

R E-PRESENTING THE EVERYDAY: SITUATIONAL PRACTICE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC CONCEPTUALISM

James Oliver, Marnie Badham

James Oliver is a graduate research coordinator at the Centre for Cultural Partnerships at the University of Melbourne. Address for correspondence: Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC 3006, Australia. joliver@unimelb.edu.au.

Marnie Badham is a research fellow at the Centre for Cultural Partnerships at the University of Melbourne. Address for correspondence: Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC 3006, Australia. m.badham@unimelb.edu.au.

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Using as a starting point a community-based art project that the authors collaborated on as artists-researchers, this article is a methodological discussion on the development of “situational practice.” This is an art practice-as-research approach, positioned as conceptual, ethnographic, and reflexive, therefore resonating with this special issue’s theme of ethnographic conceptualism. Our aim is to foster and develop a methodological debate that encourages cross-disciplinary work enhancing practice-as-research development in art—with our particular interest being the creative convergence between everyday life and forms of social practice in the arts: art practices broadly defined as socially engaged, participatory, and activating. The article draws on a use of theory—such as Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov’s reference to Paul Rabinow’s concept of “remediation,” David MacDougall’s idea of “transcending culture,” and Henri Lefebvre’s use of “sublation”—to position situational practice as a form of ethnographic conceptualism. In doing so this article is a proposition on methodology and for experimentation across art and anthropology and for innovation in approaches to practice-as-research in the arts.

Keywords: Situational Practice; The Everyday; Methodology; Art and Community; Representation

There is a delicate form of the empirical which identifies itself so intimately with its object that it thereby becomes theory.
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

What has escaped the institutionalisation of high theory is the possibility of low theory, of a critical thought indifferent to the institutional forms of the academy or the art world. A low theory dedicated to the practice that is critique and the critique that is practice.
—McKenzie Wark



Figure 1. Childrens' engagement, artist and photograph Marnie Badham, 2011.



Figure 2. Childrens' garden installation, artist and photograph Marnie Badham, 2011.



Figure 3. *Bell Bardia under the Stars*, live art installation, artists Marnie Badham and James Oliver (projections with Josh Kane), photograph Marnie Badham, 2011.



Figure 4. *Bell Bardia under the Stars*, live art installation, artists Marnie Badham and James Oliver, photograph James Oliver, 2011.

Between August 2010 and July 2011, we worked as artists and researchers on Bell Bardia, a small housing estate in Melbourne, engaging with local residents to cocreate an art project that came to be called *Stories from HOME* (see Oliver et al. 2011; Badham

and Oliver forthcoming).¹ This project was a situational practice (in simple terms of us, the artists, “being there”) that generated a casual dialogue with residents, through which we came to be able to re-present and share a sense of home with the wider community. We did this through engaging the residents in range of live art actions, a series of installations and communal events, and also a final exhibition. The project’s story begins with us being hired by the University of Melbourne to develop an art project that explored new methodologies for research. With this particular locale, we were also building on some social research on themes of area-based disadvantage and stigma that our employers had previously conducted in the area, with Bell Bardia Estate being part of a state-wide Neighbourhood Renewal program for designated areas of disadvantage. Through previous social research (Warr and Mann 2009) the area was recognized as being stigmatized, both in the print media and amongst local residents and neighbors. That is, the name and postcode had become associated with low socioeconomic status and poverty, forms of addiction and its social effects, and a demographic change from predominantly white, working-class residents to recently arrived migrants, predominantly from the Horn of Africa. The area is distinct, diverse, and culturally vibrant. Its long-term residents include indigenous Australians and people of European descent, along with other more recent migrants from Asia and Africa—approximately 30 percent of residents were born overseas (Oliver et al. 2011:7). At play here are social perceptions and dynamics of class, race, culture, and belonging, including our cultural difference Scottish and Canadian artist-researchers. We were asked to explore a methodology of art practice that worked against stigmatizing representations of the locale and its residents. We like to think we achieved this, at least in terms of not reproducing stigma and even challenging it at times.

Bell Bardia, the setting for the *Stories from HOME* project, is a social housing estate in Melbourne, distinctive not least because it includes the few remaining buildings from the athlete’s village of the 1956 Olympic Games. Our art project engaged, in nondirective ways with participants on issues of place, representation, and stigma, where an underlying concern for us was to avoid an art/research practice that slipped into acts of “representation,” where this could have the unintended effect of objectifying participants and residents of Bell Bardia. This can make the artist(s) complicit in reproducing negative perceptions or identifications of people and places. This prompted us to explore new ways of producing ethnography and art-research grounded in a more participatory, nuanced, and collaborative praxis. Negative representations of place were our starting point for the research activities that led to *Stories from HOME*, but they were not our guiding principle.

We therefore approached this project as an emergent artistic practice, where our critical intention was to build relationships through dialogue (cf. Kester 2004) and to

¹ One outcome of this project was a community-based exhibition *Stories from HOME: An Art Exhibition from Bell Bardia Estate*, curated at the Little Catalina Street Gallery, in Banyule Community Health Centre, Heidelberg West, Victoria 3081, Australia in July 2011; artists: Marnie Badham, James Oliver, and Josh Kane.

respond to residents' curiosity about what we were doing there conducting workshops (painting, landscaping, and installing)—and often we found ourselves becoming child-minders, games-leaders, arts workers, or ad hoc supportive listeners. This dynamic produced our art situation, simultaneously drawing attention to and interrupting everyday experience but also acknowledging the situation itself as a form of intervention. Our practice could be described as socially engaged, community-based, or participatory art. Certainly, it was informed by the now well-established concepts of participation and collaboration in contemporary art practice (Bourriaud 2002; Kester 2004; Thomson and Shollete 2004; Thomson 2012). Key concerns for us here are processes of recognition and reflexivity, which provide both the impetus and consequence/s of intervention, through which art making also becomes an invitation to reciprocity. We consider this as an analogy with the gift, as Ssorin-Chaikov also discusses (review essay, this issue), but the gift of a practice, not an object. Developing our art-research approach, then, we grounded it in relational, participatory, and generative processes.

We had never worked together before as artists or as researchers. Nevertheless, we quickly determined that we both shared a commitment to dialogical and emergent approaches to practice. We resolved on an extended timeframe of connection with the locale and on the need to be there frequently—to become, so to speak, part of the furniture, which is not to suggest we became integral to the community. After some discussion with the Neighbourhood Renewal team we set up an “office” in the communal public gardens. We borrowed a desk and chairs from the Neighbourhood Renewal team, provided art-making materials, and offered ourselves as available to the residents. In doing so we became a point of interest: people wanted to engage with us, to determine for themselves what we were doing by being there and how they might wish to engage our offer of dialogue.

Before setting up our project's “garden office,” we introduced our art practice with a small community BBQ that the local Neighbourhood Renewal workers helped plan. This attracted some 60 residents and we mingled, introducing ourselves and handing out some postcards we had made and stamps, so that people could send them to family and friends. The cards featured a soft grain, matte image of the estate's buildings, superimposed with the words, “...from Bell Bardia with Love.” Our BBQ also featured live (local) music. As a means of reincorporating our initial gesture, we later concluded our being there, towards the end of the project's duration, with a BBQ offered as a family picnic and art celebration, and this time we only incorporated art that the residents had been involved in making/developing. This included “planting” artwork in the garden beds, video projecting art onto buildings, and music. Other activities included a “fire” ritual—more like a sparkler walk for the kids around the ground at dusk (to initiate the video projections)—and of course food and hospitality. This event attracted at least 100 people. After that we curated an exhibition at the local community health center, which attracted about forty people (during a weeknight evening). So those direct outcomes were very positive, it would seem. But what were we really doing?

At this point we will digress from describing the project to consider some methodological questions. Our description of the project will have to remain

ethnographically imprecise, at least for the time being. Whilst context is everything in both ethnographic practice and site-specific art, we wish to make a distinction, drawing from Simmel (1971), between form and content and, by extension, between practice and product (which are always coconstitutive). Our concern with this paper is more methodological: we wish to develop an ethnographic and arts practice, rather than focusing strictly on ethnography. Likewise, our lens is not so much trained on “the community” here but on theorizing a form of practice with community.

ETHNOGRAPHIC AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE

*It's not about an exhibition, it's about communication,
a collective gesture that doesn't have any reason for being
except the continuity of living. The traditional work of art is
an object added to life; here life is modified.*

—Jean-Jacques Lévêque

Ethnographic conceptualism explicitly constructs reality that it studies.

—Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov

In re-presenting and making the world through art or ethnography we are part of the everyday; such is the closeness of theory and practice. Our contention is that our research is a form of what Ssorin-Chaikov calls ethnographic conceptualism, made minimal. It is also an attempt to transcend and/or sublimate cultural form as fixed and determined. In this context we explore the dimension of “the everyday” as a means of introducing a reflexive shift towards articulating a “situational art” or a “situational practice” as a means of creative and improvisational artistic research, ethically situated through dialogical social relations. Such practice is not predetermined, either by artistic form (in terms of a defined product) or policy form (as a form of potentially instrumental, arts-based policy research and thereby an extension of governmentality). Rather, as Nato Thomson (2012) has articulated, we are informed by a consideration of “living as form.” From there, we have a relatively straightforward mobilizing of concepts of creativity and improvisation in a parallel ethnographic stance that does not privilege or reify innovation/novelty—following from Bruner (1986), Ingold and Hallam (2007), as opposed to Liep (2001). “To read creativity as innovation is, if you will, to read it backwards in terms of its results, instead of forwards, in terms of movements that gave rise to them,” write Ingold and Hallam (2007:3).

Our theoretical perspective on practice, and in developing an approach to ethnographic conceptualism, takes up Ssorin-Chaikov's reference to Paul Rabinow's concept of remediation (Rabinow 2008), for an anthropology of the contemporary. This is further explored with reference to the visual tradition in anthropology, where David MacDougall's (1998) idea of the transcultural in visual methodology is a conceptual means of transcending didactic, textual representations of “culture,” and didactic representative space (cf. Lefebvre [1974] 1991). Within MacDougall's approach, nontextual methods are understood as a means of (potentially) transcending, as opposed to translating, fixed descriptions and nominations of

culture *as* text. This is to transcend a *textual* focus, which MacDougall overtly critiques (somewhat tongue-in-cheek, considering he does this through a lengthy monograph), as the traditional tool of “traditional” anthropology. This can be more helpfully considered to be a clarion call for methodological innovation and a reflexive move *beyond the text*, which is not just about visual materiality, as is MacDougall’s focus, but also a move towards the experiential and sensory, for example towards what Sarah Pink (2009) articulates as “sensory emplacement.”

SPACE OF PRACTICE

The map is not the territory.
—Alfred Korzybski

What the map cuts up the story cuts across.
—Michel de Certeau

The concept is not object but territory. It does not have an Object but a territory. For that very reason it has a past form, a present form and, perhaps, a form to come.
—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

As indicated previously, part of the purpose (and problematic) of the project of ethnographic conceptualism, and analogues such as situational practice, is developing a critical, reflexive methodology of practice as a means of informing artistic and cultural research as a space of representation and not presenting (or reproducing) it as *the* representative space—the critical spatial problem of place, map *and* territory. This brings together again the danger of unreflexively privileging an author perspective and authority, both in terms of writing and methodology such as with an unreflexive claim and presentation of “being there.” Here we are also reminded of Arjun Appadurai’s contention that the ethnographic project is concerned with the production of locality, where it is “in a peculiar way isomorphic with the very knowledge it seeks to discover and document, since the ethnographic project and the social projects it seeks to describe have the production of locality as their governing telos” (1995:211). Situational practice, then, as a form of ethnographic conceptualism is also a form of the production of locality as an outcome and not just a means of representation (whether as ethnographic writing or artistic object/product).

Here we pause to clarify that our use of “situational” is not without precedent: it is loosely informed by an empathy with the avant-garde situationists, situational theories of identity (e.g., Jenkins 1996), situated or site-specific art (see Lippard 1997) and also acknowledges Donna Haraway’s (1988) conceptualizing of situated knowledge. In these terms we attempt to inform a practice that is radical, relational, and reflexive. Our position incorporates reference to forms of arts practice and engagement, from community-based art to contemporary arts practice, but also other collaborative or participatory forms of creative and cultural production. According to Bruyne and Gielen:

The Social artistic “genre”—with its roots in the 1920s and 1930s (Proletarian Art and New Deal Art) and the 1960 and 1970s (countercultural art)—became dormant in the 1980s and 1990s only to be revived strongly over the past decade. Even artists who enjoy a lot of recognition in official art circles have begun to demonstrate considerably more interest in the community around them. This results in a colourful artistic palette, encompassing relational aesthetics, new social commitment and radical political art. (2011:2)

For us, situational practice is concerned further with a form of spatial analysis in practice (embodied, sensory, and emplaced) and with participating in articulating what ethnographic conceptualism might further offer in terms of creative practice (notwithstanding Ssorin-Chaikov’s pointed instigation). As with the other papers in this volume, a reference point for us is Ssorin-Chaikov’s description: ethnographic conceptualism asks not merely how descriptions perform but also how performances describe (Ssorin-Chaikov, introduction, this issue). In such performative terms this must also concern the social relations of artistic/ethnographic practice (cf. Schechner 1988; Jackson 2011). Ssorin-Chaikov offers us an important proposition for a shifting of (some) anthropological practice into more explicitly artistic or creative arts space, moving beyond traditional anthropological analysis on/of art and, maybe, beyond the sometimes (often) sacrosanct or narrow tropes of canon.

As implied above, propositions such as ethnographic conceptualism are not explicitly new for anthropology, it is also a proposition for hybridity, as directly noted by Ssorin-Chaikov. Ethnographic conceptualism therefore directly takes its historical cue from the “crisis of representation” to move on from the reflexive turn as more than a textual turn from the “writing culture” moment (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Ssorin-Chaikov’s proposition is further informed by Macdonald and Basu (2007) and Weibel and Latour (2007) on experimentation, whilst also citing Paul Rabinow’s (2008) application of remediation as a proposition on an “anthropology of the contemporary.” The concept of experimentation (and possibly secession, as well as reformation/revolution) is thematic in the written works referenced above, and there is also recognition of the concomitant tension between observing (and enacting) processes of the reproduction and/or the emergence of culture/knowledge. Of particular import for Ssorin-Chaikov, then, is this use of the concept of remediation by Rabinow, where ethnographic conceptualism is positioned as an intervention for movement between different media (for example, the text, the object, the participant, the observer) for hybrid knowledge production and engagement. For this to happen there has to be a precondition of openness, and Ssorin-Chaikov references the history of the “open artwork.” But perhaps “openness” can still be predicated on forms of skill, forms of knowledge or access, and forms of capital and hierarchy that foreclose engagement and participation?² This is why reflexivity as practice-based (reinforcing or remediating embodied action), and as a movement beyond objectivation and back into the breach of research, is required. In other words, a practice-as-research

² An insightful overview and contextualizing of the “open work” in contemporary art can be found in Bishop (2006).

consistent with a reflexive consciousness and care for practice as a relational social action in terms of its presentation and emplacement and, therefore, not assuming cultural conditions of openness, as if inert, disinterested, and accessible. Here, then, we have reference to creativity and practice as a spatial dynamic, not just of openness but of improvisation, of multiplicity and simultaneity, of movement, and of work “always in the making” (cf. Bruner 1986 and Jackson 1996 on improvisation; Massey 2005 on space; Ingold and Hallam 2007). This particular predication on openness is then important for a similar valuing of remediation, where ethnographic conceptualism transfers artifacts, ideas, and people between these different media, but it does not just translate between these contexts but generates a unique phenomenon of its own kind (Ssorin-Chaikov, introduction, this issue).

And here is the (reflexive) crux of the matter: ethnographic fieldwork can, and perhaps should, be a generative, creative intervention that disrupts cultural hegemony and normative, oppressive representations of social relations.

Here we can draw some theoretical lines together to be explicit on space, positing situational practice as a form of ethnographic conceptualism. In particular we draw on Lefebvre’s triad of the social production of space, where he was also concerned with transcending the dichotomies of body and mind, physical and cognitive, by emphasizing the relevance of everyday, lived subjective experience as *spaces of representation*. This lived (social) space of experience is part of what Lefebvre articulates as a “trialectic” relation (see also Goonewardena et al. 2008), embraced as a mutuality of perceived, conceived, and lived space in the production of social space. A normative resistance to this conceptualizing can easily fall back into structuralist habits of dichotomy, in part because this “trialectic” also requires a nuanced and complex embracing (or more specifically sublating) of contradiction and dissensus, which, it is argued, social space necessarily contains and is contained by (cf. Rancière 2010). Sublation refers more accurately to the simultaneous relationality of contradiction/s (material and conceptual), where contradiction is continually held and broken (or transcended)—sublated.

In Lefebvre’s triad of space, the first dimension consists of material interactions with place, which Lefebvre describes as “spatial practice.” This is *perceived* space, physical space (it is a factory, you go there to make things; it is a school, you go there to be taught). The second dimension, which Lefebvre described as hegemony, is *representative* space. This is *conceived* space, symbolic and ideological (you are a worker, therefore a productive member of society, enabling progress and economic growth; you are a student and you acquire knowledge to be productive and enable the reproduction of progress/wealth). It is with the third dimension that we are able to incorporate the recognition of spaces of representation, or “representational space.” Here is the movement on the opening up of social space, of sublating contradiction, which gestures also towards Pink’s (2009) contemporary notion of spatial, embodied, sensory emplacement. Through incorporating the third dimension, we allow for the 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 to not participate.

This then articulates a grounded representation of the everyday and its contradictions (and ambivalences or stigmas). And so, in the crisis of representation that ethnography and social science has been contending with, it might seem appropriate to move beyond the text. This accommodates a shift in emphasis away from formalized disciplinary reproductions of social and cultural formations, as imagined through academic tropes and traditions of thought and practice, and a move toward a more participatory and fluid approach. This is not to suggest that an art project or sensory ethnography is the only way forward but a prompt to experiment with practice. This might help engender a methodological shift that is not just a reflexive textual and historical representation but an everyday practice, a “living as form” (Thomson 2012), that is multiple and mobile. Or, as Wark describes it, a “low theory dedicated to the practice that is critique and the critique that is practice” (2011:13).

REMEDATING BELL BARDIA

Drawing on the theme of remediation (but along the lines of transcending and sublation already flagged above) and a situational practice that holds the necessary contradictions that make everyday life a (spatial) form, we will highlight the following particular art-informed situations that emerged from the practice, as opposed to what might be imagined as traditional artistic outcomes. To reiterate our point from above on sublation: there is no object but the practice; the practice is the object(ive).

As indicated, in preparation for our project we helped curate an original BBQ, with music and an art-taster workshop. Of course, there was also lots of mingling, polite conversation, and introductions amongst a diverse group of working- and middle-class, Aboriginal, African, South East Asian, and white residents (with about half of all present being Somali). We also handed out disposable cameras to people so that they could take pictures of the BBQ and surrounding area, with some people even going into their homes and taking pictures—some of which became part of the art later in the project. But early on, it was apparent that some of the recent migrant residents understood us to be officers from the local housing team and took it upon themselves to air some grievances in person (it seems it was quite difficult to expedite communication in normal circumstances). We were quick to point out that we were not part of the local housing office, which was not held in particularly high regard by the residents. Indeed, when we met one of the housing officers at the BBQ, they described the estate to us as “my patch,” yet that same person also told us that it was the first time they had been on the estate. So, to return to the woman seeking help, she told us that her one-bedroom house was too small and that there were two families living there, a total of eight people. The tacit racism and cultural misapprehension in this housing scenario is problematic to say the least—this is a Somali family where it appears to be assumed that “they” don’t really have a problem—as refugees/migrants, they will be pleased to have the house, and that they will culturally accommodate the multiple occupancy within their “home.” We apologized for not being able to help the family directly but also directed them to the

people there who we knew were able to help. We will come back to that story, but suffice to say, an abiding theme to emerge from interactions with people on that day was a desire for more “neighborly” interactions—a not uncommon articulation amongst “neighbors” more generally in contemporary times. Nevertheless, people do have busy lives. On first encounter, then, this was the main response to our conversational approach of asking people about what it was like living there, being there.

Nearer to the end of the project, after several months of making local connections and staging workshops of various sorts on the public ground and sitting in people’s houses, we were testing our plans for the final celebration picnic, which would include audiovisual material. At one point we identified the most accessible wall on which to project the artwork for a dusk finale “wrapping up” the event and the residency part of the project. Having picked the wall we thought was most appropriate, we went and knocked on the door of one of the flats onto which images would be projected (the other affected flat was empty). As we were doing this test at dusk, the testing would be obvious. So we went to the house door (we took care to go to most houses as a pair, not for safety as such, but in the interest of cultural and gender sensitivity). As it turned out, it was a carefree, twelve-year-old Somali girl who answered the door. It was just the children and their mother at home. The eldest daughter spoke to us and went back into the house to explain to her mother what we were doing. And all seemed well. About half an hour later, though, a man came striding over to us, shouting at us to stop what we were doing. It was the father, and he explained to us that he had been out working late and was not happy to come home to find us projecting light onto his home—“This is our home!” he said—and there were children trying to go to sleep. He had further concerns that it was not appropriate for us to speak to the rest of his household when he was not there, particularly to ask their permission for what we were doing in public space and also in the context of research. As it turned out, he was also a cultural researcher. Of course, we stopped immediately to have further discussion. As the situation calmed and we began to adjust our eyes in the rapidly darkening evening and to explain the context of what we were doing, he realized that he knew who we were—not only because his children had been heavily involved, but because he remembered the first BBQ. So recalled, he was happy again and wholeheartedly agreed to make sure he and his family would be at the following day’s picnic. Again, we see evident the immanent everyday contradictions in the production of social space, where our intervention sublated (contained and broke) and contextually situated the contradictions, but where everyday living also became a form, in the performance of a situational practice.

And so, at our showcase community picnic, we had a fine hot day. Everyone ate halal food (from a local butcher) and shared the social and cultural space of the public grounds, running through the art and over the patchwork of blankets we had set up. At the moment in the day where we were prepared to set everyone up for the projections and sound art, we lined up all the children to walk ceremoniously with lit sparklers around the grounds and directed them to then sit down on the blankets and face the wall for the showing. This would also help direct the adults’ attention to the culmination of the day. Of course, we had designed this for dusk, for good effect, and

so the children sat down and we asked parents to join them. But just before we could start the next phase, more than half of the group were gathered up and headed towards the houses. In a slight panic we were not sure what was happening (rather stupidly). But of course, it was time for prayer. We were assured they would be back, but we were not so sure, once they were back in the house routine. So we began the showing, hoping they would be back for the repeat showings (each showing only lasted a few minutes, and the kids could also use a keyboard to improvise and create their own versions, so we hoped that playful aspect would bring them back too). And they did come back, as they said they would. This sharply demonstrated to us our easy ignorance towards the multiple ways in which people can enact cultural belonging in shared public space. It was also an incredible performance of making culture and cultural difference part of the space in a way that we could not have curated and certainly had not accounted for. Once again, a situational practice can offer a space to remediate the everyday, by sublating the apparent contradictions of everyday life—that also makes culture and community.

ETHNOGRAPHIC CONCEPTUALISM AND SITUATIONAL PRACTICE

In this paper we have started to unpack a methodological investigation on practice-as-research through the idea of situational practice, by reflecting on and remediating the broader proposition of ethnographic conceptualism as a means of integrating and interrogating art and anthropology. Indeed, that this potential for integration (of art and anthropology) is still a fertile ground for discussion highlights the relatively bounded nature of some of the discussion and analysis that has preceded us, an analysis that has, perhaps understandably, too often been constrained by disciplinary practices. Historically we have seen a concern with the “ethnographic turn” in art (Foster 1996) and the “crisis of representation” in anthropology and sociology (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Of course these debates are longstanding and have not remained static, and for our context here, as well as the work cited above, of David MacDougall and Sarah Pink making methodological advances, there is the collective and edited work of Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (e.g., Schneider and Wright 2010) that has made serious engagement across art and anthropology. Nevertheless, for the authors here, a suspicion lingers that some practices (in art and anthropology) are suspect for not being traditional enough. More problematically there is frequently a misapprehension of what it really means to problematize representation. Reflexivity is not just about writing the self into the text, as a form of disclosure, or about participants acknowledging the making of the artifact within the artifact. These can in fact be relatively superficial (sometimes tokenistic) nods to reflexivity, when reflexivity ought to be more fundamentally about embodied practices of recognition and sociospatial relations and the problem of re-presenting these practices. We can think here again in terms of context, of form and content, practice and product, structure and agency, and how misrepresentation and/or inequity are reproduced.

What is still to be fully contemplated, as suggested by Schneider and Wright in their aptly titled *Between Art and Anthropology*, is that there should be “more experimentation in the fields of practice *between* art and anthropology” (Schneider and Wright 2010:21, emphasis added; cf. performance studies and the “liminal-norm,” e.g., McKenzie 2001). Dialogue and experimentation (or improvisation) on this *in-between-ness* seems not only appropriate but also congruent with the practices at this nexus, both in terms of ethnographic conceptualism and what we are calling situational practice. Therefore, what if we consider a theory of art practice to be about formations of living, including dwelling and emplacement within practices, and practice as embedded (or situated) in living and not the living in a practice? So approached, everyday life—“living as form”—the formations, articulations, and situations of living itself become a theory of practice and a contingent methodology. Furthermore, in a playful provocation, we employ situational practice as a means to remediate and transcend. In doing so, we position a situational practice to resonate with a form of ethnographic conceptualism and art practice-as-research—as an artistic articulation and analysis, materially *practiced*, social and embodied, sensory and emplaced (cf. Pink 2009). These are, at their simplest, everyday acts, tacit knowledge formations, and creative forms of intervention—spatial, relational and reflexive, convivial or agonistic, which have resonance with questions of identity and belonging.

As indicated above, *Stories from HOME* emerged from our experience of cocreating (together, and with local residents) what became a community-based art project. Initially this project was envisioned as an interdisciplinary research pilot to explore the possibilities of arts-based methodologies. Within the context of an area described as being of socioeconomic disadvantage, and the associated stigmatizing of such areas, this project was also concerned with critically interrogating the underlying potential of social research to reproduce such stigma, even as it is intended to counteract it (for an overview of this aspect of the project see Badham and Oliver forthcoming).³ Drawing on both our past experiences as community-based artists and researchers, and, fundamentally, with the social space of the area in question—we decided not to enact direct, instrumental research but rather to work collaboratively with the raw potential of practice-as-research. Thereby, we placed an emphasis on a particular understanding of the mutuality of an ethnographic approach and an open form of community-based arts practice. Rather than determining an outcome, we chose to use this as an opportunity to articulate practice developed from *being there*, in that situation.

What does “being there” mean? In the first instance, it should not be read as an unreflexive statement on ethnographic authority. It is again about articulating that coconstitutive link between theory and practice in methodology. In *Stories from HOME* reflexivity largely meant visiting and spending time in the community, being part of the everyday, listening and seeing, waiting for what dialogues and art making

³ It should be noted that the project was also not directly about delivering any particular social outcome, i.e., better health, social cohesion, etc.

would emerge. To this end we set up our desk (a trestle table borrowed from a Neighbourhood Renewal team) in the middle of the communal garden space at a social housing complex and turned up almost every Saturday and/or Sunday for several months. This was a form of spatial intervention—a way of working in and sharing, making and marking, a public space. Of course, the emergent process and documentation was more complex than this.

“Being there,” embedded and implicated in the making of social relations, is a key argument for articulating a situational practice. This is one function of the form of methodology (see also the above reference to “living as form”). In terms of people engaging with our work, however (as collaborative and participatory as it is), we cannot necessarily guarantee that other people can always *be there* with us. Consequently, our methods may be disappointing both to us and for the participants (e.g., when the trope of the “ethnographic present” has traditionally been used but can actively suspend belief in the veracity of an ethnographic representation and reflexivity).⁴ This realization, therefore, that our methods may in fact be problematic (as would always be recognized within a strong reflexive methodological stance) is in part what fuels this paper’s approach to ethnographic conceptualism. This is about our spaces of representation and how these can be more visible, sensed, and articulated within interrelations with dominant representative space and spatial practice (Lefebvre [1974] 1991). Or in other words, towards understanding “being there” from another perspective and experience. There is therefore recognition of the creative tension and friction (Tsing 2004) over (spaces of) representation, over the objective-subjective field, its multiplicity and simultaneity of lived experience: being and becoming. This paper’s space of practice is on a form of methodology and a form of representation, this invokes a practice-as-research that we call a situational practice, which is relational, spatial, and reflexive.

A contemporary ethnographic practice is required that critically articulates social relations beyond the text/logos. This is a paradoxical requirement, as this article’s reliance on remediating and sublation in everyday life as form also relies on theory and conceptualizing experience. Recent work on sensory ethnography has been important in this regard (Pink 2009, 2012). Nevertheless, with a particular focus on art, anthropology, and ethnographic conceptualism, this paper seeks to address creativity and contradiction in the everyday by other means, in terms of creative arts practice where a form of social practice is the object(ive). Whilst rapport is a potentially disingenuous idea, as Marcus (1998) suggests, the notion of complicity allows for a reflexive consideration of agency, in a more complex and dialectical way of understanding, articulating, and practicing the social, its relations and formations. This is in keeping with an articulation and sublation of the contradictory in everyday life. In revealing “living as form,” a practice that reflects on complicity, demands both participation and critique that can be directly and materially addressed. So,

⁴ For example, when people familiar with a community read ethnographic accounts that use language suggesting that life and culture are still “like that” (i.e., the fieldwork may have been many years before), whereas the reader is in fact more acutely aware of everyday social and cultural dynamics and interventions than is credited for, the accounts may seem patronizing and biased.

with an emphasis on recuperating the everyday for more collaborative (including contradictory) and creative understandings of social and cultural relations through art and ethnography, ethnographic conceptualism can also be remediated in practice as complicit with the contradictory field of the everyday (therefore spatial, relational, and reflexive—the living as form we call “situational practice”). Situational practice is not about the banality of positive sociocultural relations in life, as is often a critique of social practice (particularly relational aesthetics; for further reading see Bourriaud 2002, 2007; Foster 2007; Charnley 2011; Bishop 2012). It is more political than that. It has to be understood in terms of living as form, of the sublation necessary for everyday contradictions that are multiple, simultaneous, and mobile.

For us, as is surely apparent, the gift is not really an object but rather the social relations involved in the giving. And yet, an object can be formed to contain (materially and symbolically) that form of relationality, to conceptually remediate it. For us, however, the object is also practice, a containing or holding of relations that can also take place in a practice of relations. This is the simple “living as form” idea. But in exploring and understanding situational practice, we move with it, making visible our social relations, listening to them, sensing them. To return in conclusion to Henri Lefebvre, he suggests that space is not constituted,

in the projection of an intellectual representation, does not arise from the visible-readable realm, but that it is first of all *heard* (listened to) and *enacted* (through physical gestures and movements).... The total body constitutes, and produces, space in which the messages, codes, the coded and the decoded—so many choices to be made—will subsequently emerge. ([1974] 1991:200, emphases in the original)

We conclude that this resonates with our argument and, furthermore,

The strange and incomprehensible babble of art could be the new training ground for a heterogeneous public sphere in which listening has once again become a way of living. (Boomgaard 2007:90)

The ethnographic excerpts help remediate form in these terms and are a crucial aspect of what is articulated through social practice. Yes, there were material forms and objects from our project: there were the artifacts from the workshops and exhibition and the installations from the final event described above. But what was their residual value? It is worth noting that after the event, families waited whilst we tidied up and came and asked for, and sometimes just took, the blankets and lights we had used. They needed the objects for their functionality, not as art. They had already made the art form, with their bodies, amongst other bodies. One final consideration: at the first BBQ we met two families from as culturally oppositional backgrounds as you could possibly imagine. We continued to see both families throughout the project, and their children played and they got to know each other quite well. One of these families was the family in the overcrowded household mentioned above. By the time we started spending less time in the community, we

learned that one of these neighbors in question had intervened on behalf of the other, drawing on their cultural and social capital in Australia, and instigated legal investigations into the situation of the recent-migrant family. It is hard to say anymore, but it is important in the context of these neighbors being actively discouraged from getting to know their neighbors, as one housing officer is reputed to have discouraged our protagonist above. Again, living became form, the practice moved on with material consequence. Contradictions were held and broken (sublated) by a situational practice that did not have at its core an object to share or exhibit, other than social practice as an objective.

The gift then can be understood not just as an object but as social relations remediated as form—think also of the tradition of the *kula* ring made famous by Bronislaw Malinowski—a practice produced *as* and *across* social space, highlighting and holding the contradictory elements and emplacements of everyday living. To repeat, then, in terms of situational practice, this is a “low theory dedicated to the practice that is critique and the critique that is practice” (Wark 2011:3).

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РЕПРЕЗЕНТИРУЯ ПОВСЕДНЕВНОСТЬ: СИТУАЦИОННАЯ ПРАКТИКА И ЭТНОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ КОНЦЕПТУАЛИЗМ

Джеймс Оливер, Марни Бэдхэм

Джеймс Оливер – координатор аспирантских исследований в Центре культурного партнерства Мельбурнского университета. Адрес для переписки: Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC 3006, Australia. joliver@unimelb.edu.au.

Марни Бэдхэм – научный сотрудник Центра культурного партнерства Мельбурнского университета. Адрес для переписки: Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC 3006, Australia. m.badham@unimelb.edu.au.

В первую очередь мы благодарны жителям района Белл Бардиа. Исследование стало возможным благодаря гранту Междисциплинарного фонда Мельбурнского университета. Дополнительную поддержку оказали Баньюльский городской совет, организация «Banyule Community Health», проект «Heidelberg West Neighbourhood Renewal» и фонд «VicHealth» в лице Деборы Вар. Спасибо анонимным рецензентам и редакторам Laboratorium за полезные советы, особая благодарность Николаю Скорину-Чайкову за готовность работать с нашим текстом.

Данная статья посвящена публичному арт-проекту, в котором авторы работали в качестве художников и исследователей. В статье обсуждается методология разработки того, что авторы называют ситуационной практикой. Этот подход состоит в художественной практике-как-исследовании, имеющей концептуальный, этнографический и рефлексивный характер. Этим он созвучен теме данного специального выпуска – этнографическому концептуализму. Мы ставим своей целью способствовать развитию методологической дискуссии, поощряющей междисциплинарное сотрудничество и практику-как-исследование в сфере искусства. Особенно мы заинтересованы в творческом слиянии повседневности и форм социальной практики в искусстве: в художественных практиках, которые можно широко определить как социально ангажированные, интерактивные и побуждающие к действию. Теоретическую основу статьи составляют понятие «ремедиации» (*remediation*) Пола Рабинова в интерпретации Николая Скорина-Чайкова, идея «транскендирования культуры» (*transcending culture*) Дэвида Макдугалла, понятие «снятия» (*sublation*), используемое Анри Лефевром. При помощи этих понятий мы определяем ситуационную практику в качестве формы этнографического концептуализма. Таким образом, эта статья предлагает новую методологию, приглашает к экспериментированию на пересечении искусства и антропологии и к обновлению подходов к практике-как-исследованию в искусстве.

Ключевые слова: ситуационная практика; повседневность; методология; искусство и сообщество; репрезентация