cyborg Girls Dream of Becoming Sushi*? (2011). Acrylic and glass paint on drafting films, 152 x 117 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

As regards conducting counteractive gestures, Inkeun Kim, a multimedia artist in his 40s, proposes the subversive appropriation of 'amateurism'. To him, assuming the position of 'amateur' is one significant way in which he is liberated from the logic of stereotyping within established categories of differentiation (nationality, race, ethnicity, gender and so on). In his opinion, only certain limited views of Koreanness, such as the tradition of *Sakdong* (a style of arranging multiple vivid colours) and the contemporary trend of highly advanced information technology, are apparent within the Western frame of stereotypical 'Korean art'. By contrast, Inkeun's idea of amateurism (or 'weird amateurism') anticipates an 'incidental improvisation of something wonderful' against and beyond predetermined and often biased standards of Korean art. He artistically appropriates old machines and materials (old record players, fans, polyurethane) and remediates them using digital computer technologies to create poetic sonic-visual artwork that is deemed 'grotesque, cold, beautiful and touching'.

Inkeun's view of amateurism sees him becoming a 'guerilla' in the way it clashes with the institutional authorities of the art world. Specifically, he prefers to display his media artwork on the internet free from established authority, so that many people in different localities around the world can access and appreciate them for free. This is a matter of 'freedom' rather than simple tactics, for freedom is 'what is invented' rather than naturally given. Therefore, what we need to do is to 'invent a new mode of freedom' (Massumi 2014: 86).

> Inkeun: It may be necessary for me to avoid the way in which galleries choose certain artists according to their vulgar tastes. If such conventions among the galleries would not change, it is the artists' turn to change. We [artists] need not contest with one another over the entry into the galleries. We are better to throw out the expectation to exhibit our works at famous galleries and perhaps it may be a much better idea for us to open up a guerrilla-styled exhibition.

In respect of the affective-sensorial constellation of otherness, Young In's embroidery works provide a vivid example. She collects varied images and voices of anonymous people across different local, national and global contexts, and translates them into stitches in her production of embroidery works, which are delicately mesmerising and transparently dense, textually. Her aim is to let the materiality itself spontaneously narrate the ambiguity of memories and stories which tend to be hidden or even repressed, and thus remain unheard under the grand narrative of history, while being fused and shared broadly in the popular imagination. For instance, in *Under the Sky of Happiness* (2013), Young In depicts the 'women who have played a key role in shaping South Korean modern history' (the artist's homepage), who lived and worked at different times and in different fields (see Figure 3). The group of female

figures ranges from artists and musicians to political activists demonstrating against the concubine system.

Young In's way of cultivating the techniques of stitching is intriguing, particularly in terms of the possibility of an affective-sensorial constellation of otherness. To her, the technology of stitching is not a simple application of a conventional skill,

Figure 3: Young In Hong, *Under the Sky of Happiness* (2013). Embroidery on cotton, 270 x 300 cm. Presseum, Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul. Courtesy of the artist and Presseum, Ilmin Museum of Art, Seoul.

but one that has been growing within from pedagogic intimacies built up across national borderlines for several years while she was travelling. Those who taught her how to stitch were Asian manual workers who may be called the 'subaltern' (Spivak 1988) in contemporary global fashion industries.

> Young In: My stitch works began in India, where I learned the method of stitching from a man who was working at one market in India. Then while staying in Seoul afterward, I desperately learned stitching from the female workers who worked at *Dongdamun* market (the largest cluster of fashion factories and markets in Seoul). These may be something about Asian culture, especially when the fashion industry has extremely globalised in the way that clothes are instantly produced by cheap labour forces and tagged in western brands. Once Korea used to provide such cheap labour forces and the trend now has moved to other, less developed Asian countries. Such a fashion industry structure seems to be quite identical with the way in which senses are circulated [in the world of art]. I learned stitching at the *Dongdamun* market and simultaneously, my work reflects the narrative of stitching industries.

Thus, Young In's work performs a political critique of the globalised contemporary fashion industries and manifests the ethical and aesthetic values embedded in the actual lives and work of Asian workers in clothing factories and markets. Young In's experience of creating an embroidery style reveals how certain multicultural and horizontal communities are formed based on common sense and sensibility involved in the processes of nomadic art. The artist does not view herself as a representative for these anonymous lives. On the contrary, she creates with stitching that other women have been using to make a living well outside the shadow of the global capitalist world. Although perhaps not intended, the manual workers' inveterate technologies – that is, stitching – come to be transferred to and inspire Young In's artwork. This is where the aesthetical practices of creating art and living an ethical life are interwoven as the 'collective power of intelligence' (Rancière 2010: 80) in the reciprocal performance of *self-stitching* (in rephrasing self-writing).

The three modes of the performance of the aesthetics of otherness (the creation of new materiality, the conduct of counteractive gestures and the affective-sensorial constellation of otherness) suggest that the artists are less passively marginalised than they are voluntarily and actively reclaiming the position of otherness. If one can agree with Young In's view that 'the other may be in solitude but also in richness in terms of imagination', this is because becoming the other means opening up the potentialities of creating new senses; undermining conventional, authoritarian norms established in the art world; and generating an affective and sensorial community among minorities. These movements may be potentially driven by the insurgence of the aesthetics of otherness, which is spelled out in the artists' pursuit of becoming-in-the-process rather than in perfection in the act of amateurism and guerilla tactics, in the ethos of failure, and with the will to self-change. The implication of these

elements may be a denial of the hegemonic neoliberal ideology of art clamouring for commercial success and social fame. Instead, the position of otherness is radicalised and activated as 'resources and energies' (Young In) which shape dissensus in art practice (Rancière 2010); that is, the invention and demonstration of another sense and sensibility within and without the hegemonic global regime of aesthetics.

Conclusion

The life and work of young Korean artists in London has been narrated from the perspective of autoethnographic performance of the self in the performative-we. The politico-ethical implication of their art practices is that by actively and voluntarily taking the position of otherness, these artists lead a nomadic life and strive to construct *other* aesthetics while potentially envisaging the emergence of dissensus within the global regime of aesthetics. The point of the aesthetics of otherness is supported by my conceptualisation of art practices as performative-we, with the expansion of the conventional notion of self-writing in a variety of respects: from literary unimodality to multisensory multimodality, from writing and representation to action and performance, from rational and autonomous individuality to internally ruptured and externally dialogical collectivity, from fragmented and decentred postmodern subjectivity to affective-sensorial and ethical relationality, and from the single subject position of 'I' to the collective co-presence of 'we'. Thus, the subject of self-writing, often called the performative-I, also requires extending and pluralising in social terms. In other words, the mutually formative interactions between artists and society suggest the generic potential of collective performative subjectivities. This collective becoming is actualised in ongoing processes in which social memories and stories are transformed into the materiality of artwork, at the same time as anonymous people's shared experiences of living are intertwined in the production thereof. Such autoethnographic engagement with art, consisting of affective and social relations, operating with a collective power of intelligence, and performed with a variety of multisensory writings, brings into being the collective and collaborative performative-we.

The thought of multisensory and collective performances of autoethnography sheds light on our understanding of the life and work of artists who are moving away from conventional categories of belonging (nationality, race, gender and ideology) towards the opening up of a self-styled mode of unbelonging, from the vantage point of otherness. While their livelihoods are admittedly under serious threat given the current neoliberal and post-capitalist structure of art, to the extent of being confronted with a situation of self-precarisation (Lorey 2006), I argue that the potentiality of dissensus lies in their very contradictory and degenerated condition. At the risk of romanticising the instability and precarity underlying artists' lives and

work, I would argue, the artists' voluntary and active pursuit and performance of otherness are fundamental to the invention of an alternative mode of life in ethics, intervention in the Western-dominated regime of aesthetics, and the creation of a new affective and sensorial collectivity of the performative-we.

Notes

1 The present research was funded by a 2015 research grant from Kwangwoon University.

2 The word 'young' in the phrase 'young Korean artists' is less related to biological age and more to aesthetic orientation and style. The colloquial title of 'young artist' in Korea indicates one who seeks to challenge the traditional art style favoured by established institutions, and instead pursues an experimental/alternative art practice in both aesthetic and ethical terms.

3 The number of South Korean students moving to and studying in the UK has increased tenfold since 2001, from 1 398 to 17 310 in 2011 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development). The UK is second to the US in terms of South Koreans' preferred destination (Unesco 2014). While over 4 500 Korean students were studying at universities in the UK in 2012 (ibid.), the establishment of the Korean Artists Association, UK, in 1998 may show that Korean artists have become actively involved in the scene of contemporary British arts.

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Warp and woof: stalking art from End to End

Kim Gurney

Abstract

This article offers an alternative ethnography of Johannesburg by tracking the creation of contemporary art within an inner-city atelier, August House, on End Street and into the world at large ('from End to End'). The project informs a study about contemporary art as a vector of value: it sought nodes of transfiguration and their catalysts, foregrounding practice and process. In this assemblage, it aspires towards a 'cultural biography of things' (Kopytoff 1986). It simultaneously authors an obituary of a particular era in the life of this culturally significant hub: during the research period, the building is put up for sale in a value metamorphosis of its own. This disruption introduces an interregnum of uncertainty that surfaces connections between space and imagination, and flags structural realities operating outside the studio door that help define life inside it. Precarity and how this is variously transformed is key. The initial linear narrative trajectory is upended to become an interwoven cobweb instead, demonstrating through synchronous connections the transversality of its subject matter. The journey to new studios is tracked too, as is the atelier's reconfigured fate, which speaks to other buildings crafting second lives in comparable cities of flux. A concept of middle space informs both method and exegesis, starting at the building's elevators. This twinning of form and content is integral to arts-based research, which believes in artistic practice as an alternative form of understanding and revealing new knowledge.

Keywords: arts-based research; city futures; contemporary art; Johannesburg; middle space; uncertainty; value

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Middle space

'We all have to pac(k).' An unhappy face follows, scrawled upon the mustard interior of the industrial elevator serving the rear half of this Johannesburg inner-city building, August House, on End Street. The heavy doors clank shut and the elevator starts to rise, its internal walls a graffiti board for tenants. The floor selection push buttons keep to the architectural logic of the four-storey building: B-G-1-2-3-4. The numbering above the internal lintel registering the elevator's advance obeys no such rules, however. It runs all the way to 14, an extra ten imaginary floors denoting to the uninitiated the building's mysterious dimensions.

A disjuncture between the building's exterior and interior signals this kind of liminality. It suggests Homi Bhabha's (1994: 54) Third Space, where structure of meaning and reference take on ambiguity, leading to hybridity of cultural knowledge. August House appears completely commonplace to the passerby. A functional facade befits a former textiles factory, built in 1946 after World War II. It blends into its working-class New Doornfontein surrounds. Opposite is a clothing workers' union, with street traders and formal traders alongside. Commercial buildings dominate the precinct behind, a small church wedged between. A trucking business runs a commuting shuffle outside the building and long-distance buses depart from down the road. The dominant feature of the block is an increasingly derelict building squatted by tenants with nowhere better to go, wired with illegal electricity connections and a variety of found objects as window panes. During the night, loud music is fused with street noise – sometimes altercations and sometimes celebrations. During the day, the soundscape is fused with factory sirens, ice-cream truck jingles and preaching from passing loud-hailers.

Step inside August House, however, and a warren of majestic interiors lies behind opaque double doors. Beyond these doors, a rotating cross-section of emerging and established fine art practitioners have been practising for almost a decade, situated discretely under the radar. Their reconfigured studio lofts were designed in 2006 for space and light, with artists specifically in mind. As one described life within these walls, 'there is a creative vibe that just permeates the building ... we all have a common purpose' (interview, 15 January 2014). Their distinctive studios are potential portals to that 'invisible and unspeakable domain of fluxes, intensities and becoming' that Suely Rolnik (2010: 39) ascribes to artistic practice. Dramatic red balustrades are the first indication of this interior world, a swirling stairwell in Art Deco style. This article takes us there, floor by floor, stalking art in progress by four practitioners working in different mediums and styles.

Importantly, this shadowing happens during the final days for this collective of tenants, who also included a cut-and-trim factory, a group of musicians, filmmakers and more. The building was put up for sale and everyone had to relocate. Hence, 'We all have to pac(k)'. The elevator graffiti is a pun on the stage name of American

rapper Tupac Shakur (2pac), written in tandem alongside. Immediately below this lament, the following lines are rendered monotone without punctuation, justified left on the elevator interior in terse capitals:

> Who owns what they
> Have not made
> With your beauty
> I am as uninvolved
> as with horses manes
> and waterfalls
> I breathe the breathless
> I love you. I love you
> and let you move
> forever.

The research project informing this article aimed to partially capture this rich interiority, before it disappeared and became something else, by tracking the creation of new work underway in selected studios – the 'imagination's chamber' (Peppiatt and Bellony-Rewald 1982). The emphasis is on artistic practice and process. South African public policy by contrast advocates an economic validation for the arts, culture and heritage sector by conceiving of it as an industry – contributing towards growth, jobs and foreign exchange earnings. This instrumentalist approach is articulated in official strategy, called Mzansi's Golden Economy. This article offers an alternative script of intrinsic value instead, elaborated upon in the final section. The notion of middle space is central, from methodological approach to exigesis, so the research begins midstream, joining artists in their End Street studios.

Specifically, the project sought value transfigurations and their catalysts as the artefacts were created and made their way into the world at large ('from End to End'). This theoretically intersects with a broader turn in humanities over the past decade towards post-humanities or object-oriented ontology. The research foregrounds the actual artwork – to attempt a cultural biography of things (Kopytoff 1986: 64). 'Biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure.' The biography of a car in Africa, for instance, would reveal a wealth of cultural data from the way it was acquired to relationships, the uses to which it is put, its movement and eventual collapse and final disposal of the remains (ibid: 67). He states that commodities must not only be produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain *kind* of thing (ibid, emphasis added). Further, the project tries to broach the tension that Arjun Appadurai (1986: 34) draws between a cultural

biography and a social history of things; the uncertain line between is the open-ended biography of the artwork.

In the process, the article also authors an obituary of a highly regarded atelier approaching the end of an era. August House played a vital role in the cultural landscape; stitching this narrative together helps to make visible some latent threads in that broader weave. It is a story of one building in one city that speaks to many buildings in many cities, also facing global flux, and in this way is suggestive of city futures too.

The contextual disruption in the research around the building's sale profoundly impacted upon the findings. The ensuing interregnum of uncertainty that prevailed for about 18 months, as buyers were lost and found, caused shared concern around the atelier's pending closure. How this precarity was ultimately transfigured by different parties is key to the analysis. The sale process surfaced linkages between space and imagination, and flagged the vital importance of considering the broader context outside the studio door that impacts on life within it. This intersects with earlier explorations in *Critical Arts* regarding an ethnographic turn in contemporary art practices, and processes include exploring to what extent contextualisation is relevant (Rutten et al. 2013: 461). The linearity of the intended research trajectory was upended by extrinsic events to trigger a series of interrelated trajectories of second lives instead – of the artworks, artists and the building itself. This entanglement defies a definitive point of origin and closure – there is no neatly clipped end, but a series of related transfigurations. This includes the financial revaluation of the building itself, in part due to the activities of the artists within. The eventual buyers in 2015 chose to keep August House operating as an artistic hub. A new collective of artists gradually moved back in under a new ethos, where the research period concludes.

Key to my interpretation of these various responses to precarity is Edouard Glissant's strategies of language and resistance (Britton 1999), coming from a postcolonial perspective. His novels, for instance, focus on the intersection of known and unknown, of acceptance and denial – or relation, writes Michael Dash (1989: xxxviii). 'It can become evident in the pairing of opposing characters, historical forces, and narrative forms,' he adds, such as notions of exterior and interior in a landscape, a kind of cross-fertilisation or transversality at its heart. Glissant is a natural deconstructionist, according to Dash (ibid: xii), one who celebrates latency, opacity and infinite metamorphosis in a world of continuous flux: 'For him, true beginnings and real authority are lowly, paradoxical, and unspectacular.' These characteristics are all echoed in the subject matter at hand. Further, he stresses Glissant's insistence on 'a cross-cultural poetics', and linkages between individual agency and collectivity. Glissant (1989: 14) abandons the idea of fixed being in favour of relationship: 'One of the most terrible implications of the ethnographic approach is the insistence on

fixing the object of scrutiny in static time, thereby removing the tangled nature of lived experience and promoting the idea of uncontaminated survival.'

This cross-cultural poetics is reflected in the stated disruption of research linearity and the series of interconnected narratives generated instead. Rosi Braidotti (2006: 68, emphasis in the original) perhaps explains it even better, describing the poetics of relation thus:

> The thought of relation as a form of philosophical nomadism stresses the importance of the middle, in this mode of non-origin, non-purity and not-Oneness. Glissant defines this productive multiplicity as 'echoes of the world' ... They reconnect us to the living chaos of the world as living matter in transformation, a hybrid, dynamic resilient *bios/zoe* force of global creolization. Glissant captures this vitality and honours it as a poetics of an ethics of rhizomatic interconnections.

This article now ascends the building's floors to meet the artists and their work in situ. Its narrative structure reflects the content, a relationship that is integral to arts-based research. This research is technically practice-based rather than practice-led, focused upon the artwork of third parties, to draw links between practice and theory. The ascent of August House is navigated through the middle space of the building itself – the elevators, passages and stairwell. This architectural off-space, as it were, offers meaningful detail through specific artefacts expressing, in turn, the myriad transitions at play. Charles Seeger (cited in Cavicchi 2013: 53) once offered that in order to understand his paper on the unitary field of music, you had to begin in the middle and 'work outward in all directions'. Another way of expressing this sentiment might be to quote a painter friend of mine advising on the stretching of canvases. 'Small canvases are easy to stretch, but big ones are bastards. Always rotate as you secure and make sure you start in the middle of each side and work gradually outwards. This is to make sure the warp and the woof are stretched evenly' (personal correspondence, 2014). The warp is the longitudinal thread in a roll of cloth, conceived here as the building itself; the woof is the transverse, the horizontal journeys of profiled works.

This research aspires towards a sensibility described by Filip de Boeck, who calls his work urban acupuncture. He selects spaces relevant to the creation of publics – like a building, field, burial site or crossroads – and inserts an analytical needle as for a biopsy.

> By writing an ethnography of that place, from that nerve centre, the nerves radiate out and connect with other places, from spot to spot, to try tell the story of that horizontal plane. By [inserting] the needle, you also of course go into the vertical and into the deeper layers in the 'longue durée' of the city and you touch all the histories that continue to very much be there – such as land, who owns it, who opens it up for the city, constellations of power, and so on. (personal interview, August 2015)

Before this biopsy begins, a further note on methodology. The building was put up for sale by its owners, August Properties, which created a unique opportunity to capture something of its inner life before the artists disbanded. The key research tool was extended interviews in situ, and these were spaced at monthly intervals for several months. This continued ad hoc afterwards until the artists had resettled themselves and the building's fate was finally apparent. The chosen interval was sufficient to locate transfigurations without putting undue pressure on the informants or artificially disrupting existing creative processes. The outcomes were unknown quantities when the research began, so methodology specifics responded to a developing situation. Arts-based research incorporates contingency and openness to flux – the broad umbrella of artistic research has even been called a methodice [emphasis in the original], 'a self-reflexive movement continually producing novel connections, accelerations and mutations in temporary, flexible and open systems that enable the production of various metamorphoses in the research process', writes Henk Slager (2010: 228). He states that it is ultimately a form of mapping, constantly producing novel lines of thought and research. This recalls Bhabha's (1996: 54) definition of cultural knowledge as an 'integrated, open, expanding code'. Knowledge is accrued in this research project through an iterative process, amid an uncertain situation with unknown outcomes.

The evolution of ideas and knowledge derived from research depends on how well it is replicated and understood by others, writes Estelle Barrett (2007: 150), but 'the replication mechanisms that have traditionally valorised and validated creative arts practices have focused on product rather than process'. Moreover, Barrett notes that such mechanisms have tended to rely on the mystification of artistic products as commodities rather than an elucidation of creative arts practices as alternative modes of understanding the world and of revealing new knowledge. This article privileges the latter, observed from within the imagination's chamber.

Floor 1

Access to the studio of Mbongeni Buthelezi is from the August House basement, which serves as the building's parking lot. Occasionally, the basement is also an impromptu church where congregants gather on long wooden benches, using whatever space they can find in this densely populated inner-city neighbourhood. Buthelezi's studio door is decorated with posters about his practice. In a parking bay to the right, his flashy car is covered in colourful vinyl stickers of his work. A steep flight of stairs ascends to a very large open space, half of it covered with plastic scraps laid out as a colour palette. Buthelezi paints with these recycled packaging leftovers that he collects from local supermarkets. He complements this with bespoke rolls of colour ordered from a plastics factory, created through extrusion (heating

up and cooling down). Buthelezi uses a heat gun for a paintbrush and applies it to specially crafted heat-resistant canvases. On his windowsill is a row of defunct heat guns assembled from 1991, when he first started painting this way – a visual biography of his practice. Buthelezi's painting involves laborious, awkward work and he generally creates large-scale.

But today, in early 2014, is different. An empty chair that has followed him from studio to studio stands poised in front of an empty easel. The man himself, on the day we first meet him, is despondent. The pending move out of August House has creatively paralysed him and he cannot promise there will be any new work for the research project to track. When he describes this professional block, he gesticulates with his fist on his heart to show where the motivation should be coming from.

During the year ahead, Buthelezi had planned to experiment more with fluidity and reverse his previous process of opaque paint in expressionistic style to move towards a transparent deftness more akin to watercolour. 'Trying to do this in plastic will be a real challenge that I'm looking forward to,' as he put it (interview, February 2014). That trajectory was scuppered by the relocation news. His large-scale practice required some certainties to give it traction. The looming change stood in his creative way, as Buthelezi described its impact. It was a relocation cycle he found himself in every few years and he had grown tired of its dynamics. 'It broke many hearts', is how another artist referred to the building's sale. Both logistically and psychologically, Buthelezi was in no space to produce and this put him in an awkward position since he did not want to exhibit old work ('I am not that type of artist, I don't want to repeat myself'). My counter proposal was accepted to map this creative block by stalking the journeys of previously completed work as it made its way to exhibitions and collections, instead of new creations.

Three months later, I ascended the same flight of stairs for our regular interview to discover at his August House studio a man reformed in body language and with several new large-scale canvases in situ. Buthelezi had made a profound breakthrough in a portrait series of his daughter, at this point a black-and-white compilation, and he was excited about its potential. Large swathes of white canvas contrasted with the melted paint to delineate the figurative forms. The new use of bold negative space was a striking element of the formal portrait composition and a stylistic diversion. The theme was transformation and several months later the completed series retained these characteristics, its apogee a dense multicoloured trio.

The work also played with skin colour, Buthelezi said, dealing with surface appearances versus underlying reality. This suggested the metaphor of the veil, a concept that also emerged from other research interactions concerning August House – an apparently charmed existence people referred to in different ways. The practical reality of this veil was in fact a network of affiliations coordinated by its two caretakers, Power Mazibuko and Gibson Khumalo. They managed its dual entrances

and inner life to create a vital interface between the building and the complexity of neighbourhood interactions. Buthelezi had a direct view from his studio window onto End Street beyond, whose myriad interactions he called 'Live TV'.

Buthelezi's initial response of creative refusal to paint new works transformed over time into a prolific series, a transfiguration that can be compared to the process of plastic extrusion, as mentioned above: intense heat, an extended stretching and cooling, followed by a totally new form. This single experience highlighted the potential in this research project for artistic work to actively code a response – a way of doing, or 'thinking through the visual', as Sarat Maharaj (2009) puts it. Maharaj considers whether visual art thinking has a distinctive thrust relative to other disciplines, and writes that 'it is a force in its own right, always incipient in "whatever" spaces ... where intimations of unknown elements, thinking probes, spasms of non-knowledge emerge and come into play' (ibid: 3). Visual art practices vigorously intersect with established discursive-academic circuits, Maharaj states, but alongside runs an intensive non-discursive register, 'its penumbra of the non-verbal, its somatic scope, its smoky atmospherics, its performative range' (ibid: 4).

Buthelezi eventually found a new studio, even larger than his August House space, a few streets away in a newly renovated industrial building where other artists were also neighbours. This space inspired new work but also gave birth to plans to help other artists. In July 2015, his MB Studios launched the Wine and Art Association with a glamorous function in the Johannesburg business district of Sandton. The idea was to create a networking platform between elite business and the arts, to build 'a stronger central pond for the thinkers and graduates of our future' (interview,). The initial disruption of relocation was transfigured from creative block to entrepreneurial enterprise. His newly inspired artworks also found homes. In October 2015, a colourful composite of his daughter's portrait, created during the research period, was posted on Facebook along with 17 other works tagged 'SOLD!'.

Floor 2

The stairs are generally favoured by August House tenants, who have a shaky relationship with the unreliable elevators. The best way to get to the second floor is to cross the parking basement from Buthelezi's studio doors, and duck under the stairwell side entrance next to the industrial elevator. En route, multicoloured safety cones are stacked, taller than a human being. They are the raw material for an artwork we will encounter later. The same artist has also made a life-size rhinoceros out of coat-hangers; its dislocated body lies in an adjacent parking bay. Some artwork crates near the elevator wait to deliver their fragile cargo. One is annotated: 'Mary Sibande. Wish you were here.' Sibande, whose work once adorned the facade of August House in a public art project, had moved out of her studio here too, but she

returned when the eventual buyers kept the building operating for artists. One of her sculptural body-casts meanwhile ghosted a parking bay, its head butting a fire-hose reel. A sloped concrete passage next to the elevator leads to the stairwell beyond. On the second floor is a double door with 'End Street Studios' repeated across its façade, to signal a collective warren of studios that follows. The first one belongs to Daniel Stompie Selibe.

The first time we met, back in 2012, Selibe knocked on the door of the Bag Factory Artists' Studios, an artists' organisation in nearby Newtown, dressed in black and holding a bamboo saxophone. He was there to perform an unannounced intervention, a musical haunting *Pose and Repose* by the Ginsburg Brothers. I was the curator of the group exhibition 'Sounding Out', which hosted the work. *Pose and Repose* is a play that functions primarily to direct the player into position to perform *Score for Horn*. Selibe walked into the interior, placed a suitcase on the floor, and stood upon it. He performed according to a score that had no musical notation. It included instructions relating to time and space instead. The performance started slowly and mournfully, built into a crescendo and flew away on a flight of improvisation. When he decided his musical piece was over, Selibe stepped down and exited the building. The next time I met him, to engage him on this research project, he was mourning the loss of the same bamboo saxophone, stolen while in transit.

Selibe is a multidimensional artist who creates in different domains: painting, printmaking, playing various musical instruments, composing music, engaging sound art and providing art therapy. Cutting across is his capacity to craft a composite response to the ephemera of time and space, in a language of multidisciplinary collage. Central is a love for jazz. Shortly into the research period, he participated in a group exhibition called 'Heroes' and made a series of collages that combined visuals and written poetry, including references to jazz musicians who inspire him.

Tolerance for ambiguity is characteristic of Selibe's oeuvre, a skill for working with resistance that expresses itself as 'the temporary suspension of the desire for closure' (Sennett 2009: 221). Selibe describes the moment of creative transfiguration thus:

> I work a lot with how I feel - sometimes I get lost, I don't track the theme particularly, I just get in that moment. This is very interesting for me. Like when I practise a tune ... you play your exercises and scales and start playing some tunes. You change from playing scales to play melody. That is how you create songs out of practising. More or less, for me it is like that.

Selibe also privileges the collaborative impulse: '[Artistic practice] gives me a lot of pleasure and understanding in how to take things forward and how to create change and make a difference in society. Because change does not happen as quickly as we hoped. And you learn a lot working with other people.'

His August House studio interior is dominated by a printmaker's press, dotted with contemporary and traditional musical instruments and visual references to jazz greats like Miles Davis. At its centre is a carpet encrusted with multicoloured paint from the array of canvases that line the walls, a carpet he contemplates taking like a talisman to his new Selby studio in an industrial quarter nearby. The Selby building quickly became a new artistic hub, hosting other displaced August House artists including Sibande and Vusi Mfupi.

Selibe created a painting series during this time relating to the move, alongside large-format portraits. He also participated in group exhibitions, collaborative musical events and an art therapy workshop with children. His most direct response to the move, however, was a performative musical collaboration, his contribution to a collective goodbye entitled 'At the End of August'. This one-night event was organised by another End Street Studios tenant, Dorothee Kreutzfeldt. The event incorporated objects that found themselves also subject to removal and related physical transitions; its performative nature reflected Selibe's observation that the August House sale was, in itself, a performance piece. The protracted nature of the sales process and its myriad dynamics did indeed have this character. Selibe's observation again came to mind the following year, when a different cohort of artists moved in once the building's sale was eventually effected. 'At the End of August' was inscribed onto an adjacent wall in order to indicate to visitors the location of the performative event. It had remained there, and the artists who moved into that section assumed the phrase as a collective identifier.

This signals a broader contemplation of the particular role of the studio in general, and its possible future form. The site of artistic practice has arguably been transformed more recently to a discursive vector, writes Miwon Kwon (2002: 29–30), 'ungrounded, fluid, and virtual'. The studio is a space that is not just bricks and mortar but an intellectual, affective and psychological space too – whether manifested in a laptop, a collective, a collaborative body, or a performative register.

Floor 3

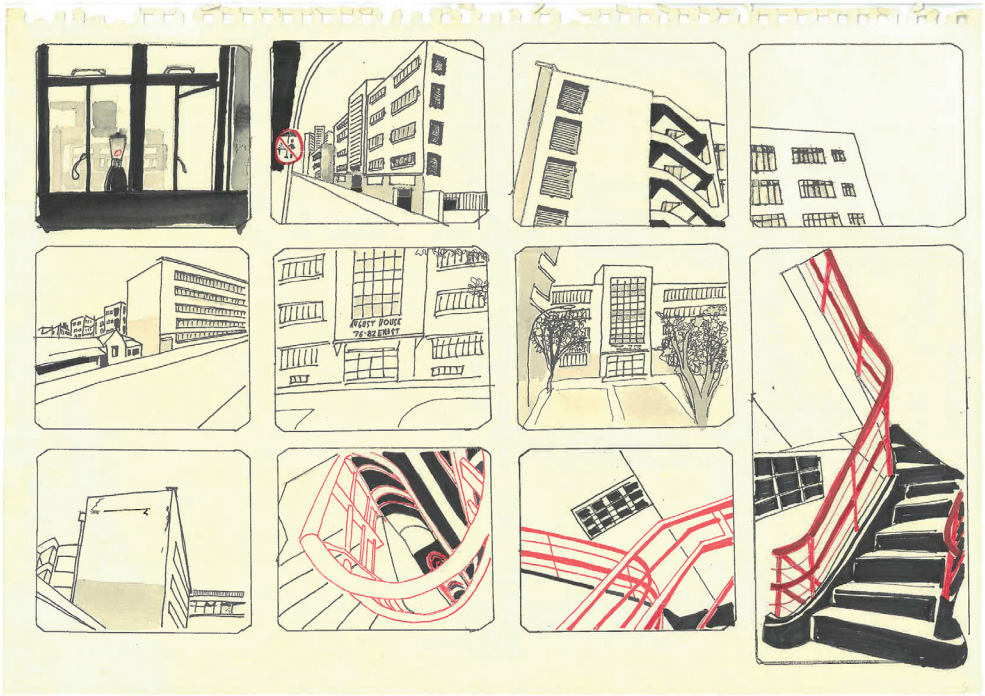
Cutting across the second floor leads to the building's End Street facade. The design of August House is oddly bifurcated, with elevators serving either side. Keeping to the stairs to reach the third floor, we pass a violin plaster cast fixed to the wall. It is a remnant from former tenant, Svend Christensen, a luthier who created and repaired stringed instruments here. A glass-fronted piano with black exterior and lights used to stand in his workshop entrance. The 'pimped' piano, as Christensen described it, was transfigured for a client after it had fallen off the back of a pickup and only the interior could be salvaged.

Opposite Christensen's former studio is the entrance to Bié Venter's loft. She transformed August House into a collective of artists' spaces, with co-owner support. Venter, who runs her own business including installing major exhibitions, lived here in a vast space still bearing ceramic wall tiles from its time as a perfume factory, punctuated by the distinct necklaced columns of August House. Her loft was an installation in itself, including an indoor garden, a bathtub with plastic toys descending from the ceiling, a billiards table and a projection screen, the space interspersed with a significant art collection.

The impulse to turn the building into a haven for artists came while living in a building across the way, called Louisar. Venter spotted August House from her kitchen window and together with another interested party approached its owners to buy in. A page from her notebook to creating a comic book Venter created about this transfigurative journey is published below.

Floor 4

On the stairwell outside Venter's loft is the strangest door in the building. It is bricked up like a mystery portal. One flight up on the opposite side is the shared studio of Jacki McInnes and Diane Victor. The mini kitchen inside is dominated by



a distinctive blue table, a legacy from an artists' residency previously hosted in this same space. The residency formed part of the inner-city Joubert Park Project and Venter was one of its collaborators. Immediately beyond is the studio of McInnes, with a drywall separation from Victor's workspace. Whereas other artists are packing boxes, this studio always seems to be in denial that any relocation is approaching.

During the research process, McInnes was busily preparing for a solo exhibition, 'The Argonauts', at a Johannesburg gallery. This included a sculpture called *Wife's Lot*. It was created first in her studio in a life-sized mould from a volunteer's body. McInnes then formed salt casts in a foundry after experimenting with different formulae. It proved a trial and error process with a new medium. After one compromised salt cast, the second one, in a different consistency, was successful and *Wife's Lot* was exhibited in June 2014.

Once the work leaves the studio door, there is a rip of context as it is differently framed and validated by the art world, re-anchored and variously perceived in these elsewheres as it takes on a life of its own. McInnes' solo exhibition engaged economic migration, taking Théodore Géricault's famous artwork *Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19) as key inspiration. This painting depicts the aftermath of the sinking of a French naval frigate with people set adrift on a hurriedly constructed raft. *Wife's Lot* speaks about forced flight, itinerancy and xenophobia. The sculpture's pose replicates the crouched figure of Alfabeto Nhamuave, a Mozambican migrant burnt to death during the 2008 anti-foreigner violence in South Africa, one foot crossed over the other. Just prior to this solo display, *Wife's Lot* was exhibited at a group exhibition called 'Deconstructing Dogma', curated by Karen von Veh. Here, it was exhibited among other works about transgressive Christian iconography. Biblical references were foregrounded ahead of its socio-political resonance. It sat alongside the work of other August House artists including Victor, who contributed with a large-scale altarpiece of smoke drawings on glass.

The body of work for 'The Argonauts' stems from a collaborative project McInnes is involved with, regarding notions of 'end times'. The exhibition's thematic has contextual relevance to the inner-city environment with its relatively high proportion of migrants. But it also has parallels with an earlier series she created with John Hodgkiss regarding scrap recyclers, *House 38*. During this project, the informal recyclers living in an inner-city building were evicted and the artists captured this brutal forced relocation. 'It's taken me a long time to understand how the strands fit together but I feel like they are starting to coalesce,' says McInnes, pondering a work in new media that would interlace these trajectories still further.

For *House 38*, McInnes fashioned recycled objects into lead sculptures and placed them in third spaces, recontextualising them into photographic works and further recycling their meaning. A profoundly philosophical engagement with recycling and its limitations, not only as a practice but as a trope integral to late-capitalism, is

identified in her work by Michael Titlestad (2014). He also highlights an intimated tension between apocalyptic eschatology and a refusal to accept that this is the way the world ends. 'There is ... an aesthetic and theoretical proposition in McInnes's work which articulates with South Africa's history of anxiety, but also opens it to the world' (ibid: 69). This observation reflects the research at large: cultural geography is generally informed by ethnography and textual analysis, as well as understanding the particular to illuminate the general (Shurmer-Smith 2002).

The rooftop

Gordon Froud also has a studio on the fourth floor, opposite Jacki McInnes who previously shared this space with him. Outside its double doors is a massive green head, a sculpture that has tagged Froud from place to place. It used to sit atop his Gordart Gallery in the suburb of Rosebank, pretty in pink, but now seems unlikely to budge. A tumble of yellow plastic trumpets called *vuvuzela*s are waiting at the elevator door. The studio door signage reads 'Kerk/Church; Stilte/Silence', but wit and wordplay are Froud's raw materials. To be heard, you have to knock loudly before entering this veritable rabbit hole of activity. Every inch of the studio space is covered with a mixture of artworks, books, artefacts, materials and works in progress. The space also serves as a home from home, with a bed, a small kitchen and a bathroom. Froud himself is contemplating how to physically move everything when the pending relocation comes around; his T-shirt proclaims: 'Whatever!'

Froud creates sculptures using modular repetition, often with everyday objects such as clothes hangers or kitchen utensils. In the artwork series this research project tracks, he uses the oversized cones we encountered earlier in the basement. Froud says of his own production:

> My work is not really ingrained in social commentary. I'm far more interested in the formal elements – how does this work, how does this fit together. And then, secondly, what does the material do. I've always liked the idea of having a surprise element to it, where people come along and then [realise] – 'Oh, it's made of coat hangers!' I still get a kick out of that (interview, February 2014).

That said, his work is often able to masquerade critiques into more formal settings because of its absurdity, playfulness or wit. Cynical contemplation, critical reverie and black humour are also read into Froud's oeuvre (Paton 2015: 46).

This article assigns Froud the building's rooftop space by association. Besides hosting numerous social gatherings on the rooftop, Froud partly created the oversized cone sculptures there too. Afterwards, they travelled in an impressive journey where they were installed on other city rooftops. These included the rooftop of Arts on Main, a nearby creative cluster in the self-dubbed Maboneng precinct, as well as a gallery in Pretoria ('Rooftop V' exhibition), and another building in the Johannesburg inner-

city (‘Joburg Joburg’ exhibition). This same work then moved indoors to the Western Cape town of Oudtshoorn, included in Froud’s 2014 solo exhibition at the annual arts festival, before returning to Pretoria as a permanent external gallery installation.

Different cone works in the same series also appeared in public spaces including a sculpture park in Gauteng, before being bought by a corporate collection, as well as a coastal path during a public arts festival in the Western Cape. This same work, later vandalised by celebrating school leavers, was chosen for inclusion after the curator saw a multicoloured predecessor exhibited on a Cape wine farm. Private art collectors bought smaller cone replicas for their homes and business premises (one was incidentally stolen, but insured). Another one in the edition was sold publicly at an auction.

These migratory trajectories taken together offer a comprehensive speculative map of value transfiguration, each exhibition adding valued provenance and the auction sale providing the market’s verdict too. The cone series travelled in a viral replication, registering new associations wherever it went. The work, also shaped like a virus form, spoke very differently when installed in a verdantly lush sculpture park, perched on the edge of an inner-city rooftop, in a private garden or on a cliff top. The series was truly nomadic and lent itself well to the research aim.

One inspirational source for Froud was giant cones spotted outside a University of Johannesburg campus. But in reality the creative origins refract across time and space. While moving out of August House, Froud unearthed an early cone experiment in his studio dating back several years. He continued to refine the series going forward, finding a new supplier with different colours and forms, and thinking up variations on the theme. Eventually settled in his new studio purchased in nearby Nugget Square, Froud mentioned the possibility of a soft, padded version. As with August House, a stack of multicoloured cones in the parking area of this inner-city industrial complex marks Froud’s presence in his new abode.

Mezzanine of the future

The reconfigured fate of a building like August House, a former factory that became a collective atelier, may speak to a future metropolis. It was ahead of its time in 2006 when artists first moved into a repurposed manufacturing site. Almost ten years later, under new management, the building is starting another creative life. This is somewhat against the odds, as Johannesburg inner-city buildings are increasingly transformed into residential space. August House has reconstituted its identity and the interviewed artists have, with time, found new studios – and some of their artworks, second lives.

Such cycles could be suggestive of city futures and their ‘tournaments of value’, as Appadurai (1986: 21) terms it. He also writes about the intercalibration of the

biographies of persons and things, and the politics of such tournaments where actors manipulate cultural definitions of path [sic] and the strategic potential of diversion (ibid: 22). To speculate further on this, it helps to revisit an inspirational account that informed this research project regarding how the United States recently lost its financial footing in the credit bubble, as written by Michael Lewis (2010). He interviewed the few skeptical mavericks who bet against the mortgage-backed securities underpinning this crisis.

To explain its origins, his book refers to a mezzanine CDO (collateralised debt obligation) or 'engine of doom'. This tower metaphor begins with original debt of poor quality, called subprime loans, piled together into investment packages. The safer upper floors are rated more highly – investors are likely to get their money back earlier, but the return on that bond is consequently lower. From the lowest floor of this tower, a second tower is then created using the riskiest tranche. The original tower in this analogy is the CDO. The second tower, created of other existing debt structures, is known as a synthetic CDO.

Preceding the financial crisis, the ratings agencies presented with these bonds backed by loans rated 80 per cent in this doubly leveraged tower as safe (triple-A quality), writes Lewis. These inferior investments could be sold to investors such as pension funds, which are supposed to invest in highly-rated securities. The effect of all this tower-building was to replicate bonds backed by actual home loans in order to satisfy increasing demand, creating a spectral tower of doom. That tower passage is formative in the book and reflects an epiphany one of its characters has in understanding the dynamics behind the debt crisis, forged on the back of subprime home loans.

The metaphor is powerful: a mezzanine CDO, conjured from the weakest floor of increasingly poor levels of debt – synthetic, mislabelled, a falsehood of magical thinking that exaggerated the eventual crunch when it came. At the time of reading about it, I too was researching a series of floors. The building on my personal radar, however, seemed an incarnation of the opposite kind of idea. Rather than a financialised economy of synthetic products, it comprised four floors where people created artefacts with immeasurable value beyond their price.

The mezzanine metaphor did not only offer a narrative structure but also a potential riposte, to articulate in the project's exegesis something of the ineffable regarding value propagation that accrues in the process of making. The stakes for such articulations increase in a broader environment of accelerating financialisation of the arts, as evoked in the opening section and reflected globally in the secondary market. The narrative thus comes full circle, because the revaluation of August House was itself partly a consequence of the highly valued artistic activities within its walls.

In its assemblage of iterative moves, led by artworks to mirror the creative act itself, this article aims for a transversality to which Glissant refers in his cross-cultural poetics of relation. It stitches together a biography and an obituary, beginnings and endings, things that change and things that stay stubbornly the same, a commonplace face-brick exterior and wonderland interior, the banality of process and aura of finished artefact, the everyday act of making juxtaposed with the singular drama of relocation. Something about this paradoxical condition weaves a Johannesburg where apparently contradictory conditions exist side by side. It is the experience of hearing More Blessings, a shopkeeper adjacent August House, play non-stop charismatic religious sermons by day and the soundtrack of violent Nollywood movies by night.

August House is dead; long live August House!

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The liminal music studio: between the geographical and the virtual

Simon Order

Abstract

The dramatic anthropological shifts in music production practices in the post-analogue world have been primarily driven by the ever-increasing functionality of digital audio technologies. Technologies are pertinent actors in the music production process, more than ever before. A new trend in music production is a move towards the mobile tablet computer as a production tool. This article emerged from my own practice-led research into music production on a tablet computer whilst travelling, and at international destinations. Using evocative autoethnography, I diarised my mobile music production, concluding that mobility positively impacted creativity. Reflection led me to ask: What factors are at play and could a theorisation of mobile production practice be articulated? Mobility is more than transplanting music production to another place. Rather, mobility asks us to reconsider fundamental notions central to musical practice. Space and environment become cognitive stimuli, echoing the seminal work by Mel Rhodes on creativity. Rhodes popularised the term 'press' to describe the multi-factorial impact of experience on human creativity. This study theorises a multi-sensorial approach where human mobility and connection with place enhance musical creativity. Second, music data mobility amplifies production options. The connected mobile musician can absorb the perceptual richness of physical travel and also the stimuli of the electronic ether. Where is creativity? This article proposes that creativity for the mobile musician is experienced in a liminal space between the geographical and the virtual.

Keywords: creativity, ethnography, mobile media, music production, soundscape, synaesthesia

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Introduction

> Creativity can be counted among those very special ways that human beings can display optimal functioning. (Simonton 2000: 151)

This article establishes a multi-sensorial theorisation of creativity for the mobile music production practitioner. The human interface with the physical geographical world, in this production mobility context, has been largely overlooked. Similarly, the impact of music data mobility via the virtual connections of mobile devices has received little attention. *Multi-sensorial* and *inter-sensorial* are umbrella terms that have emerged from this study as ways to corral the factors that impact a mobile music producer's creativity. These terms also permeate the literature review reflecting a supporting body of ideas. Creativity has long been theorised as the interplay between multiple technologies, environments and social actors (Csikszentmihalyi 1988; MacIntyre 2012; Rhodes 1961). Similarly, mobile music playback and its associated theorisation of aesthetic control (Bull 2010, 2012) have been described as a way of managing the many factors of daily life, using a customisable audio sound track to fashion a directorial experience. This is harnessing the inter-sensory nature of personal music playback in the mobile paradigm.

The author's own mobile music production practice informed the development of this theoretical model. A ten-track music album was produced while travelling over a four-year period. Ethnographic notes were made during the production of musical artefacts[1] in the manner of sensory anthropology (Pink and Howes 2010). These writings suggested there was an abstracted liminal workspace between the geographical physical environment and the virtual technological environment. This workspace was where the author received perceptual cues and a perceived enhancement of creativity. Dominant theoretical themes around the notions of mobility and connectivity also became apparent. These themes are explored in the article's extended results section and exist in strong relation to relevant theoretical terrains. This article identifies five interconnected theoretical lenses of mobility and connectivity.

The 'presses' of creativity

One of the earliest writers on creativity suggests the term 'press' to describe the relationship between human beings and their environment (Rhodes 1961: 308). Creative outcomes are affected and modified by the press of the environment. Rhodes employs the term 'environment' in a non-specific way to include multiple factors such as the temperature of a particular space and how that affects an individual's creativity. Temperature can refer to a social or technological climate, which presses on individuals in creative practice. Similarly, inventions and great discoveries seldom

result from just one great mind. Existing culture and technology create an 'aggregate of minor inventions' often allowing one individual to add the final step towards a great invention (ibid: 309). A world which is ever-changing because of practitioner and data mobility suggests a constantly evolving press for the mobile musician. The multi-factorial view of creativity is further expanded by that mobility.

Interestingly for this article, Csikszentmihalyi (1988: 325) believes the most useful question to ask is: Where is creativity? Rather than attempting to study the action of isolated individuals, he states that creativity occurs within a dynamic interplay between three forces: (1) the discipline's domain or language (e.g., mathematics consists of symbols); (2) the field, the individuals who act as discipline gatekeepers, such as teachers and critics; and (3) the person whose creativity generates a new idea using the domain and is then recognised by the field. This is the system's view of creativity where each force affects the others. These three forces, as Csikszentmihalyi (1988: 329) explains, 'represent three moments of the same creative process' in 'circular causality'. A practitioner's mobility, the technology and data increase the number of those influences, received from swiftly changing environments.

MacIntyre (2012) emphasises this multi-factorial approach. The production of art is proposed as a collective product comprising complex social, ideological and economic factors that impact an individual's practice. The creative individual is actually a team player synthesising or even channelling these complex factors (ibid: 49–51). The notion of channelling or synthesising multiple perceptual cues is similar to this article's central argument: increased production mobility can potentially increase our connectivity with multiple perceptual cues.

Mobile music playback

Multi-factorial producer cues have also been enhanced by advancing technology. From the early days of sound recorded on wax cylinders and discs, technology has offered consumers a way to hear music far-removed from its source. Technology separates the performance from the action of listening in a specific venue (Burgess 2014: 66). Radio, especially, has been portrayed (Schafer 1994) as a schizophonic media experience. Sounds are removed from their original environment and broadcast with no source acoustic reference. Interestingly, the mobile music producer, who mixes together existing schizophonic audio fragments stored on mobile devices, reconceptualises a multi-factorial schizophonia. Audio from a multitude of sources can be recontextualised within the mobile device, and within the producer's environs. Therefore, technology and mobility amplify a cacophony of factors impacting creative practice.

Burgess (2014: 66–72) traces the history of mobile music consumption from the early bulky radio receivers of circa 1906, to the first Motorola[2] commercial car radio in

1930, to the 'The World's First Pocket Radio' in 1954.[3] Interestingly, *Time Magazine* hailed the mobility and miniaturisation of the latter as one of the hundred greatest and most influential technologies from 1923–2010. However, the real game-changer for Burgess was the compact cassette and subsequently the Walkman cassette:

> The Walkman was more than music to go. It introduced an epoch of individually determined aural and emotional environments and offered the wherewithal to isolate consciously from the surrounding environment. It permitted a wilful yet acceptable social barrier and introduced the fully customizable, everywhere audio experience. (Burgess 2014: 70–71)

In echoes of Schafer's (1994) schizophonic sounds, Walkman users could transfer their music to any location, recontexualising sounds within new environs, discovering a new 'intersensoriality' (Howes 2004: 9) where aesthetic control of sounds impacted the user's perception of life and its activities (Burgess 2014: 71). The user was thus impacted by a multitude of factors; perceptual environmental factors from mobility but also by the variable aesthetic control factor of personal music playback.

Aesthetic control

Ubiquitous listening (Kassabian 2013: 3) describes our modern use of music. We carry and wear music playback technology, managing music as omnipresent and simultaneous with our daily activities while enhancing our experiences of the banalities of life. Aesthetic control of one's audio environment can be likened to an intoxication of accompanied solitude. A personal soundtrack can make daily experiences more significant, poetic or appear 'super-real'.

The iPod enables a personal aesthetic audio colonisation by the listener of their immediate urban surrounds, a way of managing their reality or taking a form of directorial control over experience. There is a sense of cognitive empowerment where audio playback mastery can heighten a user's 'sense of presence or purpose' (Bull 2012: 197–201): 'These technologies of accompanied solitude deliver a desirable and intoxicating mixture of noise, proximity and privacy for users on the move' (Bull 2010: 177).

Bull suggests these experiences of enjoyable heightened awareness relate to users claiming power over their relationship with space and place. The act of personal sound colonisation is indicative of active configuration of their space (Bull 2010: 181). Similarly, Bauman (1993: 169) refers to

> aesthetic control – the unclouded beauty, beauty unspoiled by the fear of danger, guilty conscience or apprehension of shame ... it puts the spectator into the director's chair – with the actors unaware of who is sitting there ... the inconsequentiality of aesthetic is what makes its pleasures unclouded.

There is innocence and a lack of impact on the local space and people that makes this type of aesthetic control personally desirable.

At this point it is worth considering how this sense of aesthetic and directorial control or heightened awareness may manifest itself when producing music in the mobile paradigm, rather than consuming. Interestingly, technology has made this a potentially fertile creative space. As from January 2012, over 500 000 music apps were available for the iPhone. Such apps enable us to manage, interact or create our audio environment. As past sonic paradigms have been the acoustics of buildings and speaker placements, apps now enable micro-production environments, small-scale performances, all on a phone or tablet's screen (Kassabian 2013: 11–14).

Mobile music producers may find the power of aesthetic control experienced by mobile music consumers magnified, as the control of music creation offers more directorial omnipotence. The new context is a powerful multi-factorial one where music producers may manage their schizophonic productions within various types of mobile music technology and local environments.

The notion that one's environs can impact the creation of music has been tested to some degree. Producers and musicians alike have chosen specific places for recording because of desirable acoustics, social-cultural proximity or simply a good view or climate (Burgess 2014: 131–133). What is missing from current discourse is a multi-sensorial theorisation of mobile music production in terms of a producer using mobile music production technology whilst travelling and visiting foreign climes.

Methodology

The notion of *acoustemology* 'conjoins "acoustics" and "epistemology" to theorise sound as a way of knowing' (Feld 2015: 12). This study employs acoustemology to position the theorisation of mobile music production as an interdisciplinary, multi-stranded approach. The meanings of listening and audio production are not knowable by engaging purely with the dynamics of acoustics or the physicality of sound. Enquiry should engage simultaneously with social and technological actors, 'an experiential nexus of sonic sensation' (ibid.). Acoustemology does not make claims to 'truth' but rather points to a broader examination of actors in sound production. Feld (2015) emphasises a relational ontology of meaning and knowledge production. The social study of sound acknowledges 'conjunctions, disjunctions, and entanglements among all copresent and historically accumulated forms' (ibid: 12). There can be multiple actors, at different locations, using various technologies across variable networks that bring meaning to sound production. Production is better visualised as an experiential sensory 'connectedness of being' which is 'built on the between-ness of experience' (ibid: 13). Sensory anthropology is a field of

study seemingly appropriate to conceptualise the experiential nature of mobile sound production.

Anthropologists consider ethnographic practice as a defining field data collection approach. Such a strategy engages with how place or experience is interpreted by the senses (Pink and Howes 2010: 332), but, importantly, senses that are not necessarily conceived as isolated channels of reception (Ingold 2000). Rather, sensory anthropology might look towards neurology, where understanding of the senses is beginning to be viewed as a more unified model. The 'five senses do not travel along separate channels, but interact to a degree few scientists would have believed only a decade ago' (Cytowic 2010: 46). Therefore, sensory anthropology embraces interdisciplinary research, ways of perception outside the traditional area of anthropology; notably for this article, this includes the practice of artists, sociologists and scholars in perception (Pink and Howes 2010: 333). As Howes (2004: 9) states, it should be termed 'intersensoriality, that is, the multi-directional interaction of the senses and of sensory ideologies'.

Why not apply this model of intersensoriality to activities that are perceptually-rich, vibrant and cognitively immersive? (Pink and Howes 2010: 336). This article offers new anthropological insights into the relatively recent creative practice of mobile music production. The visceral nature of intersensoriality may best be captured with a method that embraces postmodern sensibilities such as 'evocative autoethnography', where the line between social science and creative arts is blurred (Anderson 2006: 377). Ethnographic sensory production notes were written soon after mobile music production activities to capture the essence of the intersensorial experience, with the notion of mobility as a guiding theme. Retrospectively, these notes were then analysed for existing dominant theoretical themes within the terrain of mobility to communicate some qualitative categories (Bernard and Ryan 2003; Dey 1993; Namey et al. 2008). These themes represent the resulting theorisation of mobile music production and a new discourse in sound production. Moreover, some of the production notes appear as illustrative excerpts in the results section.

A theorisation of mobile music production

Connecting is creating

The notion that *connectivity* can potentially enhance creativity is not new. Recent work supports the broad concept in relation to the virtual world of the web and social media (Gauntlett 2011). Connecting in and of itself can be an act of creativity: it can be connecting materials or media in a traditional craft sense of 'making', as well as the creativity of connecting in a social sense. Taking this social sense further, one can share acts of making in the world – sharing in the social virtual world increases our engagement with our creativity (ibid: 2).

Web-based technological advances have facilitated the ability to share and connect with acts of musical making globally. This is demonstrated by the 200 million users of SoundCloud, one of the web's most popular audio-sharing sites (Graham 2013). 'With every passing minute it purportedly adds twelve new hours of original uploaded music and miscellaneous audio, nine-tenths of which is played back within a day' (Butler and Lundgren 2014). Although the site was never specified for accelerating global music creativity, it provides advanced connective functionality; it offers nullification of physical place and the sharing of materials of creativity (Slater and Martin 2012: 61). My own production diary puts this notion of connection into a mobile music production workflow context:

> Location: Dubai, United Arab Emirates, airport transit lounge.
>
> It's been two weeks since I sent Chloe one of my instrumental songs for vocal collaboration. Today, while waiting in Dubai to board my flight to Perth I received a SoundCloud link from Chloe with a rough draft of a new vocal mix based on my original song. I sat there in the lounge listening to her vocal mix and quickly used SoundCloud to fire her back some feedback from my production slant on the song. After sending her the feedback, I sat in Dubai's airport lounge, experiencing the sights, sounds, smells of the location and reflected on what had just happened. I felt a buzz of excitement hearing the new song version; I grabbed a coffee to celebrate. At that moment in the airport lounge, I realised that we had something special coming together. The new ideas sounded fantastic. In my feedback to her I requested that she send me the clean vocal track so I could add it to the larger instrumental project. It arrived just before I boarded my flight. I then spent my flight editing and producing the new vocal version of our song, the buzz of collaboration (and coffee) still zinging. (September 2013)[4]

This excerpt distils a few moments of creative joy for me. I am excited that connecting with these technologies, as I can in a mobile sense, facilitates an 'always-on' opportunity for creative musical endeavours. These moments also hint at the *press* (Rhodes 1961) of the airport physical environment. The new liminal music studio emerges between the geographical airport lounge and the virtuality of my technology.

Using sites such as SoundCloud, the acts of making, sharing, connecting and creativity have become inextricably linked in the virtual world (Gauntlett 2011: 4). From a psychological standpoint, these sites increase the range of possible perceptual audio/visual inputs and impacts on our creativity. Psychologist Dean Keith Simonton (2000, 1997) agrees, at least on the visual. He cites experimental studies showing visual stimulation functions in the development of creativity (Finke, Ward and Smith cited in Simonton 2000: 152). This psychological take on experiential perception could explain why connectivity is such a creative force (Gauntlett 2011).

Using the logic of Gauntlet (2011) and Simonton (2000), the idea of connection as creativity with people and materials can be extended to place. Connecting with our location involves experiencing another set of human perceptual inputs. Our location will connect with our senses in an immersive fashion inasmuch as a mobile computing device. The mobility of music production has the potential for ever-changing perceptual stimulation for the practitioner. What is not clear is how this stimulation of one sense produces ideas that may apply to different senses. What is the neuronal connection?

Corresponding is creating

Inter-sensory correspondence is one way of explaining how the stimulation of one sense can produce ideas that may apply to other senses. Medical synaesthesia can be used as a scientific reference to discuss inter-sensory correspondence. This is a physical health condition that affects a small minority of the population (Gross 2014). Baron-Cohen and Harrison (1997: 1) term this *genuine* synaesthesia, where extra modes of perception are triggered without external prompting. Among genuine synaesthetes (those diagnosed with the medical condition) (Gross 2014), colour-hearing is the most common cross-sensory correspondence, where an audio stimulus produces a second visual perception. For example, on hearing the note C, a blob of red colour appears in the vision of those affected by the condition. The violation of normal perception separates the condition from artistic fancy or purple prose (Cytowic 1989).

I am not a medically diagnosed synaesthete;[5] rather, I propose that the cross-sensory *metaphor* of synaesthesia (Order 2000: 1) can help theorise the multi-modality of mobile sensory experience. History tells of numerous artists using metaphorical synaesthesia as an approach to creativity. This romantic interpretation most notably includes the poetry of Basho (Odin 1986), Charles Baudelaire (Baudelaire 1978), Arthur Rimbaud (Cytowic 1989: 29–47), the writings of Isaac Newton (Dann 1998: 8), John Locke (Locke [1690]1961), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Goethe 1970), Sir Francis Galton (Galton 1883), the music of Alexander Scriabin (Matlaw 1979) and the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky (Kandinsky 1914).

With this kind of artistic legacy, creative practitioners have come to regard synaesthesia as a pathway in the 'search for unity and universal language' (Dann 1998: 11).

> Synaesthesia is a short-cut way of calculating realities, of attaching significance to things. But it could well be called a common sense, that peculiar human power of translating one kind of experience of one sense into all other senses, presenting that result as a unified image of the mind. (Cytowic 1989: 5)

We are all synaesthetic to some degree, because 'intersense transfer' (Merriam 1964: 87) has been found in healthy test subjects. For creative practice it matters little whether the condition is medically diagnosed. Recent research (Doran 2015; Goodhew, Freire and Edwards 2015) shows those engaged in creative pursuits were over-represented as medically diagnosed synaesthetes (Domino 1989; Ward et al. 2008: 135). The studies by Doran (2015) and Goodhew et al. (2015) confirmed anecdotal evidence that pseudo-synaesthetes used their inter-sensory metaphors for creativity.

Whether we are on a sun-kissed beach or at an airport, multi-modal environmental perceptions affect creative practice. This extract from my production diary suggests a strong inter-sensory translation:

> Location: Beach Chalet, Rottnest Island, Western Australia.
>
> Today the song started as a formless few bars of hi-hat and vague bass synth melody. I was grasping at straws with this one. As the day wore on, so did my struggle. It was a simple idea at first and then it morphed into sonic mud. It niggled at me all afternoon and into the evening. I gave up after dinner but was back there once the house was quiet. At 2.30am I took off my headphones, returning my mind to the little chalet kitchen. The wind was whistling around the little unit, through the gaps in the windows, under the door. A squall was coming. I looked out across Longreach Bay. I spied the waning moon briefly illuminating the shore line but then it vanished, swallowed by a wall of dark cloud. The surf took a violent turn, crashing mercilessly below our balcony. The rain began, slowly at first and then a downpour whipped across the bay, lashing at the windows. I was confounded by the weather's swift dark turn in the middle of my composition. At 3.30am, still awake, the storm had seeped into my psyche; this synaesthetic virus had entered my work space. The song, now a dark, brooding inescapable creature reaching out to the listener, was beginning to say something worth hearing.[6] (June 2014)

This diary entry evokes the multi-sensorial *press* (Rhodes 1961) of the storm on a musical composition. Mobile music technology offers an ever-changing flow of multi-sensory input. The creative space for mobile music producers is somewhere between the physicality of the storm and the virtuality of technology. The physical is where this article turns next.

Location is creating

The World Soundscape Project, initiated by R. Murray Schafer in the late 1960s, sought to heighten awareness of the relationship between humanity and the sonic environment (Schafer 1994; Truax 1999). Schafer believed that we are responsible for the composition and health of our sonic environment, and its effect on humanity. It follows that mobile musical production situated in the wider soundscape is

significantly impacted by the existing sonic environment and vice versa. Composer Hildegard Westerkamp has produced significant work in this field of environmental and musical interaction (Westerkamp 2002: 52).[7]

Westerkamp's (2014) compositions include 'urban, rural or wilderness soundscapes, with the voices of children, men and women, with noise or silence, music and media sounds, or with the sounds of different cultures'. Her work is at the centre of the larger field of soundscape composing. In 1993, the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology brought together like-minded organisations to study the soundscape (WFAE 2014). Soundscape artists and composers demonstrate the environment as the primary influence in their creative outcomes.

Lewis Kaye (2013) uses headphones and mobile music playback within the soundscape. He believes 'we must consider headphones themselves as permeable membranes' (ibid: 6). The personal soundtrack exists within and is 'conditioned' by the soundscape (Berland 2011). Kaye believes this sensory duality offers creative opportunities. His experiential soundscape compositions involve listening to pre-recorded soundscape compositions while in those same soundscapes. He explains that 'each composition becomes part of a real time soundtrack for a specific location and installation: temporally displaced and diaphanous acoustic layers born of, and sympathetic with, the living sound that surrounded the listeners' (Kaye 2013: 11).

My own experience of travelling suggests a similar conclusion, where the soundscape enters my composition. The below diary entry reflects on composing whilst travelling on the Tube in London:

> Location: London Underground, London, United Kingdom.
>
> I was under the ground, inside the earth, inside a tube, inside my headphones, inside my evolving composition. Two hours each day I sat in the crowded juddering carriages, immersed in my headphones, writing music, observing people, as they sat, as they stood, getting on and off, different faces, different clothes, different smells and different moods; an ever-changing, dream-like procession of perceptual richness. It became a blurry movie screen, too much input for one human. It was the local soundscape that took centre stage, with my headphones turned down more than usual. I could hear conversations, announcements, and the iconic sound of the tube train rattling along the tunnels. I pressed 'record' and let the world into my creation ... 'Mind the gap.' [8] (September 2013)

The visual stimulation mentioned here is palpable. The song was named *Subway Dream* because of the dream-like experience and resultant dream-like song. Recording the outer soundscape and merging that with the inner soundscape in the final song was effective. Mobile production therefore has the capacity for connection with location, rather than being isolationist (Kaye 2013: 13).

Data mobility is creating

> Mobile music as a term covers any musical activity using portable devices that are not tethered to a specific stationary locale; in particular those where the activity dynamically follows users and takes advantage of the mobile setting, thereby leveraging novel forms of musical experience. (Gaye et al. 2006: 22)

Gaye et al. (ibid: 23) describe mobile music production as a 'tension between music and place … as new relationships between musician, listener and music'. Mobile music is more than simply transplanting music production to another place; rather, '[s]pace and place become tangible stimulus parameters' (ibid.). Increasingly, producers are using mobile and miniaturised music technologies to create music (Slater and Martin 2012). They are equally able to use their tablets to edit studio demos while on the train, or to record a hip hop track using their phone while at the beach. The use of portable technology means that 'the possible location of creativity is now significantly expanded' (ibid.) and with modern mobility comes connectivity.

Mobile connective data technologies facilitate a temporal and spatial dispersal of creativity (ibid.). Modern data mobility makes it easier to move productions between 'studio' locations, thereby potentially increasing the number of actors involved in a project. Data mobility also offers added longevity to projects by expanding the chances of revisiting/editing a recording or even remixing (ibid: 71).

The most exciting development around data mobility is the website WholeWorldBand (Godley 2014), the creation of Kevin Godley, video director and member of the band 10cc (Sinclair 2014). Godley likens the portal to a musical chain letter, where the composition process is fluid, allowing musicians in multiple locations to contribute. The website is supported by industry heavyweights including Ronnie Wood (the Rolling Stones) and Stuart Copeland (the Police). Wood and Copeland have contributed 'seed tracks' to the portal, which allows anybody to expand these compositions. Users can also upload their own seed tracks. As Copeland explains, 'it's reviving the power of campfire music – that moment when musicians of different abilities join in rather than sit passively ... you open the floodgates ... everybody's got a chance to share that cool idea' (Sinclair 2014).

The creative compositional possibilities are multiplied by the mobility of data in time and place. Data mobility positions music as 'liquid as code' (Born 2005: 28), flowing easily along global information highways. This diary excerpt illustrates data mobility entering my compositional workflow:

> Location: Lombok, Indonesia.
>
> I recorded audio on my iPad outside an Islamic school, where a primary-age child was rehearsing his *adhan/azan* (Muslim call to prayer). It was impressive listening to this young child training to be a Muezzin, destined to be an important part of his community.

> Back in my hotel I enjoyed listening to the recording and started to toy with sample juxtapositions including drum and percussion loops and a guitar part in my audio library. I figured that these might work well with this brand new piece of field audio. I accessed my audio library on a computer in my home in Fremantle, Western Australia, remotely and downloaded the files I needed. This was the first time I had done this. It felt creatively liberating to be a mobile music producer travelling in Indonesia in the first instance, but to have such data mobility at my fingertips was equally empowering for my creative endeavours.[9] (January 2014)

Ironically, data mobility in this example potentially reduces the notion of place as a creative factor. However, combined with practitioner mobility in the geographical place, it lends support to this article's central argument. Musical creativity is not in one space; it is in liminal multisensory spaces, between geographical and virtual production locations. This liminality repositions creative space away from traditional studios (Gibson 2005: 192–193). Locations, musicians, technologies and producers are all partners in mobility's dance. Creativity can be considered a contributory object, 'embodying social relations … by spinning forms of connectedness across time and space' (Born 2005: 8).

Musician mobility is creating

The hermitage of the static recording studio, either a home studio or a professional studio, has persisted until recently. Laptops have encouraged some mobility amongst music producers. Most notably, Eric Wahlforss[10] of SoundCloud fame released a 2003 album, *Soulhack*, which exemplifies intentional mobile creativity. He describes the production as '[an] odyssey which started off with a counterfeit inter-rail ticket thru Europe. The only luggage being a laptop and a whole lot of songs, songs that just needed a final finish' (Sonarkollektiv 2003). A unique relationship existed between Wahlforss and his laptop, which was 'an extension of his own self, a unique unification that result[ed] in the establishment of something you could call digital soul'. The very movement through time and space shapes the outcome of creativity (ibid.).

Wahlforss founded SoundCloud in 2007 and now serves as its chief technology officer. In a revealing conference presentation, Wahlforss (2015) describes SoundCloud as a social platform for sound, 'something important for mankind'. His passion for mobility is amusingly illustrated by an interview anecdote about the hiring of SoundCloud's mobile content manager. When the candidate was asked about her mobile phone, she replied: 'Which one? I have so many, I love mobile phones; I actually sleep with them.' For Wahlforss, the candidate's passion for mobile technology was exactly what he envisioned for that position – a position she was later successful in obtaining (Wahlforss 2011).

Mobility has also become a feature of production for more high-profile musicians. In 2010, the album *The Fall*, produced by Daman Alban (Gorillaz, Blur), was released. The album is special because it was largely made on an iPad tablet while on tour. Hotel rooms and tour buses became Alban's new mobile studio. The album sleeve notes detail a journey across America as each track was recorded at separate locations, along with the specific apps that were employed (Gorillaz 2010). Alban, not really a fan of technology, likened the process to his early days with a simple portable four-track recorder and a guitar (Llewellyn Smith and Doward 2010). The album went on to receive critical and experimental acclaim (Metacritic 2011).

Interestingly, in comparison to Wahlforss and his 'digital soul', Alban suggests his retrograde creative process was similar to using the earliest mobile four-track recording devices. The common feature, however, is how the nature of musician mobility repositions the workspace as liminal, in-between two interfaces: the production interface and the location. Similarly, my own mobile music production outcomes were eloquently described by my music publisher as

> [a]n ongoing travelogue between identities, physical places and states of consciousness. Many of these dreamy, evocative slices of ambient electronica evolved on hand-held mobile devices, away from the studio, while travelling or visiting new places. This sense of contemplative, exploratory rootlessness imbues his work with the wistfulness and open narrative we often associate with travel.[11]

Waxing lyrically about the power of mobility is qualitatively indicative of the creative potential that travel may provide for the musician, but there has also been limited quantitative research conducted which offers similar conclusions (Gurman 1989).

Psychological testing and creating

Psychological research has explored the positive effects of travel on creativity (Gurman 1989). Gurman undertook experiments involving two sets of American psychology students enrolled in the same university course: one group in London, and the other in the United States. Gurman employed a pre- and post-Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (Torrance 1980).[12] The results showed that those respondents who travelled to London scored significantly higher. 'It was concluded that foreign travel and the concomitant variety of novel experiences could stimulate creative responding' (Gurman 1989: 13). Simonton (2000: 153) takes this a step further:

> Creative potential seems to require a certain exposure to (a) diversifying experiences that help weaken the constraints imposed by conventional socialisation and (b) challenging experiences that help strengthen a person's capacity to persevere in the face of obstacles. These developmental inputs may be especially important for artistic forms of creative behaviour.

In similar vein, there is evidence that exposure to cultural diversity may enhance creativity: 'Creative activity in a civilisation tends to increase after it has opened itself to extensive alien influences, whether through immigration, travel abroad, or studying under foreign teachers' (ibid: 152). Travelling by its very nature often enriches our cultural inputs, including connectivity with the new and unfamiliar. This lends support to enhanced creativity for the mobile musician and helps explain my own convictions that travelling significantly enhanced the quality of my creative outcomes.

Conclusion

The commonality in the above approaches to mobile music production is of a multi-sensorial experience. Creativity is in-between spaces, a liminal, abstracted, inter-sensory workflow.

Connection via the web and associated 2.0 technologies nullifies place in some ways where information is ultimately sharable. Audiences, feedback and interaction can be global. Actors in the web-sphere can interconnect in a rhizomatic fashion, thereby making the creative possibilities endless. A multi-sensory theorisation of mobile music production is appropriate because it corrals the perceptual inputs from the virtual sphere and the geographical inputs of place within the liminal music studio.

The discussion around synaesthesia is rooted in the perception of the real world. Sensory stimulus into one sense may trigger stimulus in another. The process in our brains is mysterious; however, the connection is well documented. Many have used this phenomenon of correspondence as a metaphorical creative tool. Once the music producer leaves the static traditional recording studio, the multi-sensory input of new places has the potential to increase synaesthetic metaphor and expand creative outcomes. In this instance, an added inter-sensorial theorisation of mobile music production expands the multi-sensory case.

As soundscape artists will testify, connection with location has the ability to significantly influence musical creativity. Mobile technology allows us to connect with an ever-transient flow of perceptual input from our mobile devices, but also the real-time soundscape. The perceptions here are simultaneous and interlinked. A music producer is connected to his/her internal device's information flow, but also to the audio from the soundscape through the porous membrane of their headphones. Connection with location also includes the human inputs of vision, smell and touch. These experiential perceptions may impact creativity via the previous corresponding connection of synaesthesia. Geographical place is a key multi-sensorial experience.

Conversely, music data mobility on our mobile devices reduces the importance of location. We have no need of a physical music studio to store data, record

performances and edit or mix our compositions. Connection with place is repositioned. In conclusion, I return to Csikszentmihalyi (1988: 325), who believed the most useful question to ask is: Where is creativity? Creativity for me occurs in a liminal music studio, somewhere between the geographical and the virtual.

Notes

1 The musical work from the project is published by Hidden Shoal Records and released under the name Liminal Drifter. See http://liminaldrifter.bandcamp.com/album/troubled-mystic

2 'Radio officially became mobile when William Powell Lear assisted Chicago-based Galvin Manufacturing in designing the first car radio. Galvin introduced this under the name Motorola in 1930' (Burgess 2014: 67).

3 'Shockley, Bardeen and Brattain's 1947 invention of the transistor would allow orders of magnitude of miniaturization and truly portable, battery-operate devices. By 1954 the I.D.E.A. Co of Indianapolis began advertising the Regency TR1: The World's First Pocket Radio' (Burgess 2014: 68).

4 For the song *Troubled Mystic* see http://liminaldrifter.bandcamp.com/track/troubled-mystic-2 (released August 2015).

5 'Synaesthete' is used to describe someone who is affected by medical synaesthesia.

6 For the song *Dark Sunlight* see http://liminaldrifter.bandcamp.com/track/dark-sunlight (released August 2015).

7 http://www.sfu.ca/~westerka/compositions.html

8 For the song *Subway Dream* see http://liminaldrifter.bandcamp.com/track/subway-dream (released August 2015).

9 For *A Love Song for Ghosts* see http://liminaldrifter.bandcamp.com/track/a-love-song-for-ghosts (released August 2015).

10 Eric Wahlforss goes by the moniker Forss, https://soundcloud.com/forss

11 For this album's promotional information see http://www.hiddenshoal.com/project/liminal-drifter/ (released August 2015).

12 The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking test for divergent thinking and problem-solving skills, and are generally scored around four criteria: fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration (Torrance 1980).

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Vignette
‘On the Line’: a report on shifting collaborations around clotheslines

Susan Ossman

Abstract

This vignette tells the story of ‘On the Line’, a Riverside, California series of exhibitions, performances, research and participatory interventions that focus on clotheslines to probe divisions of life and art, gender and culture and generation. Who does your laundry? What does an electric dryer indicate about changing relationships to nature? How do movements and conversations around laundry lines differ across the world? Each event has associated art and ethnography differently, building on earlier work to develop varied modes of spectatorship, participation, research and dialogue. The programme started with my work: first a painting, then in 2013 the first ‘On the Line’ exhibition. Artists, anthropologists and graduate students developed a ‘critique’ and then a ‘remake’ of that exhibition called ‘On the Line: A Second look’. The circle of collaborative research and practice widened and produced ‘Hanging Out’ in 2015. That exhibition was developed as a site for fieldwork, collaboration and performance, leading to a project to expand the widening circle of participation with outdoor pop-up exhibitions and performances in neighbourhoods across the city in 2016. I propose an engaged, insider’s account of the process to suggest how focusing on a simple, nearly universal practice across scenes designed to shift participants’ roles and positions, brought something of the estrangement and iterative qualities of fieldwork to collaborative practices and public discussions.

Keywords: art, collaboration, design, ethnography, memory, participation

‘On the Line’ is a collaborative programme of exhibitions, performances and participatory interventions. This Riverside, California-based project focuses on clotheslines to examine lines of all kinds: those traced across paper or sand,

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developed in arguments, strung across the sky like powerlines, or those of blood and inheritance. Who does your laundry? What does an electric dryer indicate about changing relationships to nature, technological change and social transformation? How do movements and conversations around laundry lines differ across the world? Reflecting on clotheslines and laundry, one addresses issues of aesthetics and ordinary life, work and gender, class and culture. One offers opportunities for encouraging dialogue about gender and class, cultural differences and generational ruptures. Thinking through laundry, one can raise difficult issues in ways that are more personal, less threatening and involve fewer prefabricated discourses and preconceptions than by raising issues that are topics of public discourse. From the perspective of California, where mechanical washers and dryers prevail, art inspired by laundry lines stimulates thoughts of the past, of other places, and about our relationship to the environment. We explore the myriad gestures and metaphors of washing, drying and hanging laundry on the line in a long-term programme that associates art and ethnography in a variety of ways, so that theory and practice, individual and collaborative work, nurture one another.

The project started with a clothesline-inspired abstraction I painted in the midst of fieldwork in Morocco. Years later, in California, I developed a body of work on this theme, which featured in the first 'On the Line' exhibition in 2013 at La Sierra University's Brandstater Gallery. For the final week of that exhibition, I invited my graduate seminar at the University of California, Riverside (UCR) and artists and anthropologists from several other universities to remake the exhibition by creating dialogues with my paintings and installations with their own work. 'On the Line: A Second Look' concluded with a conference and a plan to continue and expand the project. In 2015, a new seminar and the support of the Riverside Arts Council enabled us to host a third exhibition at a gallery in an open-air mall. It was conceived as a kind of 'arti-ficial' site for ethnography, performance and participatory works (Ossman 2014). The group is currently preparing to move out of the gallery with a series of outdoor pop-up exhibitions across the city in 2016. From a single piece inspired by fieldwork, to this programme of public art, 'On the Line' has developed by linking scenes that associate art and ethnography in different ways, entailing a process that does not simply widen the circle of participants and publics, but has been devised to shift their practices and positions.

Shannon Jackson points out that artists often seek to create 'disruptions', for instance through the movement from one medium to another (Jackson 2011: 2; Nakashima Degarrod 2013). Physical and cultural displacement is another central trope of cultural anthropology's ethos and epistemology. In our work we have variously mingled, associated and redeployed a variety of media and ethnographic methods, doing so bit by bit, experimenting in each new step with different associations. Each stage is calculated to shift the practice and positions of

participants, whether in their practice or in the ways they and their work are identified and positioned. While focusing on laundry lines, participants engage in an iterative process that includes experiences of new media, new associations of research and practice, and unfamiliar (potentially threatening) modes of engaging people from other disciplines, along with the public. The association of these different scenes resembles methods of participant observation, with its self-reflexive and embodied ways of coming to know. But scenes are deliberately devised in a spirit more typical of art than anthropology. Indeed, anthropologists have only recently begun to see themselves as designers of spaces and scenes that not only frame, but also provoke the contexts and encounters they study (Rabinow et al. 2008). Each exhibition, performance or participatory intervention of 'On the Line' encourages self-reflection in the manner of fieldwork, but the linked scenes are collectively experienced and shape a 'collective memory' of the project (Kester 2013: 147–149). A flickering between this assemblage of memories and the sense impressions of the present research/event intensifies the programme's affective import and critical potential. It does this by creating the possibility of 'social reflexivity' for those who conceive and make the exhibitions and performances, but also for those who contribute to them by following the programme as audiences, interviewees and sometimes participants. As the director of the project, I have been responsible for shaping these diverse sites and scenes according to opportunities that present themselves, or that I seek out. At the same time, as an artist, anthropologist, teacher, object of critique, interviewee, viewer and collaborator in others' work, I have experienced challenges and extensions of my own practices in all these areas. I touch on several key moments in the evolution of 'On the Line' to suggest how its strategic, unfolding format – not quite organic, yet not predetermined – is itself a method, a form of practice, for creating scenes of reflection and theorisation that draw on both artistic and anthropological precedents. I begin with an explanation for the choice of theme.

Scene one: origins

I painted *Hang Dry # 1* in my spacious flat in Rabat in 1994. In Morocco, under Hassan II directly addressing 'important' issues was more than difficult. Paying close attention to day-to-day exchanges and practices was a tactic for politicians and journalists as well as artists and anthropologists to skirt censorship and avoid imprisonment (Ossman 1994; Slyomovics 2005). I turned from working on direct political discourse to studying conversations and practices in beauty salons, beginning in Casablanca and shaping a 'field' that extended toward Paris and Cairo – hubs of media and politics for the Arab, Mediterranean and Francophone worlds. Framing a field of inquiry, without doing so 'naturally', in a contiguous location or according to the usual regional maps, meant that I referenced a place of modern sociability.

Figure 1: Susan Ossman, *Hang Dry #1* (1994). Oil on canvas, 122 cm x 79 cm.

I thus engaged in a form of ethnographic design that was unusual, and that I now see as connected to my work as an artist (Marcus 1995; Ossman 2002). At the time, however, I did not dwell on this inspiration and my experiments in ethnography did not really inform my art. In line with my exploration of women's worlds, I developed a body of work that focused on quotidian beauty practices and domestic chores. Natalia Zagorska-Thomas (2013) writes that the

> paintings appear to be in a state of flux. The work has a strong sense of place, but at the same time, the depictions of fabric produce a feeling of impermanence and shapeshifting evocative of transient lives where landscape, language and a sense of self are forever being renegotiated .... The inclusion of text in several languages leads us to perceive it primarily as a visual and conceptual cipher for language itself with its potential for creating parallel universes and shifts of meaning in translation.

Yet, in spite of anthropology's 'critical turn' in the late 1980s, I did not fully realise the impact of my ethnographic designs on my art, or envisage a clear method of associating these two ways of probing concepts, practices and environments. The 'abstraction' of research conducted in a field composed of dispersed locations linked by a common practice was publishable, even ground-breaking. But the painting inspired by a woman combing another's hair, which I proposed for the cover of my

book on beauty salons, was rejected as 'too abstract'. My editor said 'anthropologists need illustrations'.

Hang Dry #1 and my other 'Moroccan' art followed me from Morocco to Paris to Washington D.C. and then to London: in those cold climates I sometimes looked at this field of Naples yellow cut by a turquoise 'clothesline' to conjure up the warmth of the Moroccan sun. But in 2007, when I moved to California, I put it away. One day I took it out, and noticed how the new environment had changed my perception. A buttery field of colour stretched beyond the edges of the 'Moroccan' picture to blend with the scenes presented by my office window. Gazing from the painting toward the parched, rocky rise of Mt Rubidoux rising beyond my garden, I *felt*, indeed, *knew* for an instant that I was in Ouarzazate. Like the field I had strung among cities to compose a field to study modern beauties, the painting appeared as an alternative to the two-dimensional maps of geopolitics. The canvas, which some in the art world might see as a relic of 'expressionism' (instilled in me by my training as an artist in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1970s) had not changed. [1] But by shifting its location, my way of associating with the work had changed. And this alerted me to broader continuities between places and experiences. Looking up from my desk, letting my eye wander past the painting's edge, I sometimes expected to see billowing sheets and bright pyjamas on sun-drenched terraces. These mingled with the sound of my mother's voice, chatting with neighbours as she pinned laundry to a line that spanned the entire back yard of our suburban Chicago home in the 1960s. I recalled a super 8 film I made of my grandmother taking down clothes from her line for a film class at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1978.

While the old painting spun this imaginary cloth of women gathered around clotheslines, I realised that my neighbours considered *my* practice of drying my clothes in the sun to be unusual. I knew that in America it has been several decades since the hum of electric dryers replaced the sound of women exchanging news as they hang out their clothes to dry. But I was startled that the laundry I strung across my patio was taken as an inadvertent work of activist art: a highly successful one, if the capacity to produce talk is a measure of success. Observing my socks, skirts or sheets drying in the hot sun, neighbours, delivery people – even the man who reads the gas meter each month – seemed compelled to remark on my exotic custom. Some become confessional and apologetic: 'I'd love to save energy and be ecological, but I just have so many kids and besides the towels get crunchy and stiff.' Others imagined my dryer was broken and that I couldn't replace it, having fallen on hard times with the economic downturn. Exhibiting my laundry branded me as an ecological extremist for some, while others came up with cultural explanations which they politely shared: 'Do they still do that in France? In England as well? Isn't it cold and damp there?' ('So many years abroad, made her eccentric.') While several

of my neighbours display the stars and stripes of the American flag along with more personal emblems, they seem not to perceive the similarity between the graceful fluttering of that fabric in the wind and my sheets dancing in the breeze, or to hear the way both become percussion instruments when the ferocious Santa Ana winds blow in from the desert.

I learned that in California clothes hung out for all to see conjure images of foreign places where time might still be 'slow', of people who are poor or do not have the benefit of modern labour-saving technologies, or cultures whose women are confined to the home and expend all their energy on domestic work. Yet, because of this distance, laundry on the line can also be judged positively. Even as my laundry suggested that I had time on my hands, it summoned images of a past when everyone had time to pay attention to the colour and weave of each piece of cloth they pinned to wire or twine. All but the very youngest still recalled their mothers or grandmothers hanging laundry on the line. These memories opened up possibilities for amplifying and expanding clotheslines reflections. Thus, even as *Hang Dry #1* blended Californian and Moroccan landscapes, the ribbon of white I'd etched by making marks with my fingers across the painting, came to suggested a practice deemed exotic, foreign or historical in this new home. And my patio, with its changing exhibition of towels, socks and duvet covers, became a site of incipient fieldwork. Shifting from the taken-for-granted beauty of laundry blowing in the wind in Rabat, to an awareness of the *absence* of laundry on the line in a similar climate, led me to develop a body of work that explores laundry lines within the works I displayed in my first solo exhibition at La Sierra University's Brandstater Gallery.

One gallery, two exhibitions

> *On the Line* leads us to recall fresh laundry's associations with purity, intimacy and propriety and to question which social bindings are loosened when the fresh scent and delicate touch of sheets on the line become just a memory. (Ossman 2013)

Hang Dry #1 joined 25 other pieces in the first 'On the Line' exhibition in February 2013. Some of these investigated the relationship of landscape to human 'lines' drawn across it, be they freeways, aqueducts or laundry lines. Others referenced the social life that fades when dryers become widespread, but also the way class and gender determine practices of, and attitudes toward, laundry. Memory became much more central to this work in the United States. I drew on my own childhood memories to develop works like *My Mother/Your Mother/What Colour?* – a diptych in which paper clothespins are gathered, as though in conflict, against a background of primary colours that spell out the words of an American jump-rope ditty:

> My mother and your mother were hanging out clothes
>
> My mother punched your mother right in the nose
>
> What colour blood came out?
>
> Red, yellow, green, blue.[2]

Exploring racial divisions led to works referencing kinship and notions of lineage – themes central to anthropology. New conversations across anthropology and the arts gave me confidence as I developed works on a larger scale and employed a greater variety of media than I had before. The large installation 'What Goes Unsaid' anchored the exhibition and offered a literal sampling of my field notes. As a critic described it: It consisted of

> five rectangular, gossamer bags containing torn up messages and hanging from the ceiling in the center of the room … a spectacle in its own right—fragile and light yet large-scale. It was appealing from distance and upon closer inspection, invited the viewer to read portions of the notes, or secret messages. (Balderama 2013)

Those scraps of paper were unpublished field notes, never-submitted or rejected articles, diary entries and letters I had never posted. This literal exhibition of the unspoken words or the laundry that is too dirty to hang out, suggested why anthropologists might turn to art to explore not just what cannot be conveyed in words, but as a way of contemplating knowledge deemed incomplete or inappropriate for publication or even private correspondence. This was a theme that the graduate seminar I held at UCR in conjunction with the exhibition had many occasions to explore, first in my exhibition, and then when they were joined by artists and anthropologists from several area universities to develop a second exhibition that took up the theme of laundry to critique, expand and comment on my work in a new, collaborative exhibition, 'On the Line: A Second Look'.

Exhibitions are usually the culmination of years of work: end-points that live on in catalogues or critics' articles. Some travel to other places. But rarely do they mutate into new exhibitions in the same location. This is what I proposed for 'Second Look'. Some artists joined the project simply because they were impressed that I would 'give up' a week of 'my' exhibition time for this experiment. But I saw this as an opportunity to receive feedback and develop work across art and anthropology, rather than an authorial 'self-sacrifice' (Jackson 2011: 70). Rather than feeling that leaving a zone of self-expression, control and security was risky, asking others to intervene was, in a way, a return to a familiar, scholarly habitus in which concepts and research findings are reviewed, tested and reinterpreted by others in a process that is fairly systematic, if not objective. Thus, in this situation it was probably the other anthropologists, who ventured into developing artworks, who would be taking the biggest 'risk', along with the artists who joined them, who would be relinquishing

their role as experts/specialists, for they were willing to show their work alongside that of non-artists (Kester 2013: 8).

In the seminar, students and artists read about domestic and body practices, labour and gender, servants and masters, and produced work in which they tried out media which were new to them. They helped me to install my exhibition and observed both the work and the viewers' reaction to it:

> A teenager who asked what it meant to pin clothes to a line and his mother's explanation.
>
> A woman who didn't read the introductory texts but entered, took a moment to look at a wall-sized piece called *Winter Wash*, then exclaimed: 'My God it's like in Spain where we hung our sheets in the air!', sharing her realization that the colourful abstraction suggested the motion of sheets on the line.

Viewers shied away from touching 'What goes unsaid' and reading the texts enclosed in its folds. Was it that, as in my writing, the installation did not declare itself as biographical, making it difficult to realize that words were a repository of my personal papers? (Hirvi 2014)[3]. Or were these 'good' spectators who knew the rules of exhibition in museums and galleries? The seminar debated this and many other questions while developing plans to entirely reshape the gallery for a new exhibition of their work.

The project required students – many of whom had little arts training – not only to collaborate with artists, but also to take on the role of artist for the duration of the project. I led the first part of the seminar, shifting between studio and readings about art, anthropology and collaboration. But once my exhibition was in place, I stepped aside. The artists were confident, but the anthropologists and students were understandably nervous. Beatriz Mejia-Krumbein, then director of the gallery and a well-known artist in the region, worked closely with the students. She assisted their exchanges with the artists and reassured them as they completed their work. Along with Astra Light, a student designated by the group as chief curator, she helped them complete plans and set up 'Second Look'.

Hang Dry #1 registered a certain aspect of individual fieldwork. Moving it to California provoked 'anthropological' reflections about culture, nature and social divisions presented in a traditional exhibition format in 'On the Line'. I moved from being an anthropologist who is able to paint and take 'visual field notes' to an artist, and with 'On the Line: A Second Look' I became a viewer and observer, albeit one with an obvious stake in the project as an object of 'commentary', a teacher and originator of the collaborative experiment. At 'On the Line' I was moved by viewers' reactions and happy when they not only 'liked' but also showed that the work provoked complex and diverse questions about the many topics evoked by washing-lines. I expected to have the same reaction to 'Second Look'. Instead, I found myself moved to tears when I entered the opening reception for the exhibition. Many of my

pieces had been taken down, while others had shifted position to establish dialogues with works which engaged them with similar or wildly different forms and colours in a variety of media.

One of the works that illustrated the project as a whole was an assemblage created by the projection of Shahab Malik's video *Power Lines* on my large triptych *Christo's Laundry*, accompanied by a recorded composition for two flutes by Jared Katz. In *Christo's Laundry* I engaged with the notion of memory and the 'lost' beauty of fabric on the line, using techniques inspired by the history of painting while referencing the white line of *Hang Dry #1*. Shahab used a creamy patch at the centre of the painting as a screen. His video featured women hanging laundry on clotheslines in some unnamed (but apparently far-off) location, as indicated by their style of dress, with power lines strung across the landscape and images of the twisting shaft of a washing machine. These layered images and sounds coalesced, unmistakably illustrated the exhibition's central theme but also set it in motion in new ways. The flowing, moving feeling of my paintings inspired his composition, Katz explained.

Figure 2: Shahab Malik, *Power Lines*. Six minute video projected on Susan Ossman's *Christo's Laundry* (2011). Oil on canvas.

It was as though one flute chasing another extended the brushstrokes beyond the frame of the painting. Much as the video intensified the colours and contrasts of the painting, by adding images that took on a ghostly three-dimensional quality on the textured paint, 'hearing' the movement of the brushstrokes intensified the viewer's attentiveness to the importance of gesture and movement in the work of doing the washing and hanging it on the line. This assembled work offered an example of effective association, produced by the sustained process of collaborative research, as grounded in a set of aesthetic and thematic propositions, rather than by Jared and Shahab working as a duo. The idea of associating their work arose only during the process of placing the work in the gallery. Responding to the themes of an exhibition by a single artist, having time to work and read together facilitated a dialogue that made works like those of Malik and Katz speak not only to my piece, but also to others in 'Second Look'.

With a few exceptions, the idea that the artworks would speak to viewers (thanks to a focus on laundry, the first exhibition and its development during the seminar), worked. The temporal proximity, themes, forms and works from the first exhibition were recalled in the art and in the minds of the participants and audiences. 'Second Look' set in motion a process of comparison, which surfaced in nearly all conversations at the second opening and the conference that concluded the exhibition a week later. 'On the Line' had developed through a process of collective reinterpretation and memory building. Both exhibitions ignited discussions about people's own laundry practices and recollections, in ways that might be seen as 'ethnographic'. But the gallery was not defined as a site for fieldwork. No interviews were recorded and no formal observations were made. This stage of the programme was intended to extend the concepts and potential of the theme, and to create momentum for future fieldwork. At that stage we focused on considering what it meant to produce art with reference to a set of theoretical readings, the literature and the art of a single person. Anthropologists took on the role of artist in a public experiment. Conferring on all participants the status of 'artist' required that the 'real' artists share that position, even as they served as advisers to others. My authorship was taken as the point of departure for the project (with me being the author of the works), but the works were subsequently in dialogue with new works. Participants in 'Second Look', as authors of specific works that responded to my propositions, were important in shaping possibilities for future art/ethnographic work. The 'participatory' approach thus included a kind of training for the anthropologists (many of whom had pre-existing skills in various artistic practices) as well as for the artists. One of the most interesting aspects of the second exhibition was how readily the 'scholars' engaged elements of colour, form and gesture, while many of the 'artists' reacted more conceptually. This encouraged reflection on how artistic and ethnographic processes might be melded to coincide or complement one another, so as to best advance art/ethnographic

strategies for the future (Edinger 2015). Layered meanings and memories suggested, in overlapping media, the translation of a painterly palette to poetry and sound. The importance of gesture as a link between generations and places in individual experience emerged as important aspects of the collective experiment.

Beatriz Mejia-Krumbein's performance at the closing reception of 'Second Look' offered a glimpse of how the first two exhibitions could shape the next stage of the project. *Of the Same Fabric* began when Beatriz entered the gallery in a long, white dress covered with small white tags. We observed that the tags had letters on them, but we couldn't read them. She silenced the crowd by singing a Columbian song about laundering, then switched first to English, then German, as she acted out skits about the different ways of washing and hanging laundry in the various countries she has called home. Her gestures accompanied a script of reprimands from neighbours or family members who told her she did things 'incorrectly' or 'like a foreigner', to evoke her story of migrating from Columbia to Germany, then to Mexico and the United States. Finally, she moved around the circle of people that had formed around her, asking each of us to 'undress' her by removing one of the small pieces of fabric that covered her costume. Once the small 'handkerchiefs' had been removed and Beatriz had been stripped down to her slip, she instructed us to hold hands and

Figure 3: Beatriz Mejia-Krumbein, *Of the Same Fabric* (2013). Performance.

read the words on the pieces of cloth: *Of the Same Fabric*, we read out in unison, drawing the event to a close and marking the start of the next stage of the project.

'Hanging Out'

'On the Line' and 'On the Line: A Second Look' were hosted by the Brandstater Gallery on the campus of La Sierra University. While it is a highly regarded regional venue that attracts a broad circle of artists, art lovers and students, no casual passers-by drop in to view exhibitions due to its suburban location. For the next step of the project, we sought a more central location. The Riverside Arts Council suggested we work in their new 'Afterimage' makerspace and gallery in the 'University Village' open-air mall, where the poor 'Eastside' neighbourhood meets UCR. The gallery, located between a beauty salon and a Vietnamese restaurant, was ideal for building on the work and ideas developed in the initial well-appointed locale. Here we could more readily configure an exhibition as a fieldwork site and draw a diverse audience. Taking the gallery context for granted enabled us to focus on the work of creating dialogues between works and artists. But now we sought to draw on what we had made and learned, to devise the exhibition to include ethnographic research and make it productive as a setting for fieldwork. A new seminar became the locus for defining, developing and coordinating the programme which sought to develop a common ground – a place where people who would not otherwise meet, could 'Hang Out'.

We studied the gallery's imbrication in the mall and the surrounding area. We wanted the gallery to be a welcome, open space which people might enter as they went about their day-to-day business, but also a focal point that drew them for performances and storytelling sessions. While people of different generations, social classes, ethnic and racial backgrounds cross one another in the mall's shops, local residents and students rarely mingle. We took note that cashiers, beauticians, bank tellers or waitresses interacted with everyone, and established relationships with these intermediaries, in the hope of publicising our exhibition and events. Meanwhile, we met with city and university leaders and made sure those who had been to our previous exhibitions knew about the forthcoming event.

This art selection process was not as 'egalitarian' as 'Second Look' had been. Everyone had tried their hand at artistic practice and ethnographic exercises during the seminar, but we only displayed the most engaging and provocative work. With the addition of dance, music, spoken word performances and participatory events in addition to ethnographic research and interviews with the public, the programme became more complex and roles more defined. From being 'artists', some participants came to focus their efforts on ethnography. A single individual was thus, for instance, an exhibiting artist or performer as well as a participant in someone else's performance

Figure 4: Monica Landeros and *Heartbeat* at the 'Second Look'.

Figure 5: *Heartbeat* at 'Hanging Out'.

or an interviewer in the course of events. The variety of positions increased, even as the public face of the 'artists' seemed more professional. Engaging with the public in new ways opened up fresh possibilities not only for collectively thinking about how the exhibition was prepared, but also how it resonated with the previous exhibitions.

With this third step of the programme, the project narrative had a beginning, middle and endpoint (if not an ending). Among the works that told the history of the project was *Hang Dry # 1*, a single panel of *Christo's Laundry* (now adorned with the paint-speckled dress I wore while making it), *My Mother/Your Mother/What Colour?*, while Beatriz Mejia-Krumbein's dress from the 'Second Look' performance adorned a mannequin in the centre of the gallery – a pivot for the exhibition. Monica Landeros displayed *Heartbeat* again, but with an important addition: at 'Second Look' *Heartbeat* was composed of a set of exquisitely designed, antique-white children's clothes. Each small dress or shirt displayed a delicate red graph across its chest. Upon closer inspection, the viewer noticed that it was bright red electrocardiogramme that signalled life – except for the smallest outfit, where the stiches turned black as they moved from left to right across the heart. For 'Hanging Out', Landeros added an element to this heart-rending rendering of loss – a long, flowing woman's dress. Thick red coils shaped a large red circle around the womb of the delicate gown, which floated alongside those of the children, leading us to contemplate the other's mourning but also her life-giving powers.

While the previous two exhibitions had referenced those who do the laundry, particularly mothers, speakers at the conference that closed 'Hanging Out' were struck by the abundance of maternal figures in the third exhibition. Introducing ethnographic materials and developing an archive of laundry stories seemed to highlight motherhood. Elizabeth Stella's colourful, delicate installation associated a set of small, framed watercolours with the sound waves of an interview about washing diapers and coloured anti-static dryer papers that filled the gallery with a 'clean' scent. *My Mother/Your Mother/What Colour* featured again, but was joined by a larger-than-life-size cut-out of a woman's dress pinned to twine with clothes-pins. Beatriz Mejia-Krumbein had been encouraged by our work together to make eight large charcoal drawings of women's garments – in references to the family, men were conspicuously absent. Despite the addition of Beatriz's cut-out drawing of a man's trousers beside the 'mother's' dress, attention to maternal care, feminine sociability and labour prevailed in the art, stories and performances.

Collecting stories and participant observation encouraged us to follow the entire process of washing, drying, ironing, folding and even weaving cloth. While my previous work often abstractly referenced the movement and fluidity of sheets in the wind, I now explored how laundry is prepared for storage once it is taken down from the line. For *Folded* I set a length of canvas painted in deep rose and ochre on a pedestal in front of a square painting composed of self-enclosed rectangles of the same colours. Carol Hendrickson developed the delicately patterned hand-made papers she clipped to a tiny clothesline in *Traje Suite* through longstanding fieldwork on textile production in Guatemala. This displacement across media and location was woven into the very fabric and pattern of her work. Anh Ly likewise brought diverse approaches to doing laundry to the gallery, by covering an antique ironing board with postcards of laundry from around the world; the public could touch these and read the 'personal' notes inscribed by Anh and other participants on the back. Frank Ramos' *Know your Laundry Symbols*-puzzle evoked the mechanisation and internationalisation of laundry work, encouraging visitors to 'play' together.

Adding to ethnographic work carried out in preparing the art and exhibition, the ethnographic team and filmmaker invited people to share their laundry stories at the opening, on the day of the event and during the closing seminar. Those who had seen previous 'On the Line' exhibitions were especially eager to engage in discourse. They encouraged 'newcomers' to join in, creating spontaneous discussion groups, including people who were unaccustomed to speaking in public, those with little experience of art, or those who were just shy. This created a spiralling conversational dynamic that continued at an organised storytelling event. It also recalled the movement of my paintings, the sound of Katz's flutes chasing one another and Josette Dacosta's video of an enormous painting of a house strung on a line between two buildings, flapping noisily in the wind. From tales of flirting amidst sheets in Iran,

Figure 6: 'Hanging Out' (February 2015). Choreography by Casey Auvant and Sue Roginski.

to stories of losing laundry off a balcony in Germany, to being able to identify the location of a childhood home thanks to the poles of the clothesline having remained intact while the house had been destroyed, participants introduced far-flung places and periods of history into the gallery, sometimes pointing to a specific work of art as though to illustrate their words. As they took on the role of performers they became part of the reflexive process.

One of Dhiren Pannikar's compositions layered the voices of interviews with a live performance by his jazz band. Casey Auvant and Sue Roginski's choreography for eight dancers engaged the music while moving amidst the barbed wire lines of Jimmy Centeno's sculpture *Tendero*, to suggest the processes of washing, wringing, drying and folding (Auvant and Roginski 2015). Another of Pannikar's works required the audience to provide a chorus. We received 'scores' that consisted of snippets of interviews in various languages. Dhiren conducted as we read our lines, progressively joining in a counterpoint that mingled stories of lost socks, memories of grandmothers at work in Mexico or Vietnam, and panties being stolen off the line. As each person gave voice to the words of another, our song swelled to a crescendo. Some people moved about the room or added innovative rhythmic elements to their recitation.

Giving voice to others' memories, in unison, addressed no 'serious' issue. It solved no problem. It resonated with the work in the exhibition and the project as it

had evolved across exhibitions, infusing the gallery with a sense of shared pleasure. To say the makeshift choir engendered a feeling of *communitas* would be too bold. Yet, it did produce a certain kind of fellowship, a bringing together of individuals who would not otherwise meet, in a collectively improvised song without melody or refrain. Pleasure is not a word frequently associated with collaborative or community art projects (Bishop 2012; Jackson 2011). However, the melancholia, conflict, death and gender trouble in the art and narratives produced for and by 'Hanging Out', of contemplating the work and voicing one's own and then others' stories did lead many to describe their experience of fleeting, collective action as satisfying, cathartic, hopeful and pleasurable. Here, 'giving voice' was not a matter of the artist representing a community or issue, but rather a process that shifted everyone's roles and positions. As the circle of people involved in the project widened, as new opportunities for including new voices emerged through associating ethnographic and artistic practices, 'participation' became multifaceted.

Laundry revelations

On 16 October 2015, a new law came into effect in California, making visible clotheslines legal (Abcarian 2015). One cannot know whether Governor Jerry Brown has fond memories of laundry wafting in the sun. But, thanks to his legislation we might now imagine the patios of suburban housing estates and the balconies of newly renovated lofts in city centres as colourful, moving extensions of 'On the Line'. We plan to embrace these possibilities with a series of pop-up outdoor exhibitions/performances across Riverside in 2016.[4] When doing laundry, items are taken out of the house and into the yard, thus rendering the work of domestic servants, housewives and working women more visible. Some of the nostalgia previously associated with clotheslines may give way to anger, leading us to take a more overtly activist approach that focuses less on how, and more on *who* does the laundry. Or, we may consider other vanishing domestic practices. New places and audiences will surely simulate our thoughts about the interplay of art, collaboration and location as we repeatedly shift sites, disrupting our practices and positions in the process. 'On the Line' will involve further analysis and experimentation across ethnography and art, whether in connection to discussions about the notion of situation, varieties of participation or mobile social configurations.[5] My progression from artist to director of the project requires that I project it in a positive way; how else can it be sustained? Along with the others engaged in 'On the Line' I will surely explore the process of our work from more critical angles and develop specific theoretical questions with regard to any critical debate or piece of work. But, for now, I hope the reader finds that this progress report suggests the value of art-ethnographic programmes that unfold slowly across scenes that 'disrupt' artistic practice, social positions and

collective memory, but are linked by the iteration of a theme and the reflexive, critical questioning that this produces.

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Notes

1 My next individually authored book includes a chapter in which I examine this work as part of the research (Ossman 2013).

2 For more on art in relation to memory, life story and motherhood, see Allison and Ossman (2014).

3 See also Bourdieu (1994: 69–72) on 'biographic illusions' in chapter 3 of *Raisons pratiques*.

4 For information and images of work from the previous exhibitions and performances, see ontheline.ucr.edu; susanossman.com

5 I cannot delve into this subject in depth in a vignette, but see Zigon (2014).

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