ETHNOGRAPHIC CONCEPTUALISM: AN INTRODUCTION

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Ethnographic conceptualism refers to anthropology as a method of conceptual art but also, conversely, to the use of conceptual art as an anthropological research tool. Ethnographic conceptualism is ethnography conducted as conceptual art. This article introduces this concept and contextualizes it in art and anthropology by focusing on the following questions: What is gained by anthropology by explicitly bringing conceptualism into it? And, the other way around, what is gained by conceptualism when it is qualified as "ethnographic"? What is "ethnographic" about this kind of conceptualism? What is "conceptualist" about this kind of ethnography?

In two essays of the mid-1970s, leading conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth identified his method as "anthropologized art." This is a kind of art that, like anthropology, makes "social reality conceivable." It comes out of artists' deep immersion in cultures that are subjects of their reflection. Its aim is a "'depiction' of art's (and thereby culture's) operational infrastructure." And,

1. Ethnographic conceptualism posits a symmetry of art and anthropology

above all, anthropologized art is a "socially mediating activity." It "'depicts' *while* it alters society" (Kosuth [1975] 1991:117–124, emphasis in the original; [1974] 1991).[1]

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[1] From avant-garde and surrealism onwards, anthropology has been a continuous source of inspiration for contemporary art. Kosuth's perspective is distinct as it does not draw on the anthropological trope of otherness for artistic imagination. Kosuth in fact critiques this trope as it existed in the 1970s: "what may be interesting about the artist-as-anthropologist is that the artist's activity is not outside, but a mapping of an internalizing cultural activity in his own society. The artist-as-anthropologist may be able to accomplish what the anthropologist has always failed at" ([1975] 1991:121). This is not "artist as ethnographer" who is "locating truth in terms of alterity" (Foster 1995:204).

Figure 1. Telephone set in the form of the globe with receiver as a hammer and sickle.
A gift to I. V. Stalin for his seventieth birthday from the workers of the aircraft workshop No. 1,
Lodz, Polish Republic, 1949. Metal, enamel, plastic and wood; courtesy of State Central Museum
of Contemporary History of Russia.

Ethnographic conceptualism invokes these formulations of "artist as anthropologist." But its goal is to make this link with art wholly symmetrical.

2. Ethnographic conceptualism is conceptual art conducted as ethnography

Ethnographic conceptualism refers to anthropology as a method of conceptual art but also, conversely, to the use of conceptual art as an anthropological research tool. Ethnographic conceptualism is ethnography conducted *as* conceptual art.

I thought of the term "ethnographic conceptualism" when Olga Sosnina and I curated the exhibition *Gifts to Soviet Leaders* (*Dary vozhdiam*) (Kremlin Museum, Moscow, 2006). This was an exhibition of public gifts that Soviet leaders received from Soviet citizens and international leaders and movements. It was about a gift economy that was comparable in global scale and size to the one that the British monarchs, US presidents, or the Vatican has attracted but which was articulated

3. Ethnographic conceptualism is ethnography conducted as conceptual art

through a distinct idiom of devotion to communist ideas, the inner working of Soviet leaders' "personality cult," and Cold War diplomacy (e.g., Figure 1). But as the exhibition of these gifts became an instant hit, it also revealed a political and cultural anxiety over post-Soviet identity as well as the ways in which museum projects articulate it. The term ethnographic conceptualism became for me a way to situate this project in anthropology and art and also between this exhibition as an end as well as a means: a presentation of research results on Soviet history but also a means of doing this research, a post-Soviet artifact and a tool in ethnography of post-Soviet Moscow.

A key example that conveys the concept of ethnographic conceptualism is a comment in this exhibition's visitors' book: "Thank you for the exhibition—we found the visitors' book of comments particularly interesting and educating." The book became a site of heated polemic about Soviet history. But this comment highlights a paradox of this polemic itself becoming an exhibition artifact on par with the exhibited gifts to Soviet leaders. It collapsed the distinction between commentary and the objects of commentary, between the visitors and the exhibits—and, for me, between an ethnographic notebook and a conceptualist means to produce an ethnographic situation.

But this comment also dramatizes the relationship between this exhibition project and its audience that extends beyond the exhibition site. It is visible, for instance, in the decision of the Kremlin Museum to gift the exhibition catalog to President Vladimir Putin for his fifty-fifth birthday in 2007. This unexpected reaction to the exhibition came from a peculiar kind of audience that included its host, the Kremlin Museum, and the host of this host, the Kremlin. This act interlinked the gift relations that this project charted and the gift relations in which it was immersed—including complex power relations that formed both the subject matter and the context of this study. It drew attention to the performative links between museums, academia, social memory, and politics—to how the Soviet past was debated in the early 2000s and how it was used politically and aesthetically. As a study in ethnographic conceptualism, *Gifts to Soviet Leaders* both performs and describes post-Soviet society from the vantage point of gift/knowledge relations (see Ssorin-Chaikov, review essay, this issue). Ethnographic conceptualism is in this case an ethnographic research and a conceptualist depiction of this exhibition's operational infrastructure—an "exhibition experiment" in the double sense of curatorial innovation and a laboratory that creates new knowledge (Macdonald and Basu 2007).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY AS ART

In the spirit of the title of this journal, this special issue is a *Laboratorium* manifesto of ethnographic conceptualism. The goal of this introduction is to situate it in conceptual art and anthropology as well as to situate individual contributions to this issue.

Conceptual art experiments with the reduction of art objects to concepts—with the so-called dematerialization of art—and with the reduction of artwork to the question of what is the concept of art in a given work and among a given audience. A work of art, from this point of view, equals questioning what art is, a depiction of how whatever is taken as art is framed and situated. It makes art out of its audiences and their reactions. In a narrow historical sense, it refers to a movement that took place roughly between 1966 and 1972. But its critical mood captures much of the twentieth-century artistic landscape, from Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) to relational or situational aesthetics. Thus, an historical reading that traces conceptualism to Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967) or some earlier formulations, such as that of "Concept-Art" by Henry Flynt in 1961 (cf. Buchloh 1990:107), can be contrasted with a broader philosophical perspective in which this

chronology is not as important (Alberro and Stimson 1999; Beke et al. 1999; Goldie and Schellekens 2007). The replication of concept of art within art is also linked with an even longer *durée* in modern thinking and aesthetics, in particular, with the baroque technique of "theater within theater," in which artwork contains a miniature replica of itself or its author, as in Velazquez's *Las Meninas* (cf. Corsín Jiménez 2013).

But conceptual art is a declaration of the end of art as a distinct activity. Does ethnographic conceptualism similarly mean the end of the distinct activity of ethnography? How is it then related to a familiar narrative of the end of ethnography, as was implied by its literary turn and the postmodernism of the 1980s? Ethnographic conceptualism (EC thereafter) means not an end of ethnography as a method but its

4. In contrast to ethnography as participant observation of what exists, ethnographic conceptualism explicitly constructs the reality that it studies

reconfiguration. It is an ethnography that does things—and not just by saying them, to use J. L. Austin's (1962a) formulation of the performativity of language. It explicitly manufactures the social reality that it studies and in doing so goes well beyond a mere acknowledgement that we modify what we depict by the very means of this depiction.

EC uses art to generate ethnographic situations. But it is very far from a claim that ethnography is "in fact" art in that it works through "poetics" and persuasion, through aesthetics rather than analytics. What is meant by art in such claims looks too much like the "Western art" of textbook anthropology, that is, art as a distinct practice that has an affect because it is aesthetically compelling—about things that are "simply beautiful" (cf. Jarillo de la Torre, this issue). This kind of art is no longer there in Western art itself. The link with conceptual art that ethnographic conceptualism proposes is precisely to highlight the extent to which contemporary art is itself analytics rather than aesthetics.

But EC's link with conceptual art is also useful for reformulating the theoretical debates from the 1980s onward from a new angle. The 1980s is an arbitrary date. It is not so much a ground zero for critical and reflexive anthropology, which it is not, but this is roughly when the anthropological critique of scientism begins. I agree with Kosuth's acknowledgement that at the time of his thinking about "the artist as anthropologist" anthropology was quite different from the cultural critique that was at the heart of conceptual art. With the exception of the Marxist anthropological tradition and its notion of praxis, he admitted, anthropology had no interest in altering society by means of depicting it. It was "outside the culture" that it sought to describe and therefore akin to what he called the "modernism" and "scientism" of art criticism and art history (Kosuth [1975] 1991:117–124). However, what follows below is not a story of how anthropology "finally" caught up with Kosuth of 1974 and 1975. Nor it is a review of projects between anthropology and art, which has been abundantly done elsewhere (Enwezor et al. 2012; Marcus and Myers 1995; Foster 1995; Marcus 2010; Schneider and Wright 2006, 2010). What I am interested in is what links with art are made within anthropological theory and what in these links can be further illuminated by parallels with *conceptual* art.

First, I read anthropology's turn to artistic and literary tools in the 1980s as "not 'Ethnography' in itself but a means of creating it"—to paraphrase a conceptualist artwork title "This is not 'Art' in itself but a means of creating it."[2] In other words, I approach the "writing culture" school as an intriguing attempt at substituting anthropology with a depiction of anthropology's "operational infrastructure" (Kosuth [1974] 1991:121). There is an interesting question as to whether this depiction is indeed a departure form objectivism, as it was claimed at that time (see Ssorin-Chaikov, review essay, this issue). But, second, what I would like to stress in this section is not whether this departure is from "science" to "art," but what analogy *with* art was made in the depiction of anthropology as science.

Consider George Marcus and Fred Myers's remark that the anthropology of the 1980s evinced a "critical ambivalence" of the desire for objectivity, which required distance as evidence that the subjects of study were "independently constituted," and an awareness of the opposite: of existing relationships of power and histories of encounter, "which make anthropology itself already a part of such subjects of study" (Marcus and Myers 1995:2). It is this ambivalence that parallels developments in art. Anthropology's objectivism, predicated on the autonomy of the observed cultural phenomena from the culture of the observer, shares Kantian foundations with the notion of the autonomy of aesthetics related to art's "occupation of a *separate* cultural domain" (6, emphasis in the original) during modern European history. But the other side of anthropology's objectivism is its holism, which implies that no dimension of cultural life can be considered in isolation. Thus anthropology is both enabled by and critiques these foundational distinctions, as does contemporary art. Anthropology's critical reflection on its own objectivism can be viewed as an "ethnographic avant-garde" (20).

This analogy with avant-garde highlights that instead of "whole" cultures of extreme difference, anthropology deals with fragments of and crisscrossing lines, borders and cultural flows. But in suggesting a link with conceptual art, my goal is to illuminate not only *what* this anthropology looks at but *how*.

Anthropology's reflexive turn has been associated with strategies of writing and the notion of culture as text. This was in contrast with the anthropology of the earlier part of the twentieth century that privileged vision—the camera-like presence of an ethnographic observer (Clifford 1983:118; 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). The critique of vision is central to conceptualism too. As LeWitt put it, "[c]onceptual art is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions" (1967:84). It aims at a substitution of seeing with thinking and a material object with a concept. It "dematerializes art" to the point that material artwork becomes "wholly obsolete" (Lippard and Chandler 1968:46).[3] But textualization is the flip side of this dematerialization. Conceptual artwork often *includes* the

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[2] A man carried two full-length sandwich boards with "This is not 'Art' in itself but a means of creating it," printed on them (graduation exhibition, School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University, UK, 2004 [Lamarque 2010:220]).

[3] An example of this questioning of object is *Air Show/Air Conditioning*, a proposal for a column of air as artwork by Michael Baldwin and Terry Atkinson (Baldwin 1967).

commentary—such as in Keith Arnatt's "I'm a Real Artist" (1972) that includes famous discussion of the ambiguity of the notion of the "real" from J. L. Austin's (1962b) *Sense and Sensibilia*. I submit that the textualization of anthropology, the expansion of prefacing as commentary that sets the stage for ethnography, parallels conceptual art.

Now consider an example of this "linguistic turn": Olga Sosnina's exhibition *The Dictionary of the Caucasus* (Sosnina, this issue). This exhibition, held at the Tsaritsyno Museum (Moscow, 2012), arranges material objects, photography, and art from and about the Caucasus neither regionally nor historically but by "keywords." Sosnina's experiment alludes to the conceptualist function such as the *The Dictionary of the Khazars* by Milorad Pavić but also to Stéphane Mallarme's *Livre*, an idea of the novel with interchangeable pages that can be read in any order (see discussion of open artwork below). Among her entries are the ones on the Caucasian War, the "bandit" (*abrek*), the "elder," and the "feast"—but also on "archaeologist," "ethnographer," and "tourist" as a composite section for the outside scholar/visitor. If her point is that material objects are vehicles of translation and Orientalist imaginary of this region, this section focuses on the figure of the collector, interpreter, producer as well as consumer of this imaginary.

A "linguistic turn" in this kind of art refers not merely to the central role of language as a conceptualist tool or simply words appearing on the exhibited objects. If commentary was traditionally the domain of art criticism, conceptualism "annexes the function of the critic, and makes a middleman unnecessary" (Kosuth 1991:38). Art making became art criticism (Goldie and Schellekens 2007:xi), and, furthermore, the commentary could easily and deliberately substitute the artwork that is the subject of commentary. If thinking itself approaches art as a form, then, as Terry Atkinson asks in his famous inaugural editorial of *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art* (1969), "Can this editorial … [as] an attempt to evince some outlines as to what 'conceptual art' is … count as a work of conceptual art?" (quoted in Alberro and Stimpson 1999:xix).

These relations of substitution between the artwork and commentary become a subject of conceptualist art practice (see Carroll, this issue). Conceptualism treats the wall as a book page (Rorimer 1999); journal issues become forms of conceptual art—and not just in Eastern Europe where nonconformist exhibitions were impossible (Degot' 2004); the term "artwriting" is coined (Carrier 1987). But "A Media Art (Manifesto)" by Eduardo Costa, Raul Escari, and Roberto Jacoby ([1966] 1999) goes further. It is an account of how these artists created "the written and photographic report of a happening that has not occurred" that included "the names of the participants, an indication of the time and location in which it took place and a description of the spectacle that is supposed to have happened" (Costa, Escari, and Jacoby [1966] 1999:2–3). Ilya Kabakov incorporates the history of art, as something that explains and situates a given artistic project, into the work of art. He created the work of three fictional artists to illustrate the historical stages of Soviet art in the transition from avant-garde to socialist realism and from the latter to conceptualism.[4]

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[4] *The Alternative History of Art*, Garazh, Moscow, 2008.

But this raises a question of the status of this very piece of writing in relationship to conceptual art. This is, on the one hand, an academic argument about conceptual art and ethnographic conceptualism in a social science journal. But, on the other, if conceptualism substitutes objects with concepts, if an editorial that outlines an artistic view as to what conceptual art was could itself be seen as a work of conceptual art, and if conceptual art annexes the role of its critic and historian, can this textualization be extended to a theoretical argument? I suggest pushing the dematerialization of art (Lippard and Chandler 1968) to the point of including anthropological theory. Art as theory rather than theory as art.[5]

THE GAZE AT THE GAZE

But if the gaze can be associated with an anthropology as "science" that reflects, and textuality with an interpretive hermeneutics of anthropology as "art" that manufactures, it is worth keeping in mind that, both in anthropology and art, textuality did not so much eliminate the gaze as redirect it. In conceptual art, the "linguistic turn" constituted new kinds of material objects (texts) that are open to view. They were often meant to achieve their performative effect when a momentary glance was cast at them. In this condensation of reading and viewing in conceptual art, there was a corresponding condensation of a work of art and the definition of art. But even the most nominalist statements of anthropology's reflexive turn (cf. Rabinow 1996) stop short of declaring "I'm a real anthropologist." The "writing culture" perspective invites us to *view* commentary on anthropology. It resituates the *knowable* social world from the reality under this scholar's gaze to the relationships between this reality and the scholar. It is the

5. Ethnographic conceptualism dematerializes art to the point of including anthropological theory

ethnography of ethnographic framing and ethnography as the history of the ethnographic gaze (Asad 1991; Clifford 1983, 1988; Fabian 1983; Stocking 1968, 1993).

The artistic analogy to this second gaze—what I would call conceptualist realism—is the depiction of the viewer. Julia Secher's 1988 project *Security by Julia* placed surveillance apparatus in exhibition venues, with the aim to depict the human flow of visitors, its regulation and self-regulation, and to view the impulse of the public to be seen and to see its own visibility. Hans Haacke's *Gallery Visitor's Profile* (1969–1973) accumulates and displays information about the statistical breakdown of museum visitors according to age, gender, religious belief, ethnicity, class, occupation, and so on. Privileged social groups constitute the art audience and frame the discourse of art. This project acts as a mirror that returns this frame to the viewer. But in this mirror reflection the frame becomes realistic in its depiction of this ideology of art and its audience.

But this realism itself could be performative. One of the methods of Michał Murawski's (this issue) exploration of the meanings of Warsaw's Stalinist skyscraper, the Palace of Culture and Science that still dominates Warsaw's cityscape, is

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[5] See also *Art as Idea as Idea* by Joseph Kosuth, 1966 (http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/2362).

distributing a questionnaire and assembling a statistical breakdown and collective portrait of his respondents. But this is not simply a social science study of the attitudes of his audience but a performative deployment of the image of research and researcher. Indeed, a mirror that reflects an audience implies a corresponding reflection of this figure of the artist. For the purposes of this study, he designs "The Department of Issuing Anecdotes of the Palaceological Department of the Dramatic Theater" and at some point comes out to an audience of his interlocutors dressed as this office's bureaucrat.

My second contribution to this special issue is also an exercise in conceptualist realism—the second gaze on the gaze and the depiction of its audience. I root it in anthropology's "new empiricism" which is not an unreflected objectivism, but is the one that is mediated by the performativity theory—a description of how knowledge is situated and what are its performative affects in such fields as studies of science, gender, and economics. But I use ethnographic conceptualism to push performativity theory further and to consider how performative is the very distinction of the performative and the descriptive. "The performative" in this sense does not refer to one of the poles of the distinction between the performative and the descriptive but to the drawing of this distinction itself (see Ssorin-Chaikov, review essay, this issue).

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE CONTEMPORARY AND OPEN ARTWORK

Gustav Metzger's *First Public Demonstration of Auto-Destructive Art* in 1960 included a transparent garbage bag filled with newspapers and cardboard. When this installation was recreated at the Tate Britain in 2004, a cleaner accidentally binned it. The gallery subsequently retrieved the damaged bag, and the new one made by Metzger was covered over at night for the remaining time of the exhibition. In this section, I consider some of the artistic and anthropological uses of the unexpected.

This accident should have been invented if it had not actually happened. An unanticipated destruction, almost accomplished, illustrates the point of this kind of artwork perhaps as well as the artwork itself. This point is to highlight, first, temporality as art but also, second, something that is the opposite of literal destruction: a creative process that Helio Oiticica called "anti-art" in the sense of the artist being not the sole author of the work but "an instigator of creation— 'creation' as such." This process, he argued, "completes itself through the dynamic participation of the 'spectator,' now considered as 'participator.'" The artist "activates" the creative activity which exists in society, albeit latently—it is as such a "*social* manifestation, incorporating an *ethical* (as well as *political*) position" (Oiticica [1966] 1999:9, emphases in the original).

James Oliver and Marnie Badham put it in their contribution (this issue, 157), "there is no object but the practice; the practice is the object(ive)." Their case in point is an art project/participatory ethnography aimed at development of a sense of home that they conducted among inhabitants of an underprivileged, stigmatized, and highly divided area of Melbourne. Their artwork is an ethnography—an "articulation

of actually existing, or 'lived (social) space,' where people go to work or school and are potentially deskilled, made sick, deprived of benefits, are not permitted to withdraw their laboring bodies or not to participate" (Oliver and Badham, this issue, 156). But it is about making difference in this space. This articulation of space links ethnographic conceptualism with the "situationalism"[6] of Guy Debord and Henri Lefebvre, aimed at disruption of "the bourgeois life" by staging street events to jolt passersby from their "normal" ways of thinking. The movement's key concept was *dérive*, a disruption of the expected.

But *Internationale Situationniste* is no avant-garde "International" that in the early twentieth century called for a total revolution in society and artistic signification. This and other art after the 1960s seeks difference but is suspicious of a radically different outside. It protests against inequality, elitism, consumerism. According to Kosuth, conceptualism was "art of the Vietnam war era" (quoted in Alberro and Stimson 1999:345); Metzger's "auto-destructive art" was part of his antinuclear politics. But like Jacque Derrida's deconstruction, Michel Foucault's "tactics," or the Gramscian "war of attrition" (hegemony), in this art "Social Utopias and revolutionary hopes have given way to everyday micro-utopias and imitative strategies," writes the theorist of relational aesthetics Bourriaud (2002:13). He calls plainly "futile" any more radically critical stance as based on the impossible, if not "regressive," illusion of artists' marginality (13).

A disruption of the expected was also one of the key points of the "reflexive turn" in anthropology. Opening up to view conventions of ethnographic description sets in motion the reality that is being described—by showing how it is contested, negotiated, and subject to change. Opening up aesthetics or the society under study inserts a *break* and is an important point of *intervention*. But in the "writing culture" perspective, radical difference is part of the modern macronarratives of progress that this school critiques. The anthropology of the contemporary posits "a type of remediation" as its goal, not "reform or revolution" (Rabinow 2008:3). Both stress the open-endedness of the processes under investigation; neither are radical calls for alterity.

The anthropology of the contemporary is built not merely on the explicit contrast with anthropology as a window to the past but also on the analogy with "contemporary art". It replaces modernism (cf. Foster 2009; Smith 2009) in addition to being about what is "here and now" as opposed to "far-away" and "timeless" (Marcus 2003). "The contemporary" is open-ended, incomplete, and ultimately unknown. The emerging is a different state of being than what *has* emerged, however recently, and can be compared precisely with the old. The emergent may include novelty or may not, may hold a degree of repetition, and its contingency does not necessarily equal difference: the "problem for an anthropology of the contemporary is to inquire into what is taking place without deducing it beforehand" (Rabinow 2008:3).

This directly parallels the notion of the audience's reaction in conceptual art, which works best when unexpected. But the status of repetition here is interesting.

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[6] This was a radical political and cultural movement, which centered around journals *Internationale Situationniste* (1957–1969) and *Spur* (1960–1961).

One of Rabinow's most vivid examples of "the contemporary" as a method is the series of performances of Richard Wagner's *Rings*, conducted in 1976–1980 in Bayreuth by Pierre Boulez. He sums this up with a quote from Foucault's review of these performances:

> Boulez took seriously the Wagnerian idea of [operatic] drama in which music and text do not repeat each other, [that is, which] are not saying each in its own way the same thing; but rather one in which the orchestra, the song and the play of the actor, the tempos of the music, the movement of the scene, the decors must be composed as partial elements so as to constitute, during the time of the performance, a unique form, a singular event. (in Rabinow 2011:201)

This unique form and singular event to some extent repeats the musical score or dramatic plot, but this repetition entails difference. It is a reworking of the original script by the means of performance. Rabinow calls this "remediation," a creative transfer between different media that constitutes the key methodological device of the anthropology of the contemporary (2008:3). Boulez's performance illustrates the notion of remediation for Rabinow. He uses this to remediate art for anthropological purposes. Boulez's performance is "a *contemporary* solution" for Wagner (Rabinow 2011:201, emphasis in the original) which works as "a *contemporary* solution" for the anthropology of the contemporary—"the accompaniment of time" at a time when "no single sensibility—modernist or otherwise—dominates, overarches, or underlies current affairs" (Rabinow 2008:78; Rabinow et al. 2008).

I would like now to compare this with the uncertainty principle in physics. In this comparison, however, my point is not to root this conceptualization in the authority of science but, on the contrary, to extend the theoretical connection with art. Umberto Eco makes this link with physics in his discussion of "open work" ([1962] 1989), an artistic movement in which Boulez was one of the key practitioners and which goes back to Mallarme's *Livre* that can be read in any order. Open work is not so much a "composition as a field of possibilities." For example, Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Klavierstiick XI* presents the performer with a single sheet of music paper with a series of note groupings. The performer is to choose where to start and in which order to play. The performer is not merely free to interpret the composer—this happens, Eco says, in any performance of any music—but to decide on the sequence of the piece. The "instrumentalist's freedom is a function of the 'narrative' structure of the piece." These "mobile compositions" or "open artworks" generate "theoretical aesthetics" that are shared across cultural production but also make developments in art, from Eco's point of view, akin to the general breakdown in the concept of causation in contemporary physics, with its principles of uncertainty and complementarity ([1962] 1989:13). The transition from compositional aesthetics to open artwork is akin for him to the move from Newton's mechanics to particle physics. It is a move in scale from physical bodies to particles but also from mechanical determinism to indeterminacy and multiplicity of causations.

Via Boulez, let me link Rabinow's remediation and Eco's open work with the way artistic performance can be approached ethnographically. Sergio Jarillo de la Torre (this

issue) explores two examples of contemporary art. One is the photography of Thomas Struth, who snaps how visitors of the Prado, the Hermitage, or the Louvre contemplate iconic artworks. These viewers and their unposed body language create relational possibilities between the artwork and the art world in the age of mass tourism—from appreciation and curiosity to boredom and fatigue, from art as fetish to a box to be ticked. This exemplifies an ethnographic archive of such performances of meanings of art. But second, Christoph Büchel's installation *Simply Botiful,* in a large warehouse in East London, is an environment which is not marked explicitly as art. It is for the audience to explore and make—make into art or possibly not into art.

The uncertainty principle pervades these projects, much as Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll's art and ethnography is an exercise in "performing viewers." She created artwork out of public commentary on the former Yugoslavian monuments, "subtracted the physical monument from the acts of public writing on them" (Carroll, this issue, 101), made this into installation for the 52nd Venice Biennale and Škuc Gallery in Ljubljana in 2007, and presents here an ethnography of this commentary— an autoethnography of her project and a contextualization of socialist and nationalist monumental politics in the Balkans. Yet her study also warns of a flip side to the uncertainty principle that Eco celebrated. If observation influences what is observed and performance is not merely a repetition, the opposite is always a possibility too. Influencing and performing may entail repetition of more that we intend. With regard to Yugoslavian politics, Carroll sums this up with the saying "fight the dragon long, the dragon you become." But there are also dragons in the shadows of Stalinism and empire that other cases in this special issue discuss (see Murawski; Sosnina; Ssorin-Chaikov, review essay; all in this issue).

MAKING THE UNKNOWN: THE LABORATORY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC CONCEPTUALISM

Like conceptual art and the anthropology of the contemporary, EC reveals social and aesthetic potentialities. It elicits new responses and reactions, explicates unexpected links, points out unforeseen aesthetic figurations. But if it is no avant-garde as it does not posit a "new world" that it aims to achieve by artistic or research means, and if what it does then is add complexity and multiplicity to the existing world, what does it add to anthropology and art that deal with complexity and multiplicity? What difference does ethnographic conceptualism make/describe with regard to what was called in the 1980s the postmodern and now the emergent and open-ended?

Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles observed that the focus on emergence, complexity, and assemblage "implicitly resigns to the fact that little can be known about the world except for the fact of complexity, indeterminacy and open-endedness." In these "aesthetics of emergence" there is "a retreat from knowing." Furthermore, this retreat avoids, from their point of view, the recognition of failure of our own knowledge, as the anthropology of the contemporary locates indeterminacy and complexity "out there" in the world (Miyazaki and Riles 2005:327), rather than

within our own episteme. As a solution, they suggest that we observe this failure of knowledge in parallel between the ethnographic knowledge situation and the contexts that we explore. For instance, in the financial markets that Miyazaki and Riles study, they observe an analogous retreat from knowing and a replacement of knowledge with hope.

"The method of hope" is a valuable resource for ethnographic conceptualism that Felix Ringel (this issue) deploys by means of his conceptualist interventions in Hoyerswerda, a town which used to be a model of socialist modernity in the GDR but has undergone a steep decline following German reunification. But there his own "method of hope" is not merely analogous to his informants' but mutually constitutive. The social reality that he depicts is partly a reaction to himself writing anthropological commentary in a local newspaper, engaging Hoyerswerda youth in ethnographic projects, and initiating an art project in what was once a model part of the "model city" that was soon to be demolished. Just before this block's final deconstruction, it was painted all over, inside and outside, and filled with various artifacts—such as countless little purple figures, two inches tall and cut out of cardboard, that were installed throughout the staircases and flats, said to be "running around" and asking the tourist's question, "Excuse me, what is the way to the city center?" (Ringel, this issue, 50).

But let me consider a different, but equally methodological, implication of the aesthetics of emergence. For me, the problem with acknowledging complexity and

6. Ethnographic conceptualism treats the complexity and open-endedness as "anti-fact" that parallels the notion of "anti-art"

open-endedness is not only an implicit retreat from knowing (Miyazaki and Riles 2005) but also the opposite of this retreat. It is actually the repetition of what is already known. If we already know that things are complex, we do not really need ethnography, conceptualist or not, just to affirm that. Complexity is a good question but a bad answer.

But it is more interesting to approach complexity and open-endedness not as results but *tools* of highlighting what is unknown. It is in this quality that ethnographic conceptualism is useful in its performative stance. If it constructs the reality that it studies ("thesis four" above), this means that it actually fabricates the unknown. I suggest treating this complexity and open-endedness not as "fact" but anti-fact. Anti-facts identify areas of the unknown, although they are not, or at least not yet, "new results"; and they contain precisely the kind of unexpected that is central to contemporary art. The notion of anti-fact complements Helio Oiticica's "anti-art."

Anti-fact is different both from a fact and from the exposition of a fact as artifact. Facts already describe what is established (what "we know for a fact"). The anthropological critique of objectivism describes what procedures and arrangements and what taken for granted assumptions constitute the conditions of possibility for this knowing (Callon 1986; Latour 1999). But the vector of this description runs parallel to the vector of scientific discovery, although it renders discovery as manufacture. Artifacts are facts of sorts. They appear when the aura of complexity of science—and, as Kosuth puts it in his "Notes on the Anthropologized Art," the

"opacity" of the traditional language of art—began losing their "believability." With that "began, through the sixties, an increased shift of locus from the 'unbelievable' object to what was believable and real: the context" (Kosuth [1974] 1991:99). Emergent as the context may be, in a way it is no surprise. To make it a surprise again, the anti-fact of ethnographic conceptualism is a move in the opposite direction. It defamiliarizes the context, and it is in this sense the opposite of the conceptual as in conceptual art and also in the anthropological theory as artwork that I suggested above. It is an "auto-destruction" (in Gustav Metzger sense) of concepts in the unknown.

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