

| Colloquia |



# Experimental forms for the expression of norms in the ethnography of the contemporary

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This article considers the methodological state of ethnographic projects that are situated in the context of complex global assemblages and projects, and of a tradition of critique that has defined the purpose of much anthropological research over the past two decades. How does the recent surge of concern with value as the analytic object of study mesh with the explicit normative concerns in the ways that many ethnographic projects are conceived and narrated? Value is both an object and informing frame of such projects. This article probes experiments in the weaving of longstanding theoretical orientations to value in the mesh of contemporary fieldwork itself.

**Keywords:** ethnography, experiment, method, alignment, paraethnography, critique

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The contribution of this article to the collection of which it is a part is that it provides a particular, “off-side,” or lateral and supportive addition to the overall thrust, which is to reflect the current vibrant and revived concern of anthropologists from a number of angles with *value* as a subject of study, and the term itself as a major conceptual component of anthropological analytics. The widespread revitalizations of Western discussions of religion (driven by fundamentalisms or fears thereof), of ethics (driven by advances in biology and information technology), and of global economic, environmental, and humanitarian crises have created the vital stimulus for this prominent turn in anthropological research activities, but this turn is also clearly motivated by reinvesting not only in classic concerns but also classic data forms from ethnography (and its archive) in new, vibrant, and synthetic ways—and sometimes with new interlocutors and partners, including experts, activists, and patrons of research, in discussion.

My contribution here is focused on certain developments that precede and move alongside these current tendencies, which with novelty reengage figures like Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss, and Dumont. My key intervention here is to point out that the forms of anthropological research practice and analytics themselves—in the

1980s, debated in textual terms, but having moved on to the expressive dimensions that research activity itself now affords; the so-called “reflexive” turn now becoming a “recursive” turn—are the grounds on which value in the contemporary is discussed, negotiated, debated, analyzed, and become puzzles before they become data or the subjects of scholarly discussion and argument.

How does anthropology do research on value in new circumstances? For we may ask, how can anthropologists argue in their terms both as a condition *inside* contemporary fieldwork, driven by a range of positions on what constitutes critical inquiry, and in producing quite normatively committed discursive results from it? This question moves far beyond longstanding discussions and qualifications of a fact-value distinction, and indeed calls for—in the case of anthropology—exploring how even a renewed tradition of concern with value as both an object and trope of distinctively anthropological study can be reconciled with the overtly normative way that anthropologists create forms of research and develop (largely collaborative and dialogic) thinking in their frames.

How, then, does an anthropology of contemporary problems, spread across sites, subjects, and organizational assemblages, while being deeply normative in its commitments and engagements with other knowledge economies, also sustain more broadly a lineal concern with a classic anthropology of value? Of what worth are complex discussions of value that occur in the reimagined field of contemporary research to a revived classic anthropology of value? And, especially, what forms and methods are created to make value visible, accessible, and in a sense lateral to distinctive disciplinary discussions, such as occurred at the “Value of Anthropology” conference in Cairns that generated this collection?

A number of articles in this collection look, in new ways, at issues that depend on sustaining the classic categories that stimulate anthropological thought about value—peoples, alterity, religion, ritual—but there are others that locate themselves distinctively within and amid defined assemblages of world or global systems—and also, self-consciously or not, the deeply normative critical traditions for thinking about them. While in no way separate from, or inconsistent with, classically posed analyses of value in anthropological thought, such research projects (in this collection, I am thinking of articles by Nielsen [part two], Ortiz, and Tsing [part one] among others) do require (and manifest, I believe) innovative, experimental thinking about methods—i.e., the constitution of fieldwork and the production of ethnography, in whatever genre. It is that play with new forms and their implications and normative shape, so to speak, with which I am primarily concerned in this article—more the forms, embedded contests, and stagings of contemporary thinking about value, occasioned by the design and implementation of collaborative research than in the crafting of core arguments themselves for disciplinary debate.

Contests of value thus occur at various scales in the contemporary field of research and deserve to be excavated and conditioned as such for various receptions, including academic ones. Taking normative stories, in their versions, binds, and dilemmas is the “stuff” of ethnographic data in which the anthropologist variably participates, but always with normative stakes of her own. Figuring out ways to make these binds dynamically—and even theatrically—accessible for disciplinary conceptual work and debate is a major aim of current plays with method, form, and media.

The energetic and fresh return to classic arguments about value is immensely helpful and distinctly anthropological, but I would also say that the questions have to be restated in different idioms and engagements—and this requires a rethinking of methods by an ethos of experiment and variably scaled collaborations. This article, lateral to the others, and at the tail end, is a small and sympathetic contribution to this particular concern.

### “Circumstantial activism” now . . .

In the 1980s, as critique was taking shape as a major thematic rationale for ethnographic writing in anthropology that has since become as defining of its authority as the projects of, say, functionalism or structuralism once were, Michael Fischer and I concluded *Anthropology as cultural critique* with some (it seems to me in retrospect) unsatisfying and uneasy remarks about how anthropologists might create explicit moral or ethical discourses as an inevitable dimension of critique:

We end with a word about the moral or ethical dimension that one might expect any project of cultural critique prominently to express. For some, advocacy or assertion of values against a particular social reality is the primary purpose of cultural critique. However, as ethnographers for whom human variety is a principal interest and any subjects are fair game, we are acutely sensitive to the ambivalence, irony, and contradiction in which values, and the opportunities for their realization, find expression in everyday life of diverse social contexts. Thus, the statement and assertion of values are not the aim of cultural critique; rather, the empirical exploration of the historical and cultural conditions for the articulation and implementation of different values is. (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 167)

The value/normative expressions that went along with the theoretical discourses that informed critical ethnographic writing indeed did produce, for a while (into the 1990s?) a kind of morally redemptive style of writing that was powerfully and originally achieved by some (and still is!), but became all too formulaic for many others. It was difficult to understand projects of ethnographic research as sites where values were contested—unlike the normative or ethical doubt that routinely haunts many moments of fieldwork—outside the realm of “accommodation and resistance” narratives (Ortner 2006), of exposing the nobility and sufferings of everydayness, and of continuing to explore, with a tone of advocacy, the originality of cultural lives lived marginally, and largely invisibly, in relation to the West, modernity, and dominating styles of social thought.

If there was an anthropology of value during that period of the formation of ethnography’s explicit project of critique, then, it lay in normative doctrines embedded within and deployed in the assimilation of critical theories to produce a new kind of ethnographic writing (the reflexive turn). Value was not so much an object of study as a concomitant of embracing certain kinds of critical frames (e.g., postcolonial debates, Foucaultian critique prominently) that gave ethnographic arguments and analysis shape. The anthropology of value in the project of critique remained very much a problem of rhetoric, assimilating the ethical/normative dimensions of influential critical theories of the period to the description and analysis of difference in ethnography, which indeed has been continuously the overde-

termining, metavalue orientation of social and cultural anthropology through its modern history.

Things, in my view, became more interesting and less predictable with regard to the expression of norms in critical writing from the early- to mid-1990s onward. Anthropology in the United States had first to rethink itself, as did a number of other disciplines, in relation to the perception and reality of macro social changes that went under the rubric of globalization. As a discipline, it had to work through knowledge economies, global projects of political economy, assemblages, or circulations to find its way to both its traditional and new subjects at the ethnographic scale (face to face, everyday) in which it is committed to work. This task was more than just recontextualizing or renarrating the scenes or locations where ethnography could be done. It meant literally moving in scapes or flows, reinventing the concept of the field, reproblematising the traditional object of study, and exploring new ones. This collective thinking was reflected at the time by a spate of resonant “trend” writing (in US anthropology, works prominently by Appadurai [1996], Tsing [2000], and Gupta and Ferguson [1997], among several others) about the recalibration of the scale and meaning of the basic tropes of anthropological research method so as to set them in motion.

Parallel to the way in which Fischer and I ended *Anthropology as cultural critique* with regard to the anthropology of value in producing critical ethnography, I concluded my main contribution to this programmatic writing of the 1990s on the emergence of multisited ethnography, with the evocation of “The Ethno-grapher as circumstantial activist” ([1995] 1998). The use of the term activist was perhaps unfortunate, since despite my claim otherwise, it has sometimes been irresistible (and especially now with calls for public anthropology and the actual frequent convergences of projects of ethnography with those of NGOs, social movements, and protest) to think that ethnography that is both literally active—moving in circuits, recursive, and participatory in the scenes of fieldwork—and caught in certain binds of loyalty, sympathy, and affiliation must, once again, declare itself normatively. Rather, I would say it needs instead to make trials or contests of norms and values the basis of forming working collaborations and arguments, with uncertain, often messy outcomes, in the pursuit of ethnographic insights in the field.

The diverse ways that the challenge of globalization to the previously more circumscribed ways of conceiving projects of ethnography have played out through the first decade of this century—and continuing—as problems of designing fieldwork—facing a plethora of new conditions and challenges—are what I want to address from certain oblique angles in what follows.<sup>1</sup> What was glimpsed or evoked

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1. I think of this article as a sequel to the one (Marcus 2010) that I prepared for a previous workshop on holism (Otto and Bubandt 2010) that I also think of as related to the workshop on value. The question of *an anthropology of value* is integrally connected to the ethical positioning that anthropologists take (their mode of subjectivation in Foucault’s terms—see Faubion’s *An anthropology of ethics* [2011]) in achieving the scale of research in which they can practice ethnography these days in a now authoritative research trend of critique. The conveners of this workshop explicitly made the connection between the problem of holism in contemporary anthropology and its examination of norms and value as a condition and object of research. For the holism workshop, I posited and traced the emergence of critique as an explicit project for ethnography amid the enthusiasm generally for critical theories of the 1970s and 1980s.

in the 1990s are now full throttle trends of research practice, to be examined project by project: as they are reported in ethnographic writing still dominated by critical theory; as they are evoked in the shifting terms of “tales of the field”—the particular kind of shop talk in which anthropologists like to indulge about their trade-craft; as they are taught in graduate mentoring; and most importantly, for this article, as they are reflected in the alternative media and forms, notably collaborative, through which access to both fieldwork and its results are being developed in progress.

In broad brush, I am particularly concerned with projects that have to work through complex knowledge economies in order to shape their own anthropologically conceived object of study, projects in which the previously marked epistemological interest in defining ethnographic research questions by the intense examination of anthropologist-other intersubjectivity have been overshadowed by an ontological interest in conceiving the object of study (in this, anthropology’s participation in science studies has been crucial in conditioning it more generally to working through knowledge economies to sites of everyday life; see especially, Fischer 2003, 2009). And commensurately, the reflexive turn, in the words of Kim Fortun, has been overshadowed by a recursive turn (Fortun 2001: 23). Anthropologists move in circuits, assemblages, or among relations—as working metaphors for defining the field—and they move situated discourses that they accumulate around with them in unusual configurations. This movement and posing of arguments out of the places where they are usually made, heard, and reacted to, are distinctive acts of ethnographic fieldwork that are political, normative, and sometimes provocative, in nature—and deserve their own designed modalities accessible to readerships, audiences, and constituencies who consume ethnography as a form of knowledge. In this sense, indeed, ethnography has routinely become circumstantially activist, but not as a contingent effect of the unfolding of research as multisited, but rather as central to its strategies of asking and pursuing questions among its constituencies, including and encompassing activists, social movements, and for that matter, corporations, agencies, and labs as well.

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Within that trend, managing the framing context of ethnography in wholes—that moved from classic systemic metanarratives to concepts of assemblage or the like—was crucial. However, where I ended up in that paper was in taking a sharp turn away from the evolving problem of representing and theorizing social wholes and totalities in ethnographic concept work and writing toward the problem of the immersion of a by now conceptually prepared transitive (multisited?, circulating?) ethnographic craft in an unbounded world of new media participation—the whole not as framing representation of the global, but as establishing fieldwork within and in relation to ubiquitous media, the digital oceanic, so to speak (Chris Kely and his work on commons or communities around open access and open source technologies was my specific reference point then). Maintaining a sort of ethics of the charismatic (Faubion 2011), supporting the scale that makes ethnography what it is, is at the heart of producing any anthropology of value today. As in this present article, I am most concerned with the conditions, or forms, for so doing, which must be constructed conceptually and sometimes materially alongside or in relation to the still powerful longstanding ideologies (professional aesthetics, really) in play of how ethnography should be done and what makes it distinctive.

The visions and tropes of the 1990s have thus become plans, designs, and technologies for giving form to fieldwork in the present. The negotiation of norms is the currency and gambit of these designs. An anthropology of value becomes the working term of the collaborations—long-term, short-term—on which these forms depend, and the infrastructure for what they can offer—eventually and cumulatively—as knowledge. The classic ethnographic textual form, even as amended since the 1980s and given its learned pleasures, is a very partial and increasingly inadequate means of composing the movements and contests of fieldwork—both naturalistic and contrived, collaborative and individualistic—that motivate it.

### **The Center for Ethnography, UCI, during the 2000s: The opening of third spaces**

In a second, even third generation expression of anthropology as cultural critique, Michael Fischer (2003) influentially posits that anthropology “now operates in a set of third spaces” in which “anthropology’s challenge is to develop translation and mediation tools for helping make visible the difference of interests, access, power, needs, desire, and philosophical perspective.” He goes on to say that “these third spaces are terrains and topologies of analysis of cultural critique of ethical plateaus. They are dramaturgical processes, fields of action and deep plays of reason and emotion, compulsion and desire, meaning making and sensuality, paralogics and deep sense, social action and constraints of overpowering social forces” (Fischer 2003: 8). My sense of the course of many projects of ethnographic research—roughly from the turn of the century forward—is that they are indeed operating in third spaces, but both of their own making and design, as well as in those “found” and posited. So, what are these third spaces, how have they been imagined, and sometimes literally produced, stage managed, or forged out of the circuits and serendipitous movements that fieldwork projects define? In order for third spaces to be found, must they to some degree not be produced or elicited as domains of speculative thinking, alongside and increasingly defining of situations of fieldwork? What are the varieties of such moves and inventions? How are they conceived, and what do they portend for anthropological knowledge?

These questions have come to be the intellectual spine—the orienting themes—of the Center for Ethnography at the University of California, Irvine ([www.ethnography.uci.edu](http://www.ethnography.uci.edu)), which we founded in 2005 with a curiosity about the many projects that were then self-consciously emerging and becoming established arenas of anthropological research amid the networks, assemblages, knowledge economies, and complex institutional arrangements of global orders that had been the prominent subjects of influential “trend” writing in anthropology during the 1990s. Most notably, this trend writing marked anthropology’s early forays into sciences studies, as well as fascinations with globalization, the global situation, evocations of neoliberalism, flows, circuits, and ethnographic multisitedness.<sup>2</sup> Immer-

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2. Before coming to UCI, I attended a conference in Prague in 2003 that brought together scholars from several disciplines, and that was inflected by synthetic thinking on the domain that has inspired the diverse trend of research relevant to the experiments with alternative forms that I survey in this article. It resulted in the volume *Global assemblages* (Ong and Collier 2005), which among others stands as a major statement of research trends over the past decade in the realm of complex global organization and

sive fieldwork certainly has remained the ideology of ethnographic research in these arenas, but its ultimate results, its developing ideas and arguments, are functions of different sorts of participations that pursue a line of thinking in the field, often collaborative and collective in nature, that requires not only documentation (in fieldnotes and diaries, for instance, leading to the monograph), but also forms of elicitation, demonstration, and accessibility to publics and readerships in process. They evoke anthropologists who, as a challenge of con-temporary fieldwork, have worked through other knowledge forms, or economies, to find their way to an anthropological subject or object of study. Thus, in contemporary ethnographic projects, prototypes—working versions anticipatory of a result—have become, in a sense, more important productions than finished and rounded interpretative texts. But these productions need their forms, their spaces, their studios, and media. It is the variety of such experiments in form that the Center has sought to follow, encourage, to provide perspective on, and perhaps use to articulate the rudiments of a theory of such practices.

To bring this research trend together into an account, as I am sketching here, is a thoroughly speculative and categorical venture:<sup>3</sup> each project develops a distinctive working vocabulary, a theory of form, so to speak, for what it perceives as its experimental quality. My provocation is that these projects fit together; they define a certain trend. Each, in its own way, diverges from the now well-established genre of fieldwork writing. In fact, what is at stake in each is less writing about fieldwork, or method, but rather defining the conditions of anthropological thought and argument in arenas of dense debate, contestation, and representation. This requires

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arrangements: technology, infrastructures, science, governance, neoliberal policy, and political economy. The event that inaugurated the Center for Ethnography at UCI in 2005 reflected experiments with form in the growing research tendencies that *Global assemblages* registered: that inaugural Center conference included the research of Doug Holmes on central bankers, of Bill Maurer on finance, infrastructures, and payment systems, of Annelise Riles on regulatory regimes in markets, of Michael Fischer on “emergent forms of life” perspectives in science studies, and of Paul Rabinow on his move into the study of synthetic biology. I have continued to follow these projects on moving ground, their morphings, and in their progressions, the development of innovations in forms, to develop thought, alongside the serendipitous routes and encounters of a research process still in the spirit of fieldwork.

3. It is much easier, however, to suggest in general terms the contemporary characteristics of doing fieldwork that have led to these efforts to experiment with form in defining “third spaces” (and their variants). I’ll simply list six here. Each is discussed more fully in my essay on the contemporary legacies of the *Writing culture* debates (Marcus 2012).
  1. The imperative versus the impulse to collaborate.
  2. A Theorem of Incompleteness and the problem of scaling ethnographic research.
  3. Double agency—the ethnographer having independent and masked purposes in relation to subjects with whom they are nonetheless aligned in explicit collaborations as fieldwork.
  4. Reception and forging/recognizing granular publics within the frames of fieldwork.
  5. Working in the temporality of the present becoming the near future.
  6. The appeal of design and the studio as a legitimate form of experimentation in association with fieldwork methods.

more than a rhetoric of difference, but the making of interventions and forms alongside the traditional imaginaries of being in fieldwork. Third spaces, in their various renditions, where reality is sensed to be escaping available working concepts, is where the very nature of anthropological knowledge in fieldwork gets negotiated in relation to and recognition of parallel, or lateral, processes on the part of subjects. This is also where, I argue, an explicit anthropological discourse on value is being forged, consistent with changes in the project of critique that has motivated much ethnographic research and writing since the 1980s. The problem is how to make such a collaboratively produced and contested discourse accessible in forms other than the now canonically critical ethnographic text—how to make this discourse a part of the stuff or data of fieldwork in a form rawer than the rhetorics of critique that now lend authority to ethnography. These forms are experimental, designed, and interventionist, and while consistent with the dialogic modality of classic fieldwork, they also work against the grain of the naturalist norms of such fieldwork.

I can only present a flavor of these projects here, grouped by some of the key terms, however provisional, for the spaces and forms in which the (field) work of anthropology as a kind of theater, of partnership, of complicity, of workshop, etcetera, can be done. A number have to do with establishing conditions of perspective, of what Gregory Bateson (1972: 159) long ago termed as deutero-learning or metacommunication, but still within the contexts of the “field.” It is quite difficult to generalize across cases and examples about what difference these experiments in form make to the projects in which they are theorized, proposed, and conducted—in my observation, succeeding or failing, or somewhere in between, always have important and certainly interesting results, in each instance, for how arguments and subjects take shape in established ethnographic genres of reporting, and indeed for what these genres are becoming as media beyond and supplemental to the book and the journal article.

What follows, then, is a yet unsynthesized sampling of the ongoing experiments with form to which I have been referring. They are intended to give the reader a sense of what is being done and what is being claimed for them, in different idioms. The research projects and trajectories that I collage below reflect prominent efforts from anthropology over the past decade to work in the terrains of complex arrangements that I have evoked. Collective editing of the *Late editions* annual volume project through the 1990s (Marcus 1992–2000) was a rich experience for me in the untapped affordances of dialogic forms of reporting situated as collaborative thinking amid ongoing, self-consciously emergent conditions of systemic change. But it was the issues around the inaugural meetings and conferences that established the Center for Ethnography at the University of California, Irvine in 2005–2006, that suggested to me a shared problematic with diverse expressions. With different degrees of commitment and elaboration, all of these scholars seemed to be evoking new spaces or conditions of ethnographic fieldwork that suggested shifting functions and conditions for producing ethno-graphic knowledge, and all seemed to me to be suggesting different kinds of relationships, alliances, collaborations with subjects that emphasized the transitive, parallel, overlapping nature of ethnographic curiosity and found curiosities within the power-knowledges that define the chronotopes and conceptual maps of the literal field of fieldwork.



Ethnographers work with and through the knowledge protocols of their subjects (only some of their subjects—and herein lay the politics of fieldwork in these spaces of complex projects), and fieldwork involves the recursive movement through research spaces. This movement depends on continual concept work—speculative thinking along the way—that deeply defines the eventual reports to the academy and that require discretely conceived forms or practices, distinct from the usual way immersive fieldwork is thought about by its practitioners, who are in most intimate conversations with their fieldnotes. These forms, evoked generically as third spaces by Fischer, are imagined as an ideology of contemporary form and function within or alongside fieldwork, or as the Center for Ethnography is encouraging, they are actual interventions staged and conducted by ethnographers and others, shaped by the conditions of specific projects.

### *Archives*

Rather than repositories, archives, in the experimental/alternative mode, enabled by available and changing information technologies and media, are active, animated, open-ended, multileveled, and transitive in authorings, genres, publics, commons, and internal relations—sharing exactly the shifting conditions of producing ethnographic research today. Among the examples that I am surveying, they are the most fully alternative to the authoritative print genres of scholarly communication. They are inspired by early experiments in open source commons online explored by Chris Kely, for example, who in *Two bits* (2008), conceptualized them as “recursive publics.” As I suggested at the conclusion of my paper for the *Experiments in holism* volume (Otto and Bubandt 2010), the context for the construction of these forms and platforms, and more importantly for their performance and rethinking of norms so basic to the theory and constitution of the social in modern life (such as freedom), is the digital oceanic—crowds and clouds in current patois.

Archives are thus the making of web-based forms for the pursuit of inquiry whose boundaries must be designed within a realm of contemporary communication that seems unbounded. Their conventional success depends on resources, investments, and patronage of the technologies on which they depend. In this way, they are perhaps no different historically than, say, encyclopedias and cabinets of curiosity when they were in fashion. From the myriad of such projects underway today that morph conventional disciplinary practices, I select out the Asthma Files ([www.asthmafiles.org](http://www.asthmafiles.org)) project developed by Mike and Kim Fortun to exhibit, though I follow or participate in the development of a couple of others. The Asthma Files is a work in progress that both illustrates the considerable hurdles in actually producing a platform (in this case depending on the affordances of Plone technology) true to the project’s considerable ambitions and vision, as well as providing a continuing in-depth conceptual, theoretical, and normative discussion of the project’s imaginaries rooted in the ethnographic stuff of the world. I should also mention, from anthropology, the website of the Matsutake Worlds Research Group ([www.matsutakeworlds.org](http://www.matsutakeworlds.org)) whose impressive website I began to follow as I was writing this paper. It has evolved from the influential writing of Anna Tsing (2000, 2005) about doing ethnography in the “global situation,” to the formation of the Matsutake Worlds Research Group (2010) among her students and associates as a collaborative project and on to what I think of as its present dynamic archival

form online as ethnography in process. In sum, not only technological possibility but curatorial practices become key to the construction, maintenance, and arguments-within-form of archival projects as contemporary “writing culture” alongside fieldwork.

***Lateral, para-ethnographic, and collateral knowledges***

These three characterizations (representing the ideologies of practice of Maurer 2005; Holmes and Marcus 2005; and Riles 2011) are actually imaginaries for alternative forms within the professional culture of expectations for ethnography, fieldwork, “being there” modes. They evoke scholars committed to fieldwork who move through complex spaces and knowledge economies, with which, as anthropologists they have affinities, and thus who must rethink and innovate the terms of the relations of research—others become counterparts, epistemic partners in certain contexts, which ethnographers find opportunistically and negotiate to define for their purposes. They are imaginaries of alternative forms within the leviathan, so to speak, and in basic accordance with the expectations of the traditional anthropological research form.

Most importantly, they exist, actually and conceptually, outside, or as an exception to, the longstanding regulative norms of immersion and participation by the anthropologist mainly on the subjects’ terms in fieldwork. They are neither the literal and figurative space of the subject, nor that of the engaged observer, but a third space—literal and imaginative—in relation to the serendipity presumed to be strongly operative in the immersive hopes (on the part of the anthropologist, at least) of fieldwork relations.

In a sense, these experiments with form, though a necessity in constituting fieldwork inquiry today in most settings, are the materialized outcome and consequence of the value and license placed upon reflexivity in the discussions and re-thinkings of ethnography of the 1980s and 1990s. What were and are reflexive writing strategies canonically blended into ethnographic texts now give rise to “third space” designs, interventions, and opportunities as fieldworkers become immersed not only in communities and networks, but in the normative, often global projects of activism, philanthrocapitalism, and latter-day development initiatives that define them and require or anticipate more active modes of participation in order for ethnographers to sustain their own longstanding norms derivative of the value of immersion and its ideology.

“Lateral” is a term employed in the methodological introduction to Bill Maurer’s (2005) distinctive work on the ethnography of three different contemporary forms of money. For him, lateral refers to a conceptual rather than literal space or framework that orients fieldwork. He presents it as an alternative to discussions of reflexivity consistent with the idea of the immersive experience of fieldwork. The fieldworker and his subjects operate along parallel lines of thinking that may or may not literally intersect in the interactions of fieldwork. The intellectual, conceptual thinking of ethnographers is profoundly aligned with that of subjects and has variable implications for experimental thinking or practice in fieldwork. Ethnographic knowledge as lateral and differential to subjects’ knowledge inspires thought experiments in the field and perhaps a kind of studio staging alongside it, in part inspired by the thinking that culturally defines the phenomenon of money as equivalences among quantities and values (adequation).

Here, for example, is a doctoral student's expression of a lateral approach to her dissertation research in the arena of business, clearly influenced by Maurer or alongside a conception of ethnographic inquiry:

Rather than putting things into context by elevating the conceptual to a higher ground above the empirical, my experiment allows the two to be in continuous variation. I will thus be addressing field participants, not just as practitioners, but also as thinkers, as they are conceptually informed in their work as I am in mine. The experiments will proceed by a series of lateral moves between the practices and concepts of informants and those of science studies. I will be comparing scientists to the objects they study and the technologies they work with. More importantly, I will use their conceptual language to transform or rethink my own. (Gorm Hansen 2011: 15)

"Para-ethnography" is a term that has emerged—and continues—in conversations between Douglas Holmes and myself since the late 1990s. In my case it served to help think about the changing relations and productions from fieldwork interactions when the scope and scale of fieldwork is multisited (Marcus 1998). For me, the para-ethnographic was thought through first in relation to a notion of "complicities" in multisited fieldwork (Marcus 1998). For Holmes, it had to do with illicit discourses at play amid the more official ones in the effort to establish the European Union (see Holmes 2001 and the alternative he explores in "Integral Europe"). And later, para-ethnography has been both a key value and object of inquiry in our mutual discussions of the explicit and structural collaborative nature of much fieldwork today (and how this work could remain distinctively ethnographic; see Holmes and Marcus 2008), and most importantly in our discussions of Holmes' research on central banking with a deeply para-ethnographic curiosity and indeed expression in the history, logics, and everyday work of this institution (see Holmes 2009).

Here is an expression of how Holmes and I were thinking about the para-ethnographic when we were also talking about the refunctioning of ethnographic methods to work in project assemblages of global scale:

How to make ethnography of the para-ethnographic found in the marginal ways of knowing—centrally the anecdotal—within technocratic regimes? When deployed counterculturally and critically, by the most privileged within these regimes such as chairman Greenspan, these genres suggest where ethnography might literally go in fieldwork. How to move within the space or vision of the referents of the para-ethnographic? . . .

In sum, within traditional ethnography one never would have asked for the para-ethnography of the Trobriand Islander or the Nuer. The need for radical translation was assumed. . . . What does it mean to substitute the "para-ethnographic" for this traditional apparatus of ethnographic knowing? As we have suggested, it means that when we deal with contemporary institutions under the sign of the global symptom, as we have termed it, we presume that we are dealing with counterparts rather than "others"—who differ from us in many ways but who also share broadly the same world of representation with us, and the same curiosity and predicament about constituting the social in our affinities. At base, then, the postulation of the para-ethnographic is a somewhat veiled,

maybe even hesitant, overture to partnership or collaboration with our counterparts found in the field. (Holmes and Marcus 2005: 241, 250)

Finally, the condition of para-ethnography in contemporary fieldwork projects invites the creation of and experimentation with new forms and formats—designs within fieldwork—to meet this challenge. And to the extent that it concerns itself with, even privileges, the professional, the expert, and the mundanely powerful, it also challenges the deepest value alignments on which the conduct of ethnographic work has often been routinely undertaken.

*Collateral knowledge* is both the title of a recent study of banking regulation by Annelise Riles (2011) and also a term like “lateral” or “para-ethnographic” that intends to rethink, adapt, and enact ethnographic method in a novel way that involves a different calculus, recognition, and practice of relations between anthropologists and subjects. Again, hers is an experiment in thinking about research with implications for its doing. She makes this clear in the following declaratory and introductory passage, worth quoting at length, since it engages with and claims to go beyond a functional limit in the production of ethnographic knowledge as conceived in the mode of operating laterally or in the mode of the para-ethnographic. Rather Riles, a legal scholar as well as an anthropologist, pushes deeply as ethnographer into the intellectual functions of those she studies and seeks to at once intervene, inspire, and create within their conceptual practices. This requires, she says, a recursive rather than reflexive accounting of research as an ethnographic form. Literally the creation of a “tool,” a scheme or plan that in a sense must have effect in the scene of fieldwork in order to also have value as ethnographic knowledge that anthropologists cultivate as experts among themselves (Riles 2011: 6-7). Thus, she goes far in the direction of deriving distinctive anthropological knowledge from collaborative relations in fieldwork that first must be found and then made, with consequences for politics, ideas, and certainly methods of inquiry. As Riles puts it,

This project . . . does not ultimately seek to describe; it does not point to a new artifact. It does not seek to find a technique for re-starting the epistemological project. It lets go of the desire to restabilize the ethnographic terrain, even if it means that in some cases anthropological descriptions become technocratic interventions. This time what I seize upon is not form, but tool.

Here I am very much in agreement with Holmes and Marcus when they insist on radical collaboration as the nexus of ethnography now:

“Working amid and on collaborations significantly shifts the purposes of ethnography from description and analysis, inevitably distanced practices for which it has settled, to a deferral to subjects’ modes of knowing, a function to which ethnography has long aspired. This act of deferral . . . is thus generative of different collaborative configurations by which, we believe, the architecture of a refunctioned ethnography gains coherence.”

Yet “collateral knowledge” differs from “paraethnography,” I think, because mine is ultimately not a methodological project of “refunctioning ethnography” through conversations with others who successfully deploy paraethnographic practices in the contemporary world. Marcus and Holmes’ project, as I understand it, is much closer to what I aimed to do

in *The network inside out*, that is, to restart ethnography for itself borrowing from others. But at this point, I am less interested in “their versions of what we do” (Strathern) and more interested in what our version of what they do might become. My project in contrast is more recursive than reflexive. And so I have tried to produce a kind of collateral knowledge of my own, running alongside, and deploying the moves of various trends of legal theory already running alongside one another albeit from my own very different starting points and toward different ends. This results in an artifact that is clearly not “legal theory” but does not look much like traditional ethnography either.

This ethnography moves from putting legal and anthropological theoretical traditions side by side in places, to demonstrating how an ethnographic sensitivity can provide venues for market governance and a professional life worth living, to making proposals for how financial markets might be governed. The value of this disparate work for my interlocutors is that I suggest ways of thinking about problems of concern to them and ways of engaging their various publics, produced recursively and relationally, that at once strike at the heart of what matters to them and yet would not have been thinkable outside the ethnographic conversation. (Riles 2011: 6-7)

### ***Adjacencies***

Adjacency is a concept that Paul Rabinow chose to characterize what have become his experiments with alternative forms. Initially it was a Foucault-inflected restatement of the positioning of the scholar amid complex modern, truth-seeking assemblages and problematizations of science and technology. Its enactment has led to a lab and studio form alongside (as well as distinctively outside) complexly organized terrains of investigation that is ethnography-like, but defines itself in a different conceptual frame (see Rabinow 2003; Rabinow et. al. 2008; Rabinow and Bennett 2012; and Rabinow and Stavrianakis 2013). Adjacency anticipates contestation with, and even secession from, one’s subjects, in sustaining the theoretical terms of inquiry. In Rabinow’s particular project, entailing a restatement of research practices for anthropology adapted particularly to its increasing investigations within and in relation to bioscience, adjacency entails being able to “observe the observer observing,” while having dialogic relationships to subjects within the literal spaces of scientific work (labs, seminar rooms, conferences, bars, etc.). As Rabinow says of his involvement as director of ELSI (Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications—the organized function of studying the ethical, legal, and social implications of major science projects from within, mandated since the mapping of the human genome project as a condition of receiving US government funding):

Thus, the dual challenge was how to practice anthropology and ethics as a member of a collaborative research center [SYNBERC]. The anthropological challenge turned on how to transform traditional observational practices, albeit situated and existential ones, into participatory ones. The ethical challenge turned on the question of whether synthetic biology would prove itself to be worthwhile interpersonally, scientifically, and ethically. The latter challenge, of course, was more than an observational one, and it carried with it unknown dangers. (Rabinow 2011: 162)

Unknown dangers indeed. Unable to sustain an ethical and methodological position of “adjacency” in terms of the affordances and expectations of his role as ELSI Director within the SYNBERC project, Rabinow and his students recount in two detailed works his exit from SYNBERC (Rabinow and Bennett 2012; Rabinow and Stavrianakis 2013) to the adjacent spaces, literal and figurative, that he had created as an elaborately designed website and conventional lab/studio space at the University of California, Berkeley.

Rabinow and his students have produced a fascinating chronicle of possibility, failure, and then secession in occupying the official project space of ELSI in a massive consortium project designed to define the coherence of synthetic biology as an emerging field of engineering. So, when anthropologists enter into their open spaces of research anywhere today they are likely to pass through regimes with real or putative forms for an ELSI function. The question, as in Rabinow’s demonstration, is whether the spaces, already officially or putatively anticipated for ethnographic inquiry’s own inclination to develop “alongside” interventions, can provide affordances for what ethnography intends.

### *Para-sites*

Para-sites were originally proposed in the Center for Ethnography as pedagogic techniques to create the occasions that would untie certain “knots” at advanced stages of first fieldwork research toward the production of dissertations. It became clear that they were useful or more frequently appropriate for dealing with these same knots in the postdoctoral and later projects of ethnographers. Any para-site is a mobile ad hoc lab or studio for devising an alternative form for a fieldwork project, tailor-made for it. In a setting that is appropriately and opportunistically staged in relation to sites of fieldwork, para-site events are second-order occasions (breaking the frame of the naturalistic in-context encounters of fieldwork) to explore the conceptual and normative issues of a research project in process, at least initially on the ethnographer’s terms, but taking (at their most interesting) surprising turns. The collaborative refining of the project’s questions and clarification of its stakes (in critique, as worthwhile knowledge) in mid-course are both the para-site’s value and the risk that it takes.

The para-site connotes a bounded space of orchestrated interaction that is both within the activities of a particular fieldwork project and markedly outside or alongside it—or lateral to it (cf. Maurer 2005). Intentionally playful, the term nevertheless had a serious lineage in the 1990s *Late editions* series of annuals devoted to both found and orchestrate dialogues on fin-de-siècle transformations in a variety of topically organized settings (see Marcus 2007, volume 7, inspired by the work of Michel Serres of the same title). The para-site addresses two problems in the implementation of contemporary ethnographic research.

First, it momentarily pauses the phenomenological standpoint of fieldwork from which the fieldworker might glide over questions of knowledge production, leaving gaps between reported events and interpretation. Conducting interviews or thinking about theory during fieldwork are indispensable, but they do not capture the “ways in which some mode of para-ethnography, undertaken by actors who are collaborators in (rather than subjects of) [anthropological] investigations, is always already a part of sites where [anthropological] research alights,” producing “leakages . . . that affect [anthropologists’] investigations as they are taking place”

(Holmes and Marcus 2008: 96). So the first task of the para-site is to register the potential for reflexive capacity in scenes of fieldwork.

Second, para-sites are a granular way to address certain problems of defining the scale and contexts of reception exacerbated by the organizational, media, and multisited complexity that increasingly is the norm in doing anthropological research (see Faubion and Marcus 2009). Ethnographers rarely receive any indication of the hoped-for reach in terms of further, scaled conversations their work might stimulate, even though the environments of contemporary fieldwork favor collective forms of speculative thinking. The para-site harnesses the relentless temporality of emergence and anticipation that comes with those environments. Depending on how it is composed and organized, it affords an opportunity to microregister in situ, and therefore anticipate the potential range of discursive communities and networks with which the specific project might eventually connect.

During the late 2000s, I worked on a three-year team ethnography project to study internal operations of the World Trade Organization in Geneva, at the invitation of Director-General Pascal Lamy. The project was led by Marc Abélès (see Abélès 2011) and experimented with the para-site form through staging seminar-like meetings with the Director-General (DG) and his main assistants in the “Green Room,” a chamber in his suite where the final, most intense moments of trade negotiations occur (see Deeb and Marcus 2011). The idea of the para-site was not to interview the DG and his staff as such as an integrated part of the project inquiry but to work through its grounds by asking what anthropology was and what it was intended to accomplish as a distinctive form of inquiry—something that had motivated Lamy to invite anthropologists in, which was controversial—and whether our inquiries had aligned with internal reflexive questions about the evolution of the organization since the early 2000s.

The discussions in this para-site were fascinating and inconclusive, but have continued beyond the collaborative ethnographic research to an “afterlife” or second act art/anthropology installation of two weeks duration in June 2013, at the conclusion of Pascal Lamy’s Director-Generalship. This intervention has been an extension of earlier discussions in another format that retains the functions of para-site constructions within the otherwise uncertain trajectories and opportunities of fieldwork.

***Ethnocharrettes (as a pedagogical project of the Center for Ethnography)***

Charrette—a term of pedagogical practice—is a collaborative session of intense design activity used for developing solutions to specified problems. Ethno-charrette—a neologism invented to encourage experiments with a similar form in the training of anthropologists—is a collaborative session of intense activity in which design thinking and methods are used to interrogate and explore ethnographic concerns. Ethnocharrettes, thus, represent one kind of confluence of engagements between design studio and ethnographic practices, which have been growing in recent years—in this case, in favor of the interests of ethnography as a professional project. The ethnocharrette makes sense as a modality for doing things with ethnographic texts, other than reading them in seminars, among students embarking on research projects that ideally lead to such textual ends. There is thus the notion and hope in the experiment with ethnocharrettes in the studio training of ethnographers that

the forms learned will somehow spillover, be contagious and applicable to experiments with form, with third spaces as described above, in many contemporary projects of first fieldwork. As these events of the teaching studio develop, then, they will increasingly take on other objects, functions, and purposes. The pedagogic sphere is a strategic, at hand, already structured place to start.

As canonical methodologies are transformed by emerging technological developments and on-the-ground constraints, the field of design—including separate subdisciplines like architecture, industrial design, graphic design, interaction design, information, architecture, human-computer interaction, and a host of related fields—seems indeed to have a number of affinities with ethnographic method, and as such, presents itself as one key direction that anthropology can explore. Here are some of these affinities that suggest design pedagogies and working practices as models for experimenting with third space forms in both the training and application of ethnographic method:

Both design and ethnography exist as process and product. The design process and the ethnographic process both rely on specific sets of (more or less) inviolable principles and core methods that students are exposed to from their introduction to the disciplines. At the same time, practicing designers and ethnographers work toward crafting *a design* or *an ethnography*, tangible results stemming specifically from putting learned principles and methods into action.

Both design and ethnography are focused on research, with a particular emphasis on careful observation and purposeful inscription of what is observed. As such, neither designers nor ethnographers take for granted the minute operations of the world around them in conceiving and carrying out their work.

Both design and ethnography are anxiously people-centered. In different ways design and ethnography maintain a committed relationship to “the social,” though the actuality of the latter in research or design practice is hard to capture in the latter’s applied modes of representing the social in their “working” forms of the field or studio. That is, both design and ethnography often fall victim to a tendency toward abstraction and a removal from material realities, despite the seemingly self-evident attunement by each to observations of real world conditions. Thus, the challenge to mediate this penchant for the abstract amid the messy real is a productive condition for their collaborations and conversations.

### **“Hope” in research that pursues answers to questions that it and its subjects/partners are not yet able to clearly ask**

In his book *The method of hope* (2004) anthropologist Hirokazi Miyazaki argues that the kind of descriptive ethnography that has long been the mainstay of anthropology is inherently retrospective. Implicit in the retrospective glance is the notion of a completed world, a world of ethnographic objects. What for the people are moments of hope, of opening up a future is “not yet” of growth along a path, are converted in the process of ethnographic writing into moments of closure and finality, wrapping up what has already come to pass and rendering it back to an audience or readership. How, Miyazaki asks, can we overcome the incongruity between the retrospective orientation of ethnographic description and analysis and the perspective orientation of hope? Can anthropology, once more, be a hopeful discipline? (Ingold 2011: 15)



Experimental systems are to be seen as the smallest integral working units of research. As such, they are systems of manipulation designed to give unknown answers to questions that the experimenters themselves are not yet able to clearly ask. (Rheinberger 1997: 28)

Miyazaki's *The method of hope* (2004) was a bellwether expression of the status of normative discourse in ethnographic writing as the forms of ethnographic research changed in ways that I have sketched during the first decade of the new century. Just as objects of study were cast in temporalities of emergence (see Rabinow 2007; Rabinow et. al. 2008 for reviews), so normative discourse in ethnography became invested in tropes of possibility, and of anticipation found in the data of fieldwork (though along with Ingold, I would always invoke the term "hope" with a literal or implied question mark). By then, ethnography had long since abandoned a "retrospective orientation" but it did not know quite how to mine or what to do with the anticipatory (hopeful?) orientations of the most interesting and productive situated discourses of parallel knowledge economies through which it moved. The identification and engagement with these discourses led to ethnography's own most valuable and distinctive insights, remade in the languages and idioms of critique learned in the last decades of the twentieth century.

The debates about secularism and political theologies of a few years ago—see, for example Mahmood (2005)—were perhaps the most prominent recent effort to create a specific anthropology of values, out of reigning critical theories, but in engagement with and alongside a diverse realm of renewed discussion in the West about the significance of contemporary religious practices and belief. In this case, anthropology produced a body of work that only could be understood in engagement with a contemporary debate of significance about normative systems and religious and political practices. Continuing and future episodes of anthropological thinking and research exist, I argue, in these wide ranging debates at different scales—more lateral than lineal, so to speak. Anthropology participates in these arguments and furthers its own concerns with these issues by such engagement. It is a different way to build and concentrate a specialty or current field of interest in the discipline—different from the past modes in which anthropology has created stimuli for itself by revitalizing classic concerns in new circumstances—and is certainly synergetic with the way that anthropologists are currently renewing their discussions of value as sampled in this collection. This article only adds the argument that in this development, a concern with the dynamics of anthropology's method in the contemporary—wherever it is deployed—is crucial. For its own discussions, anthropology depends increasingly—at a theoretical level—on its discussions with others; not as a contribution of an already formed, distinctive, and marked discourse to academic and intellectual debates, but as part of the field itself, and its data.

Lateral research forms—methods—emphasize this normative challenge in the very makeup of anthropological practice and are especially called to attention by the renewed theoretical interest in a disciplinary frame in value. Beyond, but in sync with discussions derived from new engagements with such seminal figures as Durkheim and Dumont, among others, there are the questions that ongoing research in the contemporary teaches anthropologists to ask with, and in opposition to, others. We need to experiment with new methodological forms to achieve

these means-and-ends of what we contribute in a temporality of emergence as anthropologists operating as fieldworkers.

So, in the granularity of fieldwork, such anticipatory and diverse discourses on value are usually encountered, not as facts, but as working speculations (or less interestingly as blind or fervent commitments)—like the epistemic things of experimental science, as fashioned by Rheinberger (1997). But accessing and developing them as results for what stands as ethnographic description, moving recursively within assemblages, circuits, and economies today in its evolved disciplinary project of critique requires designs, archiving, interventions, and stagings—experimental systems—of the sort and variety that I have sampled and tried to categorize in this article. They at the very least insure the pleasure of surprise, which is the uber-norm or value that drives ethnographic research and experiments non-teleologically forward.

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## Formes expérimentales pour l'expression des normes dans l'ethnographie du contemporain

Résumé : Cet article porte sur les aspects méthodologiques de projets ethnographiques insérés dans des assemblages globaux complexes, et d'une tradition de critique qui a défini l'objet de beaucoup de recherches anthropologiques au cours des deux dernières décennies. Comment la récente préoccupation pour la valeur comme objet analytique d'étude se mêle-t-elle avec les préoccupations normatives explicites dans la façon dont de nombreux projets ethnographiques sont conçus et racontés ? En effet, la valeur est à la fois l'objet et le cadre qui informe ces projets.

L'article teste ainsi des expériences qui tissent dans la trame de terrains contemporains des orientations théoriques bien établies de la valeur.

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