

This article was downloaded by: [University of Gent], [Kris Rutten]

On: 09 November 2013, At: 01:29

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office:
Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcrc20>

Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art

Kris Rutten, An van. Dienderen & Ronald Soetaert

Published online: 04 Nov 2013.

To cite this article: Kris Rutten, An van. Dienderen & Ronald Soetaert (2013) Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art, *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 27:5, 459-473, DOI: [10.1080/02560046.2013.855513](https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2013.855513)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2013.855513>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>



Articles

Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art

Kris Rutten, An van. Dienderen and Ronald Soetaert

Abstract

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

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

Introduction

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

Kris Rutten works as a post-doctoral assistant at the Department of Educational Studies of Ghent University. Kris.Rutten@UGent.be. An van. Dienderen is a filmmaker who obtained a PhD in Comparative Cultural Sciences. She is affiliated to the School of Arts, University College Ghent. an.vandienderen@hogent.be Ronald Soetaert is a full-time professor at Ghent University. ronald.soetaert@UGent.be



27 (5) 2013

DOI: 10.1080/02560046.2013.855513



ISSN 0256-0046/Online 1992-6049
pp.459–473

© Critical Arts Projects & Unisa Press

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The artist as ethnographer?

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

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

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

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

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

Based on Hal Foster (1995):

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

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

Based on Andrew Irving (2006: 14):

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

Based on Lucy Lippard:

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

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

Practice-based art projects

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

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

The crisis of representation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Representation as delegation

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

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

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

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

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

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

Representation as description

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vignettes

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

References

- Bhabha, H. 1994. *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, C. 2011. Terminus: ethnographic terminalia. *Visual Anthropology Review* 27(1): 52–56.

- Clifford, J. and G. Marcus. 1986. *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Da Silva, T.T. 1999. The poetics and politics of curriculum as representation. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 7(1): 7–33.
- Enwezor, E. 2012. (Interview.) Reformulating the landscape of quick judgments. *Le Journal de La Triennale #1*. <http://www.latriennale.org/en/lejournal/unlearning/reformulating-landscape-quick-judgments> (accessed 9 October 2013).
- Farber, L. 2010. The address of the other: the body and the senses in contemporary South African visual art. *Critical Arts* 24(1): 303–320.
- Forero Angel, A.M. and L. Simeone, eds. 2010. *Beyond ethnographic writing*. Rome: Armando Editore.
- Foster, H. 1995. The artist as ethnographer? In *The traffic in culture. Refiguring art and anthropology*, ed. G. Marcus and F. Myers, 302–309. Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press.
- Geertz, C. 1988. *Works and lives: the anthropologist as author*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ingold, T. 2011. *Being alive: essays on movement, knowledge and description*. London: Routledge.
- Irving, A. 2006. Review of contemporary art and anthropology. *Anthropology Matters* 8(1). www.anthropologymatters.com (accessed 9 October 2013).
- Kristeva, J. 1991. *Strangers to ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kwon, M. 2000. Experience vs. interpretation: traces of ethnography in the works of Lan Tuazon and Nikki S. Lee. In *Site-specificity: the ethnographic turn*, ed. A. Coles, 74–91. London: Black Dog Publishing.
- Lippard, L. 2010. Farther afield. In *Between art and anthropology, contemporary ethnographic practice*, ed. A. Schneider and C. Wright, 23–34. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Marcus, G. and F. Myers, eds. 1995. *The traffic in culture: refiguring art and anthropology*. Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press.
- Pink, S. 2009. *Doing sensory ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Pinxten, R. 1997. *When the day breaks: essays in anthropology and philosophy*. Hamburg: Peter Lang Verlag.
- Rutten, K. and A. van. Dienderen. 2013. ‘What is the meaning of a safety pin?’ Critical literacies and the ethnographic turn in contemporary art. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16(5): 507–520.
- Schneider, A. 2008. Three modes of experimentation with art and ethnography. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14(1): 171–194.
- Schneider, A. and C. Wright. 2006. *Contemporary art and anthropology*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Schneider, A. and C. Wright. 2010. *Between art and anthropology: contemporary ethnographic practice*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Soetaert R., A. Mottart and I. Verdoodt. 2004. Culture and pedagogy in teacher education. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies* 26(2/3): 155–174.
- Trinh Minh-ha. 1990. ‘Documentary is/not a name.’ *October* 52(Spring): 76–100.

- van. Dienderen, A. 2006. Afkicken van representatie – met rijlaarzen door documentaire processen. *Etcetera* 24(101): 43–47.
- van. Dienderen, A. 2007. Performing urban collectivity: ethnography of the production process of a community-based project in Brussels. In *Visual interventions: studies in applied anthropology series*, ed. S. Pink, 345–380. Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books.
- van. Dienderen, A. 2008. *Film process as a site of critique: ethnographic research into the mediated interactions during (documentary) film production*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag.