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Articles

The rhetorical turn in contemporary art and ethnography

Kris Rutten, An van. Dienderen and Ronald Soetaert

Abstract

This special themed issue, published over two consecutive issues of *Critical Arts* (October and December 2013), aims to revisit the ethnographic turn in contemporary art by inviting papers from theorists, artists and critics, to engage critically with the ethnographic perspective in their own work or in the work of other contemporary artists. This introductory article briefly recapitulates some of the issues explored in the first themed issue and introduces the second by situating the ethnographic turn as part of a larger rhetorical turn within the human and social sciences. The main argument is that the *crisis* of representation can be reframed as a focus on the inevitable *rhetoricity* of representation, implying that one cannot avoid rhetoric in the description and delegation of culture. This argument is related to the different contributions that constitute this issue.

Keywords: art critique, contemporary art, ethnography, literary turn, rhetoric

Introduction

The concept of 'the ethnographic turn in contemporary art' was introduced in Hal Foster's (1995) seminal article entitled: 'The artist as ethnographer?' Since the 1990s there has been an increasing wave of challenging art projects that show significant similarities with anthropology and ethnography in the exploration of cultural difference and representational practices. In this special themed issue, which is published over

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two consecutive issues of *Critical Arts* (October and December 2013), we revisit the ethnographic turn in contemporary art by inviting contributions from theorists, artists and critics to engage critically with the ethnographic perspective in their own work or in the work of other contemporary artists. We approach ethnography from a thematic and methodological perspective, rather than looking for fixed categories to define 'ethnographic art'. We also invited short statements and reflections by artists about their practices. In what follows we will briefly recapitulate some of the issues explored in the first themed issue, before introducing the second issue, which continues the discussion we started on the ethnographic turn in contemporary art from a number of different perspectives.

In the first issue the focus lies on practice-led research. Our aim is to further the critical work on ethnography in relation to contemporary art by specifically examining art *practices* and *processes*, thereby offering a bottom-up perspective from artists, critics and theorists addressing the question *if*, *why* and *how* an ethnographic perspective is indeed at work. In these practices we focus on the extent to which contextualisation is relevant when dealing with the display of *alterity* and *outsiderness*. The contributions in the first volume focus mainly on issues dealing with *representation as delegation* (those who are delegated to speak and act in the name of others) and *representation as description* (the process of presentation and description of the other) (da Silva 1999; Soetaert, Mottart and Verdoodt 2004). The critical work of Hal Foster, Andrew Irving, Lucy Lippard and others forms the background for the self-reflexivity voiced by the authors. They explore whether or not they can indeed be accused of pseudo-ethnography, and they are very much aware of the complexity that this question raises. The authors also attempt to move beyond the strict dichotomy of 'self' versus the 'other' by emphasising the immense complexity of the relations between artists/researchers and their subjects, because these will always inevitably be unequal.

The crisis of representation is perceived as a more complex issue than 'merely' looking for different formats of representation. The question is how to combine the rhetoric of artistic reflection with the rhetoric of anthropology as an academic discipline. Different authors focus on their artistic processes as mediated relationships between 'author' and 'other' in which the 'viewer' is prefigured, thereby emphasising the complex interactions during the production, reception and interpretation of an artwork (van. Dienderen 2008). The vignettes that we added to the volume offer a personal touch from different artists testifying how they grapple with these issues.

It is clear that revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art raises a large number of issues that can be approached from many different perspectives. The different contributions throughout our special issues discuss the work of anthropologists who are collaborating with artists, artists who are creating projects generating anthropological insights, and art projects that are produced as outcomes

of anthropological research. In what follows we will first situate the ethnographic turn as part of a larger rhetorical turn within the human and social sciences.

The rhetorical turn

The ethnographic 'turn' in contemporary art is part of a number of related turns in the social sciences and humanities: linguistic, cultural, interpretive, semiotic, rhetorical, … *turns* – all emphasising the importance of signs and symbols in our interpretations of reality and more specifically the construction of meaning through language, culture and narrative. This perspective is important, because we have become increasingly self-conscious about how we construct culture through the symbolic tools of language and narratives. From this perspective, rhetoric is no longer seen as a *second-order* phenomenon, but nowadays has acquired the status of an anthropological 'fact' (Flemming 1998; Rutten and Soetaert 2012). Contemporary rhetoricians and ethnographers increasingly explore the mediating role of rhetoric in culture, and this also gives rise to a rhetorical focus on anthropology, as is exemplified in recent work in the Germanic tradition of *rhetorische Anthropologie* (e.g., Gross 2009; for an overview see Rutten and Soetaert 2012; Strecker and Tyler 2009). Also, Richard van Oort (2008, 2009) extensively explores the relationship between rhetoric and anthropology. According to Brad Evans (2007: 44), van Oort 'casts the object of humanistic criticism as the "anthropological" construction of human thought manifest in the study of language and aesthetics'. Ivo Strecker and Stephen Tyler (2009: 1) argue that rhetoric is the decisive factor in the emergence of cultural diversity: 'Just as there is no "zero degree rhetoric" in any utterance, there is no "zero degree rhetoric" in any of the patterns of culture.' This perspective does not 'condemn persuasion or rhetoric, [but] appreciate[s] the centrality of this activity to much of life, and to recognize that human beings are rhetorical beings' (Herrick 2004: 5).

Anthropologists, too, have been greatly influenced by this rhetorical turn, realising that their ethnographic writing and narratives are essential aspects of their 'trade'. This is a key aspect of the critique in *Writing culture*, 'which rightly asked whether all ethnographies are not rhetorical performances determined by the need to tell an effective story' (Strecker and Tyler 2009: 2). Indeed, many anthropologists still grapple with the *crisis of representation* that was explored in this influential volume by James Clifford and George Marcus (1986), emphasising the importance of style – and we would add rhetoric – in 'presenting' fieldwork and 'persuading' an audience. From this perspective ethnographies have increasingly been interpreted as a special kind of narrative and, we would argue, as a special kind of rhetoric.

We assert that rhetoric can become a major turn for exploring the abovementioned turns in the humanities and social sciences in general, and the ethnographic turn in particular. We concur with Strecker and Tyler (2009) who argue that while rhetoric

is the means with which we 'describe' culture, it is also the means with which we 'create' culture. They emphasise that this insight is an important lacuna in the criticism developed in *Writing culture*:

> No one dwells on the rhetoricality of culture. Yes, there are the inklings of the role of rhetoric in social life, as when James Clifford approvingly quotes Victor Turner as saying that social processes are saturated 'with a rhetoric, a mode of emplotment, and a meaning'. But the reference to Turner is not used to reflect on the interaction of rhetoric and culture. (ibid: 2)

Focusing on the creative role of rhetoric in the emergence of culture, they concur with Clifford and Marcus (1986: 98) that

> ethnography itself is a performance emplotted by powerful stories. Embodied in written reports, these stories simultaneously describe real cultural events and make additional, moral, ideological, and even cosmological statements. Ethnographic writing is *allegorical* at the level both of its content (what it says about cultures and their histories) and its form (what is implied by its mode of textualization). (Strecker and Tyler 2009: 2, emphasis added)

Precisely these *allegories* – that occur in many different guises throughout this special issue – are explored in confrontations between art and ethnography.

The original focus on the relation between art and anthropology largely fell on the relationship between literature and ethnographic writing. Clifford Geertz can be described as one of the founding fathers of this interpretative and literary turn, focusing on the overlap between the scientific, academic writing of ethnography and literature. Geertz (1988: 141) introduced a rhetorical perspective by criticising the 'objective' claims of traditional ethnography, arguing that ethnography is also a mode of persuasion. He therefore introduced a narrative and performative approach in anthropology (which was also central in the work of Johannes Fabian [1990]). Again, this is part of the realisation of the importance of rhetoric, involving a 'sea-change' in 'the way we think about how we think' (Geertz 1983: 34). From the work of scholars such as Kenneth Burke (1969) – who exerted an important influence on Geertz – we can learn how perspectives from literature and rhetorical literary criticism can be extended to analyse culture in general.

In revisiting the relationship between art and anthropology we thus also need to focus on anthropologists' fascination with literature. Indeed, as Vito Laterza (2007) wrote, since the birth of the discipline this relation has been important for a great number of anthropologists and others who have published literary works as part of (or apart from) their scientific work (see, e.g., Lange 2011; Tomaselli 2007). The reverse is also true: many novelists have published their work as a kind of fieldwork (e.g., the literary work of V.S. Naipaul, on this see Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Michael

Hensen [2008]) and there is a clear ethnographic turn in literary culture (see Teju Coles [2012]). Rose De Angelis (2002: 1) argues that

> social scientists and anthropologists 'borrow' from the analogies and imagery often used in literary analysis; literary people cull ideas from anthropologists (the fashionable ones like Geertz and Turner, both of whom have backgrounds in literature) and transmogrify models, methods, and terminology in the social sciences. (see also Rutten and Soetaert, this issue)

This implies that anthropological writing can be subjected to 'literary analysis' focusing on how such interpretive essays uncover social reality. Not only is ethnographic writing 'literary' in nature, 'literature becomes both a creation and creator of culture, with anthropology as observer/reader/interpreter' (De Angelis 2002: 2). It is precisely 'the dual role for literature and the repositioning of anthropology [that] allows for a multiplicity of possibilities in reading, writing about and interpreting people. Literary writers are ethnographers by virtue of the fact that they write stories about people and their sentiments, about places and happenings, and about contexts' (ibid.). Laterza (2007: 125) indeed raises some challenging questions:

> Is it possible to have truly ethnographic novels, written by anthropologists for anthropologists as ethnographic monographs? Would the novel bring any added value to the ethnographic enterprise? What are the pros and cons of anthropologists' engagement with the novel?

In their contribution to this issue, 'Literacy narratives as ethnography', Kris Rutten and Ronald Soetaert focus on how narratives can be used in the study of contemporary culture and society. They start from the *literary turn* in *ethnography*, to explore how literature and drama have become important sites for ethnographic research. They specifically approach this question from an educational perspective. That is: How can narratives be introduced as a form of ethnography for education in general and – their field of study – literacy studies and literacy education in particular? The authors claim that literature/fiction is about more than aesthetics, since it can also be described as a tool for meaning-making because it presents and discusses particular cultural perspectives. This last argument is the basis for an ethical turn in art and ethnography. Focusing on the ethnographic turn in contemporary art also implies that the work of the artist is described as a kind of ethnography, and the work of art as a form of rhetoric. Narratives (textual, visual, sensorial, …) can indeed be seen as 'representative anecdotes' (Burke) that function as a form from which one can generate a vocabulary that adequately conveys the complexity of a subject similar to Clifford Geertz' 'thick description' of seemingly anecdotal subjects.

Today we can see how both artists and anthropologists are engaging with respectively introducing ethnographic formats in art, and artistic formats in

ethnography. So, the literary and rhetorical turn in ethnography needs to be broadened to art in general. Indeed, the same trend is true for visual arts: using video or photography in ethnography implies using artistic genres and, vice versa, artists can embed or even present ethnographic data as art. We argue that the *crisis* of representation can be reframed as a focus on the inevitable *rhetoricity* of representation, implying that we cannot avoid rhetoric in the description and delegation of culture. A number of the contributions to the second issue precisely explore this rhetoricity in ethnography through the detour of art, by focusing on the work of artists who problematise the ethnographic perspective in and through their work.

The artist as 'ethnographer'?

In this second special issue of *Critical Arts* we continue the discussion on the ethnographic turn in contemporary art that we started in the first issue by addressing a different set of questions. Whereas the first themed issue focuses on practice-led research – artists assessing the ethnographic perspective in their own work, based on practices and processes – this issue focuses partially on the assessment by anthropologists and critics of the work of globally acclaimed artists such as Kutluğ Ataman, Walid Raad, Jayce Salloum, Akram Zaatari, Brett Bailey and Kendell Geers. What these artists share, besides their importance on the global art scene (and market), is that their artwork focuses on themes such as travel, memory, migration, identity and (the crisis of) representation, which clearly situates their work within the ethnographic turn in contemporary art. Their work explores complex identities and they position themselves critically *vis-à-vis* ethnography. While these artists embrace 'ethnographic' themes in their artwork, it needs to be emphasised that they do this by developing work which contributes to the more critical discourses that ethnography has precisely developed since the emergence of the crisis of representation in anthropology and the rise of post-colonialism and post-feminism. Their work thus offers an important perspective for unravelling ongoing debates within ethnography itself.

This is addressed in a number of the contributions that explore how anthropology/ethnography has developed as a self-critical discipline over the past few decades, and how this can be related to particular art practices. The focus on ethnography as a dynamic and evolving discipline indeed offers an important complementary perspective to Hal Foster's essay. Foster began from a critical take on ethnography – a criticism that remains pertinent – but in his assessment he was particularly vague about how he understood the term 'ethnography' and its related practices.

This is clearly and straightforwardly exemplified by the first 'vignette' that we incorporate into this issue, namely a manifesto by Kendell Geers, a renowned South African artist working and living in Brussels. Exasperated by his perception of not

belonging to either Europe or Africa, Geers develops an artistic practice which aims to produce a new definition of his self. The resulting manifesto struggles with many of the questions Foster raises, but from the perspective of a highly charged subjectivity.

Anthropological assessment of art practices

A growing body of anthropological and ethnographic research of art practices has been crucial for the debate on the ethnographic turn in contemporary art. Anthropologist Susanne Küchler (2001: 95), in discussing the work of Sophie Calle, argues that

> Calle's use of the ethnographic present tense and also her staging and manipulation of self/other relations draws heavily on the ethnographic model, in which fieldwork is used in order to reconcile theory and practice and to reinforce the basic principles of the participant/observer tradition.

In her analysis of the work of Nikki S. Lee and Lan Tuazon, art historian Miwon Kwon (2001: 75) raises a number of challenging questions: 'How are artists enabled or disabled by the way in which ethnographic imperatives reorganize their practice? What is the relationship and/or difference between ethnographic authority and artistic authorship?' Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright – central figures in continuing the debate on art and anthropology – claim in *Between art and anthropology: contemporary ethnographic practice* (2010) that artists and anthropologists share a set of common practices that raise similar ethical issues. They encourage artists and anthropologists to learn directly from each others' 'practices in the field'. Kiven Strohm (2012: 112) states this very clearly:

> First, by working with contemporary artists, anthropologists are provided a unique opportunity to appropriate visual representational strategies that break with traditional anthropological modes of representation. In other words, by adopting the visual strategies of contemporary art, strategies not confined or overdetermined by traditional textual forms of representation, anthropology is invited to consider art as more than an object of research – as something with which to think radically […] and, one hopes, through which to be exposed in turn 'to the unforeseen and unexpected'.

This themed issue thus revisits the ethnographic turn in contemporary art by giving a forum to anthropologists, art historians and critics (sometimes in collaboration with artists) to analyse artistic practices and projects as a starting point from which to discuss ethnographic methods in general and specific ethnographic themes in particular. In their article 'Staging/caging "otherness" in the postcolony: spectres of the human zoo', Chokri Ben Chikha and Karel Arnaut complement Foster's essay along an anthropological as well as an artistic line. They develop the anthropological perspective substantially with a narrative about modern and contemporary anthropology that stages the kind of ethnographer for whom Foster seems to be

looking. The authors explore different attempts to *decolonise* anthropology – based mainly on the work of Johannes Fabian and Dell Hymes – and confront this with the work of the artist Brett Bailey. More specifically, they look into the performance project 'Exhibit B' that engages with the historical format of cultural representation, variously known as 'human zoos', 'black villages' or 'human showcases'. The authors take the domain of the human zoo to be a patch of common ground between anthropology and art, which they explore in search of the challenges that a 'proper' ethnographic stance poses to the artist. 'Exhibit B' engages with the human zoo as a historical, colonial phenomenon, and explores its relevance for contemporary ways of looking at 'others' in positions of (cultural, racial, bodily) difference and subjugation.

In 'Aesthetics of self-scaling: parallaxed transregionalism and Kutluğ Ataman's art-practice', Cüneyt Çakirlar examines relationships between ethnography, contemporary art-practice, globalisation and scalar geopolitics, with particular reference to the work of Kutluğ Ataman, a well-known and globally acclaimed artist and filmmaker. In his video works Ataman explores a conscientious failure of representing cultural alterity *as* indigeneity, while being at the same time aware of the global travelling of his work via global artistic social networks. The author explores Ataman's enactment of a critical transregionalism where *region*-as-concept becomes a 'dramaturgy' of power and discourse, and the ethnographic gaze focuses on the conflict between non-Western articulations of modernity and Western ideals of form, medium and genre in representing such alterity. By analysing several works from the *oeuvre* of Ataman, the author aims to demonstrate the ways in which Ataman's art practice produces self-scaling, self-regioning subjects that unsettle the hierarchical constructions of scale – understood as topological rather than topographical – and offers a critique of the scalar normativity within the global art world's regionalisms and internationalisms. Çakirlar suggests that the artist enacts a travelling art practice that questions conventions of travel and translation in a global/ised contemporary art scene, and explores possibilities of a non-assimilating spectatorial and authorial encounter. The very problem of scaling and translation in ethnography is narrativised, rather than being resolved.

This approach aligns with Foster's critical questioning of the contemporary figure of 'the artist as ethnographer'. Çakirlar argues that Foster's (1995: 203) proposal in response to the ethnographic turn in arts, namely the proposal of 'a parallactic work that attempts to frame the framer as he or she frames the other', is dramatically at play in Ataman's art practice:

> While 'the framer' to be critically 'framed' in Foster's critique refers to authorship and the artist's agency, Ataman's use of classical and modern western art media, ranging from photography and video to columns and the Renaissance frescos, addresses failures of cultural translation and creative potentials of those failures in articulating the modern

> of the other, which in turn frames the modernizer-as-framer, or the viewer-as-framer, and/or any embodiment of the 'globalizing' western gaze as framer – as s/he frames the other.

Çakirlar's analysis of Ataman's 'framing' of the 'moderniser-as-framer' or the 'viewer-as-framer' resonates, according to us, with the claim by Richard Lanham (2006: 9) referring to the paradox that much of the postmodern criticism in disciplines such as literary theory and cultural studies has a strong relationship with the current revival of rhetoric, but that very often only half of the rhetorical perspective has been taken into account, namely 'the search for the special interests that lie behind any argument'. The problem is, according to Lanham (ibid: 29), that 'as often as not, these debunking inquiries have not extended to the writers themselves … [but] have been restricted to opponents'. This can be related to Richard Edwards, Katherine Nicoll, Nicky Solomon and Robin Usher's (2004: 7) critique of *classical* discourse analysis:

> Unlike in forms of discourse analysis linked to ideology critique, where the idea is to 'unmask', to name a truth, [rhetorical] deconstruction continually uncovers the truth of rhetorical operations, the truth that all operations, including the operation of deconstruction itself, are rhetorical.

We can relate Çakirlar's analysis of the work of Ataman to the second vignette that we incorporate into this volume. In 'To cite … in time', Elias Grootaers presents an aphoristic text emanating from his artistic work as a documentary filmmaker. The text, which is accompanied by images from his documentaries, touches on several nodal points where artistic and theoretical threads have intersected, and contains a twofold objective. First, the author opens up Walter Benjamin's radical concepts of citing and his philosophy of time, and lets them resonate within the context of documentary film. Second, he contemplates the relation between contemporary (reflexive) ethnography and documentary film. Ethnography has always haunted documentary film; how to depict the other, the inescapably fragmented nature of a (documentary) relation with that other (see, e.g., Tomaselli 1999). In Grootaers' vignette, time is explored as the constituent element of this relation with the other.

In 'Making sense: affective research in postwar Lebanese art', Mark Westmoreland explores the possibilities arising from crossing disciplinary borders between anthropological and artistic modes of social inquiry, based on long-term research with contemporary artists in Lebanon, who utilise documentary practices as experimental forms of evidence. The author focuses on the vibrant public art movement that emerged after the civil war, with a set of critical aesthetics aimed at identifying and working through a postwar crisis of representation. More specifically, the focus is on the work of Jayce Salloum, Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari. Because these artists have systematically grappled with the epistemological and methodological aspects

of researching the war, their oeuvres provide an important framework for assessing alternative forms of evidence. By closely examining the way their work rethinks the taken-for-granted modes of knowledge production, the author argues that their experimental visual practices critique the politics of representation, redefine the codes of documentary evidence, and 'make sense' of the war on an affective level. Although these artists express antagonism towards traditional anthropology, Westmoreland (this issue) argues that their minority perspectives, research methodologies and practice-based accounts work as alternative ethnographies of Lebanon:

> In order to rescue knowledge from the predilections of an ethnocentric enterprise, we must reconsider both what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired. Artists like Jayce Salloum, Walid Raad, and Akram Zaatari dispense with these dichotomies and offer productive strategies for rigorously rethinking the methodological-epistemological project.

Westmoreland contends that trends in anthropology offer greater theoretical foundations for the alternative aesthetics of these artists, that help lift it beyond mere criticism.

Ethnography and art as methodological/heuristic tools

Along with the anthropological assessment of art practices, this issue also explores how ethnography as a research discipline and art as a form of ethnography can be used for art scholarship and art critique. A number of the contributions focus on 'anthropology-at-work' within different contexts. In her article, 'Towards an ethnographic turn in contemporary art scholarship', Fiona Siegenthaler argues that while an ethnographic turn has indeed taken place in contemporary art practice, this is not necessarily the case with scholarly research in contemporary art. For the author this is surprising, considering the conditions under which research on contemporary art production takes place. The particular processuality of the artworks requires additional approaches that move away from established methods in art history. The author therefore calls for an ethnographic turn in art scholarship that complements established approaches with methods and research questions derived from social anthropology and sociology, such as participation, observation, and qualitative studies in social and aesthetic production, reception and perception.

Siegenthaler concedes that artists working in the ethnographic idiom focus on social interaction, but argues that scholarly analysis rarely considers the actual exchange that takes place. In order to keep up with new artistic practices, she argues, art scholars need to adopt empirical approaches that go beyond the exhibition space and other sites of art mediation, and instead take into consideration the factual social and aesthetic processes and impacts in the 'field':

> These processes occur both during the project period and in its aftermath in both the artist's life as well as the life of the people or groups involved. To draw the attention to these social interactions and interpretations is necessary not only in the analysis of projects by 'northern' artists in 'southern' contexts, but in any art practice that involves and aims at social exchange.

In 'Doing Home Works: the extended exhibition, the ethnographic tools, and the role of the researcher', Sidsel Nelund concedes that there is a strong debate about artistic appropriations of ethnography, but feels there is not much work on the ethnographic practices of art researchers. For the author the latter focus is also important, as the art world is experiencing considerable changes: art objects and exhibition formats take new shapes and circulate internationally, creating situations of translocality in contemporary art. This inevitably raises a crucial ethnographic question for Nelund: How can one engage thoroughly with artworks and exhibitions from different cultural contexts, without losing the complexity of the local discourses inherent in them? The author answers this question by drawing on three ethnographic perspectives: the multi-sited ethnographic approach (George Marcus); the pairing of aesthetic analysis of artworks and ethnographic fieldwork (Georgina Born); and the use of generative ethnographic stories as a writing tool (Helen Verran). She explores these perspectives by analysing the Beirut-based extended exhibition 'Home Works: A Forum on Cultural Practices'. Her analysis shows that adding ethnographic tools to the aesthetic analysis of international exhibitions allows for a complexity of local discourses, enhances attentive art writing, and stimulates engaged art research.

In 'Back to my roots': *artifak* and festivals in Vanuatu, Southwest Pacific' (*artifak* in Bislama, the Pidgin lingua franca used in the islands of the archipelago), Hugo DeBlock elaborates on the problematic assessment and appropriation of ethnographic objects within the contemporary art scene by focusing on the production of artefacts in Vanuatu, which takes place in a context of cultural revival as well as tourism. The author focuses on notions of indigenised copyright (*kopiraet*) that are central to the production of knowledge and art, and offer cultural as well as economic capital/value to producers and/or owners. While contemporary art in Vanuatu is restricted by customary copyright legislation, according to DeBlock, different aid agencies and funding bodies promote customary art production and performance. Customary arts – related to cultural revival as well as tourism – feature in a context of festivals that are held at regular intervals on the outer islands of the archipelago. During these festivals, notions of 'otherness', of the authenticity of people and things, are negotiated by all involved (performers, local audiences, and visitors such as tourists and art collectors) and 'authenticity' is turned into a commodity. The author claims that this generates ambivalence and results in a feeling of loss of authenticity among

local people and visitors alike, but that it also generates a series of values related to status and prestige among locals. DeBlock argues that there is a 'contemporary turn in ethnographic art' in Vanuatu that generates increasing participation by local people in globalisation processes and in the global art world.

Conclusion

With these two issues of *Critical Arts* we hope to have revisited the ethnographic turn in contemporary art and to have contributed to the conversation by moving away from fixed categories that define 'ethnographic art', and by approaching ethnography from thematic, methodological and theoretical perspectives. We broadened the discussion by initially focusing on practice-led research. Many of the 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, we aim to further this theoretical and critical discourse by studying the ethnographic *practice* of artists and by giving voice to the artists themselves. In this second issue we elaborated on this by incorporating discussions by anthropologists and critics of the work of globally acclaimed artists such as Kutluğ Ataman, Walid Raad, Brett Bailey and Kendell Geers, whose work explores a set of aesthetics which contributes to the more critical discourses that ethnography has developed since the crisis of representation. Their work thus offers an important perspective to unravel ongoing debates within ethnography itself, which is complementary to Foster's rather vague use of the concept 'ethnography'. As becomes clear from the contributions by Fiona Siegenthaler and Sidsel Nelund, the ethnographic turn in contemporary art requires a broader conceptualisation of art theory and art criticism.

With this introduction we aimed to embed the ethnographic turn within a larger rhetorical turn, to reframe the *crisis* of representation as the inevitable *rhetoricity* of representation, meaning that we cannot avoid rhetoric in the representation and delegation of culture. If we understand art as ethnography and ethnography as rhetoric, then we should also consider *art* as *rhetoric*. From this perspective, art becomes a framework for exploring how we create culture through rhetoric:

> Like the mythical trickster, rhetoric allows us to turn fact into fiction and fiction into fact. It tempts to persuade ourselves – and others – to see and feel what we wish, and it leads us to limitless flights of fancy. By means of rhetoric we act like demons, and by means of rhetoric we conjure up those ideas, values, moral rules, and laws that constitute the basis of culture. (Strecker and Tyler 2009: 5)

We would like to end by emphasising, as we did in the introduction to the first themed issue, that our aim is not to close the discussion on the 'ethnographic turn' in contemporary art, but, with the double special issue we hope to open up the debate and stimulate continued dialogue. The response paper by Tarek Elhaik, and

his further exploration of the 'sensorial turn' in anthropology, can be deemed an important next step in the process.

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