

Taking the Long Route

Ethnographic Metacommentary as Method in the Anthropological Film Practice

by Dada Docot

This article introduces “ethnographic metacommentary,” an experiential, processual, and protracted approach to ethnography. My proposed method goes beyond stating complexity as the defining characteristic of an anthropological project, visual or otherwise. To demonstrate the method, I write an ethnographic metacommentary of my 3-minute film *Performing Naturalness* (2008), which is about the surveillance of foreigners in Tokyo. A number of contexts on the film are explored—the political situation from which it arose, the background of the experiment chosen for the project, and genealogies of art practice. The method includes the process of “furtherings”—self-reflexive explorations that unpack aspects of the project that often retreat from anthropological ethnography. Overall, in the process of writing this ethnographic metacommentary, this article explores the nuanced experiences of Filipinos in transnational migration, contributes to the conversation on contemporary Philippine conceptual art and its relationship with anthropology and film/art practice, and fleshes out difficulties of representation in collaborative projects due to differences in intentions and locatedness. I show how ethnographic metacommentary is a productive thought process that fleshes out ruptures in the filmmaking process that are often concealed from the audience, and even from the filmmakers.

Screening

I begin with an invitation to watch *Performing Naturalness* (Docot 2008), at <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/67568>.¹ The short film was shot with an 8 mm camera, on a single roll of film, at the end of my 4-year stay in Japan as an international student. Opening with a close-up shot of myself talking on my mobile phone while waiting at the train platform, the scene changes to a train car where I ride surrounded by Japanese passengers whose faces are digitally blurred. I get off the train at Shinagawa Station in central Tokyo. At the intersection of six train lines, Shinagawa is one of Japan’s most bustling stations and the one closest to Japan’s busiest immigration office.² I walk toward the station exit. Captions along the bottom of the screen explain that the film is documenting a one-off experiment. Namely, I am testing the hypothesis that as a Filipina I would be stopped by the Japanese police for inspection within 3 minutes, even if I do not do anything out of the ordinary. As I expected, within a minute, two plainclothes Japanese policemen stop me to check my documents.

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Tracing Routes

In the foreword to *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, Luis Camnitzer et al. (1999:vii–viii) argue that beyond merely embodying oppositional politics by becoming anti-aesthetic, conceptual art also helps to “enlarge and deepen the scope of what art could be.” Visual anthropology has a comparable aim: to problematize representation by going beyond the merely visual/optical to explore in an expanded way the ideas and processes surrounding an anthropological research project. In recent decades, the genealogical tree of visual anthropology has branched off in a variety of directions, each of which aims to complicate the ethnographic narrative in different ways. Recently examined topics include how anthropologists draw from art practice (Clifford 1988; Marcus 1990, 2010; Russell 1999), the artist-envy of anthropologists (Foster 1996) on the one hand and the ethnographer-envy of artists on the other (Schneider and Wright 2006), the performative dimensions of visual ethnography (Castañeda 2006; Pink 2011), art-anthropology experiments (Brodine et al. 2011; Russell 1999), and the sensory aspects that often retreat from anthropological investigation

1. This invitation assumes ease of internet access among contemporary readers, as it also pushes for a more open sharing of visual and other works by academics, which until currently have been difficult to access.

2. According to statistics compiled for the operators of the six lines, Shinagawa Station in 2008 was the eighth-busiest station nationwide, with daily ridership of 913,182 (Hatena Diary 2009).

(Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016; MacDougall 2006)—to name only a few.

To contribute to these conversations, I turn to two pivotal discussions that have appeared in *Current Anthropology* about how visual anthropologists deal with the complexity of the anthropological subject and about visual anthropology's methods of representation insofar as they concern the problem of visibility. In Weiner's (1997) article "Televisionist anthropology: representation, aesthetics, politics," he asks what Faye Ginsburg means by "complexity" when referring to the film clips produced by aboriginal peoples that Ginsburg had screened during her keynote lecture at an anthropological meeting held in Australia in 1994. Weiner (1997:197) wants an "explanatory passage," and he asks that anthropologists perform the role of critic so that visual projects can be understood by their audience. To deal with complexity, he suggests that anthropologists begin seeing filmic media simultaneously as a "tool of our ethnographic craft and as an object of our ethnographic inspection" (1997:198). Weiner demands: "I want Ginsburg to tell me what I can't know about the film just by inspecting it," in effect commenting on the "mode of repression" in the ways that anthropologists unpack stories depicted on-screen (Weiner 1997:206). To brace his claims about the unproblematic Westernizing effect of the camera, he draws our attention to nonconstructionist discourses in the non-West, in particular, the case of the Avatip in Papua New Guinea. For the Avatip, acts of nonrevelation (such as the harboring of secrets) are means for protecting knowledge and wielding power. Weiner argues that such forms of nonvisualist knowledge production contrast with strategies of signifying a revelatory "real" that underlies Western forms of visual representation.

Weiner's critical attention to nonrevelatory modes of elicitation and nonconstructionist sensibilities calls for the need to acknowledge the existence of nonvisual forms of self-representation by aboriginal and indigenous peoples, but it strikes me as paradoxical that he also wants a "full-blooded anthropological treatment" (Weiner 1997:206) through ethnographic writing on the visual work. He critiques anthropologists for being party to the effacement of the memory of non-Western peoples who now wield new visual media technologies, but at the same time he demands an explanation that leads him to effectively assign the power of narrative concealment or revelation only to anthropologists. Complexity, it appears from Weiner's perspective, is a matter constituted by the anthropologist's agenda, falling outside of the agency, will, and understanding of the studied "other."

Fifteen years after Weiner's critique of Ginsburg's lecture, Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev (2012) returned to Weiner's points about concealments in anthropological practice. Suhr and Willerslev propose the use of montage to reduce the gap between the visible and the imperceptible. Montage, they assert, is a "key cinematic tool for evoking the invisible, without reducing it to forms of visibility" (Suhr and Willerslev 2012:285). Through montage it becomes possible to imagine the expanse of the universe of possibilities that exist beyond

our limited visual scope (Suhr and Willerslev 2012:286). In their proposed methodology, vision must be understood as infinite and therefore ungraspable in its whole. In montage, the invisible is maintained as an "excess" of vision (which is limited, be it through the human eye or its extension in the camera). It is through montage that "views of a multidimensional 'thick'" can begin to supersede the "'thin' 2D" of revelatory visual representation (Suhr and Willerslev 2012:288). Suhr and Willerslev's idea that the images, through montage, acquire "super-real quality" nevertheless remains to overprivilege visual representation, leading them to retreat from inquiring beyond the visually im/perceptible dimensions of the ethnographic object (Suhr and Willerslev 2012:288). They fail to break away from anthropology's fixation on revelatory visuality and its attachments to the observable that Weiner critiqued. Their proposal suggests that the only interpretations that can be conjured are necessarily bound to the visual, as if vision is the only available sense through which we could extend our perception, understanding, and experience of the image.

I revisit these conversations more than 2 decades after Weiner opened a polemic that I believe continues to be central to visual anthropological debates. In *Beyond Text?: Critical Practices and Sensory Anthropology* (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016), the editors push conversations in visual anthropology toward the sensorial dimensions of ethnography. The editors write that a key concern of contemporary anthropology is how to productively bring together theory and method "so as to practically research the complex realms of imaginative expression and experience" (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016:16). In resolving this dilemma about complexity, the editors curiously return to the idiom of montage, which they suggest "is already prefigured in lived experience" (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016:7). They write that an anthropology that seriously considers the sensory dimensions of research produces a "lived montage" that contains "those that go beyond or challenge those that can that be effectively represented" (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016:17). They recognize the expanse of "productive possibilities of engaging in forms of perceptual investigation and creation" (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016:19). This recent discussion leads me to think that anthropologists remain attached to finding new modes of experimentation that produce the end or means of their ethnography. Rather than finding new ways to produce research by engaging with various artistic forms and "experiments," I am more concerned with treating the creative projects of anthropologists as "'ethnography' *in itself*" (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:9, italics mine). It appears that conversations loop back to the concerns of Weiner and Suhr and Willerslev about complexity and visuality.

To contribute to these conversations, I introduce what I call the "ethnographic metacommentary," a conceptualist method that can be used in approaching creative projects and that contextualizes the visual ethnographically. The method of ethnographic metacommentary is located within Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov's (2013) proposal for ethnographic conceptualism (EC), which "refers to anthropology as a method of conceptual

art but also, conversely, to the use of conceptual art as an anthropological research tool” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:6). Conceptual art practice, for Ssorin-Chaikov, problematizes art, dematerializes the art object by attending to analytics rather than form and aesthetics, critiques the institution from which it emerges, and extends conversations to the discussion of processes that underlie art production. The conceptualist process pierces through different dimensions of production, which means that Ssorin-Chaikov (2013:7) sees EC as a way to depict anthropology’s and the anthropological project’s (e.g., film or experiment) “operational infrastructure.” In illustrating what EC might look like, Ssorin-Chaikov looks at the visitors’ book from an exhibit he had curated with Olga Sosnina at the Kremlin Museum in 2006. The book, Ssorin-Chaikov points out, did not merely archive the visitors’ comments; it had become an “exhibition artifact . . . [that] collapsed the distinction between commentary and the objects of commentary, between the visitors and the exhibits . . . between an ethnographic notebook and a conceptualist means to produce an ethnographic situation” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:7).³ Through this example, EC seeks to illuminate “not only *what* [this] anthropology looks at but *how*” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:9; italics in original). In short, EC is “ethnography conducted as conceptual art” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:6; italics in original).

In this article, I engage with EC’s propositions by ethnographically writing on *Performing Naturalness* (2008), the film introduced above.⁴ I use this very short film “as an end as well as a means” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:6) of anthropological ethnography. My personal involvement in *Performing Naturalness*, as filmmaker-anthropologist and as a subject appearing in the film, will allow me to demonstrate the method of ethnographic metacommentary more effectively. Following EC’s critical note about complexity as a “good question but a bad answer” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:16), I do not merely reiterate complexity (Weiner) nor do I simply recognize visibility and invisibility in practices of representation (Suhr and Willerslev). In its overall form, this article demonstrates ethnographic metacommentary as a method of expanding our thinking beyond what is representable on-screen and in our writing. It is also an autoethnography that fleshes out difficulties of representation in relation to locatedness, as well as an ethnography of knowledge production from the Global South, and its conversation with the discipline of anthropology and others. It serves as an ethnography of the nuanced experiences of racialized bodies in transnational migration.

Just as the postmodern investigation in anthropology sees culture as open-ended, ethnographic metacommentary is a method that offers a flexible itinerary. I continue below with

3. Borrowing from typical film screening formats, I begin this article with a film screening, followed by an extended discussion. My demonstration of ethnographic metacommentary begins from a filmic media in the same way that Ssorin-Chaikov saw the visitors’ book as the starting point for thinking about ethnographic situations arising from one object.

4. Running for only 3 minutes, the film is among the shortest ever screened at the Society for Visual Anthropology’s Film and Media Festival.

two sets of commentaries. The first set discusses *Performing Naturalness* in various terrains such as its background in relation to political situation, experimentation, and art/anthropological practice. The second set of commentaries is composed of what I call “furtherings” of the film. Furtherings are self-reflexive explorations that surround or are embedded in the object of study itself (in this case, film) and that flesh out aspects not immediately visible to the public. These furtherings, undertaken after the film’s release, unpack ethnographic situations arising from the film project such as contestations on the film’s concept, audience feedback, collaborative “failings,” and, finally, issues of relationality. The chosen subheadings in these commentaries are represented by succinct keywords for investigating the operational infrastructure of my film. I make reference to an eclectic mix of discourses—performance theory, anthropology, race, gender and migration studies, art and personhood theory, knowledge production, autoethnography—which in itself demonstrates the multiple positions and experiences that anthropologists inevitably become linked to in the process of ethnographic metacommentary. Ethnographic metacommentary extends conversations about creative works in anthropology (and beyond) by proposing that we take the long and laborious route to reflecting on and writing about cultural production. Through the descriptive power of EC, I hope to demonstrate a way how to deepen contextualization and to further the narrative beyond the personal and political themes already discernible on-screen.⁵

Contextualizing *Performing Naturalness*

I agree with Weiner’s concerns about anthropology’s tendency to use the notion of complexity to summarily punctuate rather than ethnographically engage with visual works.⁶ Following EC’s push for “an ethnography that does things – and not just by saying them” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:8), I provide in this section an elaborate contextualization of the film. The task of providing context in the postcolonial world includes the meticulous peeling off of “‘mercurial’ layerings”—of politics, histories, memory, and many others (Manalansan IV and Espiritu 2016). I begin by writing about the immediate context of my film: Filipino mobilities to Japan and gendered and racialized surveillance at the Shinagawa Station.

Political Situation

Today, Filipinos find themselves in Japan (one of the Philippines’ former colonizers) because of the mobilities arising from

5. I first encountered ethnographic conceptualism in 2011, which was 3 years after making *Performing Naturalness*.

6. A brilliant work that critiques Western representation that has not attracted much anthropological attention is Marlon Fuentes’s *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995). The filmmaker depicts a visit to the archives of the 1904 Saint Louis World Fair interwoven with accounts on the American colonial period in the Philippines and Fuentes’s faux autobiography (Homiak 2000).

post-World War II image-amelioration and cultural diplomacy programs.⁷ This mobility correlates with the experiences of turbulence culminating during Martial Law under Ferdinand Marcos (1972–1986), when the Philippine government saw the opening of the international migration market as an opportunity to increase revenue and repay debt. Japan's continued industrialization, coupled with a program for intensive internationalization in the 1970s, facilitated the initial entry of Filipino women as entertainment workers. Migration from the Philippines to Japan has been strongly gendered since the beginning, resulting in a highly feminized Filipino migrant population mainly concentrated in the entertainment industry. The stigmatization of Filipino women in Japan because of the sexualized nature of their work at the nightclubs facilitated a surveillance practice that have rendered them as targets.⁸ This situation is influenced additionally by the United States's colonial and neocolonial relations with both the Philippines and Japan, which mirror Japan's own links with the Philippines. For example, as a way of applying pressure, the US Department of State (2014) keeps Japan on tier two of the Watchlist for Trafficking in Persons Report, compelling Japan's sustained crackdown on illegal migrants and its tightening of immigration controls.⁹

The Kōnan Exit of Shinagawa Station in Tokyo, the one that leads to the Immigration Bureau, is known among Filipinos as a place where undercover Japanese police are dispatched to “spot/stop” foreigners. As one long-term Filipino resident of Japan shared with me after seeing the film, Shinagawa train station is “*abunai* [dangerous] for people from the so-called Third World, whether they have a valid visa or not.” The idiom frequently used by Filipinos in Japan to refer to being spotted is *nahuli*, which can be translated as “captured.” The implication of *nahuli* is that surveillance is experienced or perceived by Filipinos in Japan as a violent act. Like other Filipinos, I felt vulnerable, uncomfortable, and anxious in that place, so I would avoid it whenever possible. Going there felt unsettling. To be singled out from the hurrying crowd is *nakakahiya* (shameful), as it brings a conscious moment of difference and a disruption of one's sense of normalcy.¹⁰ *Performing Naturalness* was conceptualized within a context of persistent racialization.

7. One major postwar effort is the Japanese government's scholarships program, of which many Filipinos, including myself, have availed themselves.

8. The “entertainment” occupation in Japan mostly employs foreign women. There is no clear definition of what this occupation entails. Women entertainers may work as bar hostesses, performers, and, in some cases, prostitutes.

9. The September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City also spurred the tightening of surveillance in Japan. However, as argued by several authors, surveillance has played an important role in Japan's internal security policies since the Meiji restoration period (Wood, Lyon, and Abe 2007:266).

10. Eve Sedgwick (2003) explores the affective experience of shame upon interpellation.

Experimentation

Performing Naturalness documents a performance controlled by my choice of equipment, but this was a choice consequently influenced by the “field” in which the project was executed. The decision to use 8 mm film for *Performing Naturalness* arises from larger conversations about the camera as a tool in contemporary systems of surveillance. The history of film tells us about experiments with narrative by filmmakers who worked within the early limitations of film technology.¹¹ Rather than for the quality of “graininess” that filmmakers today may find nostalgic or aesthetically appealing, my decision to use 8 mm film came from a number of contingencies, including the purchase of an 8 mm camera in 2008 by Jong Pairez, a Filipino artist who was also living in Japan and with whom I discussed my initial ideas about the project. It was after his proposal to lend his camera and skills to a project that I began to imagine different possibilities for a filmic commentary on the experience of racialized surveillance of migrants in Tokyo. I conceived *Performing Naturalness* as both a performance work and a cinematic experiment. The idea is that Pairez turns on the camera when we get off at Shinagawa Station and just lets the camera roll while I walk to the exit, where I may or may not be spotted/stopped by surveillance agents.

The temporal control on my experiment comes from the 8 mm technology itself; a single 8 mm film roll runs for exactly 3 minutes and 20 seconds, at 18 frames per second. Hence the gamble that I would be spotted/stopped by the police within 3 minutes. The idea of limitation (i.e., limited recording time) of camera equipment from the past is used in *Performing Naturalness* as the experiment's controlled variable. By documenting a time-constrained performance of “natural” everyday behavior and the racial interpellation it elicits, I hope to comment with this film on the persistent surveillance of the “other” in contemporary Japan—historically linked to the power relations between postindustrial Japan and migrant-sending Philippines as described above.

In the world of performance, artists often restage performances, while in academia, anthropologists repeatedly visit the “field.” Practitioners in both domains often cultivate creative or scholarly practice through acts of repetition. However, the field that serves as the anthropologist's site for research is often a space filled with everyday anxieties, and the anthropologist is in many ways vulnerable to being affected by the stories unfolding in these spaces. In *Performing Naturalness*, the adversity I encountered ultimately made it impossible for me to repeat my planned experiment in the way that it might have been possible to do in another, less hostile, public space. The performance envisioned for *Performing Naturalness* was conceived as what artist Dick Higgins (2002) terms a “chance operation” and was meant to be staged only once.¹²

11. Rouch's (1974) first-person ethnographies were among visual anthropology's groundbreaking works produced within these very limitations.

12. Fluxus, a conceptualist artist network with members using various media, called their brief happenings “chance operations.” Beginning in the

Filming techniques such as Sarah Pink's (2011) "video walk" and other participatory or observatory methods, with their expansive use of time, were not well suited for *Performing Naturalness*. Thinking about "dialogic encounters" during fieldwork, Cox, Irving, and Wright (2016) liken the act of walking with the filmmakers' strolling-while-perceiving practice. They suggest that while in motion, filmmakers "perceive images and mentally record their visual experiences" (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016:17). They conceptualize movement as a "creative act of *poesis*" that splices "dialogues and juxtapositions of sound, image, texture, taste and aroma within the flow of everyday life" (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016:17; italics in original). However, this idiom of moving as *poesis* appears to be a luxury for the racialized body in motion. Surveillance society apprehends racialized bodies even when at rest, as we have seen in many accounts about bodies of color being policed while merely driving, eating, lounging, and other everyday acts. In the case of documenting a moment of surveillance, one must film quickly under potentially inhospitable conditions. Thus, the documentation of the *mise-en-scène* (Rouch 1974, 2003) may not only be difficult but also taxing.¹³ As a temporary resident-other in Japan recurrently subjected to the type of surveillance depicted in the film, my gender, race, and nationality made the act of filming tense, if not frightening. Such anxieties experienced in the field are not necessarily obstacles but can themselves become platforms from which new methodological experiments can be imagined.

The context illustrated here points to the need to expand conversations about how tensions wrought by situations such as surveillance and racialization press upon anthropological representation and experimentation. Ethnographically elaborating on the *raison d'être* for the deployed tools and experiments of our ethnography highlights the situation from which ethnographic experiments flourish. In the case of *Performing Naturalness*, its use of "alternative" methods and tools emerged from a situation of persistent racialization in the postcolonial world that affects how bodies move in space/the field, consequently pressing upon ethnographic experimentation.

Practice

In the background of this project conceptualization is a *mélangé* of influences from the Philippines' art world and beyond. I often find myself struggling with conflicting epistemologies and praxes. Educated in the Philippines (in a system patterned after the United States) and in Japan (where a commitment to internationalization is projected alongside a strict protection

of nationalist traditions), trained more rigorously afterward in anthropology at a Canadian institution, and, finally, identifying overall as a globally mobile citizen rooted in the "Global South," the world for me is hybridized by multiple cultural encounters. Beyond stating this background, I return to what "might" be the roots of my practice, just as conceptualism in art problematizes art itself. Weiner calls for an "ethnographic background," and I show here that visual works can also be better understood by examining the intimate enmeshments of one's visual production with the ideologies found at home, in turn linked to events and debates happening outside its national borders. The positioning that I provide here is admittedly an uncomfortable balancing act because of how self-regarding, or even vainglorious, autoethnographic works can appear. Numerous feminist scholars have already considered how dynamically the political and the personal intersect, and I align my present work with these efforts (Behar 2013; de Jesus 2005; Narayan 1993; Okley 1996; Ryang 2005).

My position stems from being an intermittently exhibiting artist and a student of Roberto Chabet, an artist widely recognized as a strong force in the Philippine conceptual art movement. However, as an undergraduate at the University of the Philippines, I was also a writer-photographer for the activist student publication *Philippine Collegian*. Today, I am a diasporic scholar whose graduate education was funded by scholarships. My main area of study is Filipino migration, and I belong to a family whose members are spread all over the globe as immigrants or temporary workers in a range of occupations. Given this background, I recognize that my practice, when set in the art context of my home country, can be located within the two camps of art, namely, conceptualism and social realism.

In the Philippines, artists who identify with social realism create works committed to directly promoting social change and raising sociopolitical awareness in the public sphere (Guillermo 1987). Social realist aesthetics are often, although not exclusively, painterly, made up of images that reflect the artists' activist orientation—as seen for instance in their straightforward portraits of urban and rural poverty. Conceptual artists, in contrast, often critique the explicitness of social realist aesthetics.¹⁴ I recognize that the writing of this anthropological text, which ends up as a reading of my own work, is potentially antithetical to Filipino conceptualists' nonrevelatory practice.

The persistent tensions between these two camps in the Philippines reflect the larger debate within the conceptual art world that began in the 1960s and 1970s: the rift between what has been called tautological conceptualism, prominent in North America, and the political conceptualism adopted in Latin

1950s, Fluxus-affiliated artists have produced such a wide range of works that it would be impossible to describe a definitive Fluxus style or aesthetic.

13. Rouch's idea of the everyday *mise-en-scène* is among the many intersections between art and anthropological practice that Sansi-Roca (2015:25) writes about. Situationists abandoned formal art spaces such as the museum and have used and engaged with the city as an expressive platform in their public performances and other interventions.

14. Two artists whose works cross the divide are conceptualist Alvin Zafra and activist filmmaker Kiri Dalena. In his painting experiments, Zafra uses live bullets to scratch out on sandpaper portraits of victims of political killings in the Philippines. Dalena's film *Washed Out*, documenting the aftermath of a typhoon that wiped out several villages in the southern Philippines in 2011, was shown in an art gallery in Manila alongside the actual uprooted tree trunks from the disaster-stricken island.

America. Art critic Simón Marchán Fiz (quoted in Ramírez 1999) stresses the mainstream-periphery divide in art production by comparing the conceptualist practices between the two regions from the 1960s and 1970s. At the source of this divide lies the art of “pure” conceptual tautology in North America, a historical position articulated perhaps most explicitly by conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth (Ramírez 1999:551). For Kosuth (1999a:165), tautological conceptual artworks “provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact.” It is through art’s existence as sheer tautology that art can “remain aloof from philosophical judgements” and to “[exist] for its own sake” (Kosuth 1999a:1970). Kosuth’s work *One and Three Chairs* (1965) exemplifies his theory. The work is a three-piece installation consisting of a wooden chair, a mounted enlarged photograph of this same chair, and a mounted enlarged definition of the word “chair.” As in *One and Three Chairs*, Kosuth’s work often deals with different explorations of an object’s meaning in relation to its varied visual or linguistic representations, an investigation that can be paralleled with his own investigations into the definition and boundaries of art (Russell 1976:1055).

Political conceptualism in South America, on the other hand, subverts the very “art for art’s sake” principle professed by artists like Kosuth. For critic Mari Carmen Ramírez (1999), the Latin American “inversion” of North American conceptualism can be characterized by the credo of intention over aesthetics, in which the artist works with “the real situation itself” (of actually existing social relations) rather than with metaphors (Meireles 1999:410).¹⁵ For example, Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles, in *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* (1970) removed from circulation Coca-Cola bottles, upon which he printed political messages (such as “Yankees Go Home”) before reinserting them into circulation. In this way, Meireles tricked the company into spreading his anticapitalist and anticolonial messages through its mass distribution system. Meireles’s tampering exposes and critiques contradictions and possibilities inherent in capitalist systems of mass distribution and consumption. In this instance, rather than form and representation (as in Kosuth’s work), the “larger social circuit” understood through Marxist political theory constitutes the art object that acts a “conveyor of political meanings within a specific social context” (Ramírez 1999:555).¹⁶

15. Comparing the Latin American conceptual art movement with North American and European conceptualism does not mean that it should be seen as subsumed within the practices of the latter. Latin American conceptual artists were aware of their anticolonialist and anti-imperialist stance and wary of being bundled together with the conceptualism of the hegemonic centers of art production (Stimson 1999:497).

16. Tautology was not exclusive to North American conceptual artists, and as Luis Camnitzer (2007:126) recognizes, even tautology was reappropriated by them, albeit with a twist. Compared with what Camnitzer calls the noise-free tautology of North American artists, Latin American artists borrowed texts and language from literature to empower their works and, at the same time, delivered critiques of issues such as human rights violations, capitalist social relations, and neocolonialism.

Kosuth later became more interested in the politics of art rather than in tautological explorations of its premises, borrowing from anthropology in revising his position. He turned to a model of art practice that he called “anthropologized art” (Kosuth 1999b:339) through which he concluded that “art cannot be apolitical . . . it is necessary to make one’s politics explicit (in some way) and work toward constructing a sociopolitical context of one’s own in which (cultural) actions are anchored for meaning” (Kosuth 1999b:346). Kosuth ultimately reconciled himself with the idea that political content need not contravene art’s conceptual bases.¹⁷

This elaborate contextualization is important for two reasons. First, the above consideration of artistic genealogies in my home country lead me to think that the comparable Philippine version of the tautology versus political agenda dichotomy has been remarkably long-lived. Marchán Fiz characterizes it as a state of “impasse” (quoted in Ramírez 1999:551)—a junction at which conceptualists and social realists in the Philippines also find themselves. A recognition of this historical parallel can help reconcile the opposing traditions of production in the Philippines into a more complicated and richer understanding of the country’s art and knowledge production. Visual anthropology is still young in the Philippines, where it still has only a limited number of practitioners, remaining (in 2018) unhosted by any institution. Consequently, the circulation and the value of visual anthropological works might be mediated not only by the academy but also by the social yet divided world of visual artists in the Philippines. The work of future practitioners of visual anthropology in the Philippines might also become caught between these conflicting traditions from the visual art world.

Second, conceptualism that sees art production as a political project serves as a guide for anthropological film practice in the “peripheries” that might be concerned with tense layers of context and other artistic expressions beyond visibility. As I have described above, Latin American artists use their self-awareness about their geopolitical marginalization as the starting point of their own inquiries. North American conceptualist works, exemplified by Kosuth’s eventual and conscious shift toward anthropologized art, meanwhile speak of the need for political explicitness grounded in one’s own sociocultural context. Of course, it is a mistake to consider the ideological clash between North and South American conceptualists as resolved, given their ongoing relationship with each other (and with Europe), on account of the entangled colonial histories and enduring

17. The strong presence of feminist conceptual artists in North America complicates the tautological discourse because of their engagement with gender politics in a manner that often rejected tautology. An excellent example is Martha Rosler’s video/performance piece, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), in which she stands behind a kitchen counter and shows the audience various kitchen tools, one for each letter from A to Z. She contrasts the mundane objects with incongruously wild gestures, highlighting distorted gendered boundaries at home.

postcolonial (and arguably neocolonial) relations of these continents.

To end this contextualization, I recall Filipino critic Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez's (2011) clarification that while conceptualists are ostensibly repelled by the idea of their works being "read into," they cannot be dismissed as being apolitical. It must be noted that social realist artists in the Philippines also do often use conceptualist strategies, blurring the divide between the two traditions. For their part, Filipino conceptualists are not completely apolitical, even if their art practice largely avoids or only very subtly engages topical social concerns. Their aversion to having their works "read" is grounded in a reaction to the recognition of political explicitness as a defining characteristic of social realism. Thus, as exemplified by the above cases from Latin America, the political can and ought to be employed in production (within visual anthropology or otherwise). The artist, however, despite affiliations with either tradition of art/politics, should retain the agency in how to articulate the social/cultural situatedness of their works. Political intentionality, this contextualization shows, can be made explicit even in projects that align themselves as conceptualist.

In the next section, I discuss *Performing Naturalness* beyond what is visible on the screen, as well as beyond the political commentary that I intend to communicate. I do this by peeling away some of the many layers of the material itself, as well as layers of the intricate social world inherent in its production. I refer to this part of ethnographic metacommentary as "furtherings," in order to suggest that acts of expanding one's horizon of understanding (about a visual work, for example) lead to problematizations and discussions rather than to definite conclusions.

Some Furtherings

Roger Sansi-Roca (2015:25) asks: What does it mean to go beyond the so-called politics of representation? How must anthropologists proceed within the "traps and devices" that pervade the ways of crafting representation? To his questions, I propose "furtherings" as a tool for extending, branching out, and opening new itineraries that anthropologists could venture into more intentionally as part of their ethnography. Furtherings not only affirm the incompleteness and open-endedness of the anthropological project but also take on a "performative stance" in ethnography (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013:16). In the furtherings that follow, I take the route of ethnographically writing down some narratives that comprise and surround my very short film.

Contestations

An internationally successful male Filipino artist who was doing his graduate studies in fine arts in Tokyo suggested that I stage a "grand performance" for this project. According to him, my clothes should emulate the "stereotypical" Filipina entertainer's outfit: a miniskirt, full makeup, high heels. By

doing so, he said that I would surely attract attention at the train station, especially from the police, and thus be successful in my experiment. Dressing in this way, to deliberately attract attention, would have contrasted with the practice of Filipinos who admit to wearing "masks" to avoid confrontations with the police. These purported masks pertain to the superficial "Japanizing" of the self through clothing, dyed hair, and skin bleaching. Vera Mackie (1998:52) calls such self-masking "border-crossing," which she defines as manipulating one's racially coded physical characteristics to blend in with the crowd. As confirmed by some of the film's viewers, this conscious and laborious effort of "dressing up," as one viewer called it, helps the othered body escape the attention of the police. Reflecting on his experiences of being constantly stopped by police in Tokyo, a Paraguayan student who saw *Performing Naturalness* commented, "It was bothersome, so I started 'dressing up' a bit more, and shaved much more often than I did previously. There was no need for me, being a college student, to wear shirts and dressy coats, but it freed me from the annoyance."

The Filipino artist's suggestion has important implications for how anthropologists' identities are performed or crafted in the field. In anthropological ethnography, the wearing of multiple masks as we socialize with people of different levels of power is a celebrated strategy for obtaining the data that we will later analyze (Berreman 2007; Fabian 1983). To a certain extent, this mask-wearing is valued as a testimony to the anthropologist's purported perseverance, patience, and flexibility during fieldwork. As I argue below, gender and race need to be considered to complicate "impression management" (Berreman 2007; Goffman 1959) as a politically charged aspect of ethnography.

While writing this article, I found literature on surveillance and performance theory useful in problematizing the choices I had made for this project. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler (1993:x) writes that "thinking the body as constructed demands a rethinking of the meaning of construction itself." The suggestion that I should dress like an entertainer for this project encouraged what Butler (1993:xii) calls a "reiterative and citational practice." In this case, it is the unproblematized adoption of a characteristic gendered and racialized identity (i.e., the stereotyped Filipino woman in Japan). An uncritical acceptance of the artist's suggestion could have merely contributed to the unwitting reproduction of precisely the exclusionary profiling that the project comments on. Successfully eliciting the profiling attention of the police, as I wished to do, if it had been affected by the performance of a stereotype would have only reiterated the "formative" and discriminatory surveillance practices rather than commented on or critiqued those practices.

It was after gathering thoughts from fellow foreign students I knew in Japan who had themselves experienced profiling and surveillance that I decided that simply performing my everyday "naturalness," dressing and behaving as I would on any other day, was more appropriate for the project. However,

as Butler reminds us, what we assume to be “natural” always bears a history of normativization. The “natural” in *Performing Naturalness* is necessarily also a reiteration of certain embodied gendered modes into which we have been enculturated. While this “naturalness” remains circumscribed within socially ascribed norms, it was chosen over the suggestion of dressing ostentatiously as a means of avoiding the infliction of further “injury” (Butler 1993:84) to Filipino women, who are often targets of the deployed systems of profiling and surveillance in Japan.

This brings me to thinking about performance versus performativity in our ethnographic projects, including visual ones. For Butler (1993:178), “performance is distinguishable from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’; further, what is performed works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable.” Embodying “naturalness” (a performative act) instead of donning a “mask” (a performance) for this project was therefore conceptualized as a form of resistance, albeit still categorically what Butler calls a “bounded ‘act.’”

Feedback

Earlier, I situated *Performing Naturalness* within different layers of contexts, and through them I directly articulated the messages that I wished to impart to the film’s audience. Whether these messages are delivered to the audience in full or only partially is an issue that needs further discussion. Despite its short duration, *Performing Naturalness* aims to “call(s) forth a world” (Kondo 1990) of shared experiences for its viewers and thus works as an evocative tool for data gathering. To test the generalizability of my personal experiences of surveillance, I collected more than 50 comments from people who have lived in Japan for various durations and who have watched the film. Many of these testimonies attest to the reality of surveillance of foreigners, non-Filipinos included. Following are some of the comments:

I can relate to this because I always get checked! One day, even twice, also at Shinagawa Station!!! (Female, Philippines, 3 years in Japan)

I’m annoyed by the trend of “reading bodies,” as if being a Filipina would automatically imply not having the right visa in the passport. (Female, Israel, 3 years in Japan)

Japanese feel superior to other Asians and inferior to Caucasians! (Male, Iran, 8 years in Japan)

I remember once they stopped me and asked for my alien card. The card was renewed and the expiration date appearing on the front had already passed. They didn’t look at the back and immediately called for backup. After 5 minutes, I was surrounded by a dozen Japanese policemen in both

uniform and plain clothes. They threw me in the patrol car and headed to my place to have me show them my passport. After showing them the passport and the back of my alien card, which clearly stated the visa renewal date, they finally let me go, without any apologies for not checking the card carefully. How rude. (Male, Vietnam, 10 years in Japan)

For me, the experience is different, but I can safely say that after having been here for 10 years now, there are still reminders every day. But when the authorities are involved, the stereotyping not only disgusts you, it also chips away at your pride and your confidence. (Female, Romania, 10 years in Japan)

One time, I got checked twice in less than a minute. I told the second inspector that I just showed my card to the officer downstairs, but he still insisted on checking my card. I find it rude when they gang up on any foreigner they choose to check. I guess it’s true that in Japan you are guilty unless proven innocent. (Male, Philippines, 3 years in Japan)

Institutions maintain their power through surveillance systems that discipline subjects and ensure the functioning of institutional authority (Foucault 1975). Applying this statement to the surveillance system in Shinagawa Station, the panopticon of omnipresent surveillance cameras is supplemented with human eyes that filter certain people from the crowd according to observable traits and preformulated profiles. Reflecting on his experience of being surveilled in Japan, the Paraguayan student also shared that “they stopped me whenever I had a beard. I was also stopped more often in the summer, when I was more tanned, than in the winter, when I was whiter.” Ahmed (2007:154) argues that race structures a world in which the “body-at-home is one that can inhabit whiteness;” the orientation of the world toward whiteness produces the “noticeability of the arrival of some bodies more than others” (Ahmed 2007:150). Under these conditions, the body out of place becomes an object of state control, as well as a site for the display of state power. In public spaces such as the Shinagawa train station, policemen often work in small groups or in pairs and assume “naturalness,” as I did in this project, by wearing everyday clothing to camouflage the force of the law that their uniforms would represent. The encounter of the racially profiled subject with state power, through the apparatus of surveillance and profiling in Tokyo, as shown in my film, unfolds in distinct stages. First, a subject’s mobility is halted when they are suddenly surrounded by two or more police agents. This isolates the subject from the rest of the rushing crowd. How the inspection proceeds thereafter depends on the circumstances. Often, the agent will ask for the subject’s “alien card” to check their nationality and to confirm the legality of their stay and status in Japan. The agent may also ask the subject in the Japanese language where they reside or work, the duration of their residence in Japan, or whether they live alone or with others. It is nevertheless common for the agents, before exiting the scene, to perform the traditional *ojigi*

(bow) to the subject as a form of delivering apology (or perhaps respect) upon confirmation of the subject's legal status. The agents then fade back into the crowd to continue their surveillance.

This manual and performative practice of surveillance creates what Hille Koskela (2000) calls "emotional space" through face-to-face interaction, rupturing emotions on the side of the surveilled. One male Filipino student commented on the film: "I was emotionally shaken and felt that I was 'profiled' because of my ethnicity." He added that he believed the faces of the police officers "showed suspicion and condescension." Violence takes many forms. The form of surveillance shown in this film, the experience of othering, includes a brand of violence that injures self-worth and self-value (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Steven Nock (1993:15) describes profiling in Japan as a "form of categorical suspicion that connects the operational requirements of surveillance systems with historical legacies of racism." Ryoko Tsuneyoshi (2011:131) tells us that in contemporary Japan, the "new types" of foreigners are identified easily by their skin color, especially compared with the "old foreigners" like Chinese and Koreans, who blend in more easily with the Japanese majority. In addition, Apichai Shipper (2002) argues that Japan organizes its foreign labor market not by skills or qualification but hierarchically according to race and nationality. In this hierarchy, the *nikkeijin* (foreign citizens of Japanese descent) are at the high end, while the darker South Asians are at the low end, taking inferior jobs with low pay and poor benefits.

Surveillance of foreigners in Japan is linked to these gendered and racialized dynamics and to how the Japanese surveillance agents look at other "aliens" outside of these categories with a tempered ambivalence. A Filipino who has been living in Japan since the 1980s commented: "I was interrogated at the JR Shinagawa Station in 2008. They do not choose particular people, they said, and that they ask any kind of foreigner. I then challenged them to approach the white foreigner who passed by, but of course they could not do it." A Turkish Caucasian male commented, "I haven't been questioned by the police even once in my 10 years of stay." Such examples show how the visibility of the "new types" of foreigners is arranged according to ingrained hierarchies that make persons of darker skin color the most frequent subjects of surveillance. However, comments from the Israeli, Romanian, Paraguayan, and Turkish viewers mentioned above also tell us about the slipperiness of categories based on skin color on which the profiling of foreigners in Japan is founded.

As Sara Ahmed (2007) writes, "You learn to fade into the background, but sometimes you can't or you don't" (159). Racial hierarchization has many injurious effects, one of which is the self-congratulatory inhabiting of a skin color that is fairer or whiter than the rest. As observed by a Filipina who also lived in Tokyo: "When I shared this film [*Performing Naturalness*] with fellow Filipinos who were lighter than me and looked Chinese or Singaporean, they told me that they are thankful they are not brown skinned." Here the fairer-skinned people in

the group trade the bonds of solidarity for safe shelter in racialized/racializing categories—a tragic repercussion.

Finally, other viewers questioned my objectivity in making the film. A French female friend who also lived in Japan asked, "Do you think the experiment would have worked if you had been anywhere else than at Shinagawa?" Another Filipino commented, "I have been here for 3 years, did not encounter police even once." Other foreigners find the Japanese surveillance system worthy of emulation. "But police are police, they are on their duty. I wish our police worked just as hard," wrote a male Mongolian who lived in Japan for 6 years. While the diversity of these comments demonstrates how broadly and differently the film resonates with foreigners in Japan, they also furnish clear evidence of an active racialized and gendered surveillance system.

Failings

In the contextual terrain titled "Practice," I considered the divide between conflicting artistic camps in the Philippines. In "Contestations," I explained why the choice of performativity over performance became the political choice for *Performing Naturalness*. I continue below by writing about the unintended repercussions of some of our ethnographic choices. This furthering contributes to the self-reflexive writings on the interpersonal relations surrounding a project, visual or otherwise (MacDougall 2006). I focus here on my filming and postproduction interactions with Jong Pairez, a Filipino artist whom I asked to film my performance. During our prolonged and sometimes impassioned exchanges, I came to realize that in practice, pushing for one's own kind of politics might result in the silencing of another's.

Filmmaking and the demanding act of editing are exercises in subjectivity. Pairez applied his own subjectivity to the process before we had even reached Shinagawa Station. Despite our preliminary discussion about a straightforward shoot, Pairez brought along a detailed storyboard, something I had not anticipated. Pairez is a temporary Filipino migrant like myself, and he also held his own feelings of exclusion in Japan that he wanted to articulate as a practicing artist. I realized at that point that he understood the project as a collaboration. Pairez and I are conationals who shared feelings of marginalization in a country that is not our own. Our different genders and subject positions, diverging art practices, and political ideologies, as I will expand on, left tangible marks on the short film, however imperceptible these are in the film itself.

In addition to my short encounter with Japanese police officers, Pairez shot "evocative" scenes to use up the single film roll. He directed me to stand in one corner of the station as people rushed by, to depict my isolation from the crowd. During the very instance of filming, my intention of performing everyday "naturalness" slipped through my fingers. The difference between our respective positions was further highlighted when he put together a film of our shoot without consulting me. Pairez had the film developed and spliced, and

he then edited a sequence according to his own concept and storyboard, thus dismantling the original sequence of the film material. Pairez had also decided to use up the remaining frames to shoot the words “Filipina,” “Homogeneous,” and “Control,” written on pieces of paper, which he then integrated into the scenes shot in Shinagawa. I reacted strongly when the raw footage I had anticipated receiving arrived in my mailbox instead as a completed and digitized film. I found that his version spelled out his ideas too literally, while glossing over my personal experience of profiling and surveillance, which I had intended to be at the center of the film.

Replying to my frustration, he emailed an eloquent response: “You want to deny the cameraman . . . his participation by reducing his subjective perception of your performance into a mechanical machine. You want to centralize Power by not sharing it. Therefore in your stance, the COMMON [capitalization in original] experience of racial profiling is ridiculously patented. Ironically, this act replicates the very essence of racial profiling itself – the act of exclusion” (Pairez, email, March 17, 2008). In Pairez’s view, his initiative in assembling the film, and subsequent arguments, were acts of subversion that exposed my own privileging of concept and authorship as the “essences” of a project. Pairez’s assertion of a decentralized position of power over a personal commentary on the experience of surveillance also reflects the critique made by Latin American conceptualists of the tautology exhibited in the works of North American artists that privileged concept over political content.

Our argument came to a head when we started discussing the representation of the two Japanese police officers who carded me. I insisted on blurring their faces, while Pairez argued that exposing these agents of the panopticon would fulfill our shared desire to “unmask the wild beast” (Pairez, email, March 14, 2008). But for me, revealing the faces of the police officers would mean we were effectively subjecting them to the very surveillance that I resist. At the same time, it would deny them individual agency. For example, one Japanese police officer I know refuses to arrest undocumented Filipinos because, for him, Filipinos work hard and do no harm to Japanese society. Having such knowledge makes me more sensitive to the persistence of the person behind the mask. While it was among the aims of the film to use obsolete technology to record historically rooted and persistently manifesting issues of surveillance, it was not my intention to use the camera as a “predatory weapon” (Sontag 2007:10). To do so could intrude into the lives of those whose images we captured. For Pairez, however, it was quite absurd to extend consideration to the oppressor, as represented by the individual police agents, and even more absurd to seek permission from a certain authority (in this case, me) before assembling his version of the film.

The original sequence became completely irrecoverable when, in reaction to my criticism, Pairez divided the single film roll between the two of us—giving me the frames in which my image appeared but withholding the rest. He may have seen this as a symbolic act of asserting his claim to the knowledge

he had created through the act of framing and shooting the scenes, while recognizing my rights over my own image. The film version presented here is digitally constructed from the film created by Pairez. I rearranged the sequence he had already assembled and removed the frames displaying the text. The faces of other persons who appeared in the film were blurred, and I added slow-motion effects to the “evocative” scenes. Finally, I added a musical soundtrack whose dramatic progression and title *Your Empty Lives* I thought suited a film on surveillance culture at a time of increasingly atomized urban lives. My version takes on not only this one-time event but also dark-skinned foreigners’ experience of consistent profiling in Japan.

This furthering contributes to nuancing “identity” in the diasporic space. In her ethnography of an exhibit at The Field Museum titled *Art and Anthropology: Portrait of the Object as Filipino*, Almira Astudillo Gilles (2017:152) observes a “strong dichotomy” between participating artists belonging to two groups: Filipinos from the Philippines and Filipino Americans from Chicago. In Gilles’s assessment, the former were more interested in constructing a “national” identity whereas the latter were more interested in depicting an identity that was a “personal construct.” This particular furthering complicates Gilles’s findings, as it exposes identities as shifting beyond macrocategories such as the “nation.” In the case of Pairez and myself, our interpretations and ambitions for presenting the subject of surveillance of foreigners in Japan turned out to be remarkably different. While we are both Filipinos raised in the Philippines, Pairez and I entered and lived in Japan with different subject positions. *Performing Naturalness* runs for exactly 3 minutes to approximate the duration of the film roll. In my version of the film, Pairez is credited as cameraman, not as a collaborator. This furthering reveals no grand surprise, as many researchers have already written about the different degrees to which collaborations have failed.¹⁸ Pairez and I ended up creating separate projects out of this “failed” collaboration. Within our respective disciplines’ expectations for production, it could be argued that this venture did not fail. In the furthering that follows, I move away from thinking about the

18. Researchers have reflected on collaborative tensions and failings between researcher-informants (England 1994; Young 2005), between researchers and family/elders (Docot 2017), and between artists and anthropologists (Schneider and Wright 2006; Strohm 2012) to mention a few. As an intersubjective activity, collaboration, like anthropology itself, is an open-ended enterprise. Timothy Choy et al. (2009) suggest that this open-endedness in collaboration offers endless possibilities that are “intriguing,” but that at the same time, the “merging of creative personalities” could also be “terrifying” (381). Schneider (2016:25) writes of failings as related to disciplinary differences, for example, about how artists tend to be more “ethically transgressive” than anthropologists. Choy et al. add that failings in the collaborative process link to single authorship expectations in anthropology. The collaborative failings between Pairez and myself reflect these tensions about the dichotomizing effects of our respective disciplines on our creative and ethical practice.

successes and pitfalls of ethnography through its material production toward thinking about “failings” in relation to the collapse of culture-specific relationalities.

Relationality

In July 2012, I emailed conceptual artist Luis Camnitzer, whose articles on Latin American conceptualism I also cite here. I introduced myself as a graduate student interested in visual anthropology, Filipino overseas migration, and conceptual art. I asked if he would comment on my draft that interweaves these issues. He sent short but scathing comments on the draft the following day: “While ego is important in hegemonic art, I think it is a negative trait in culture-shaping, which is the mission of resistance of art on ‘the periphery.’ So, even if your personal work may be on target, your mentioning it contaminates the paper” (Camnitzer, email, July 15, 2012). What are the implications of Camnitzer’s arguments for academics who reflect on their own visual practice through writing and who are thus critics of their own projects (Jackson 2004; Picton 2011; Torresan 2011)? What does it mean for persons from the “peripheries” who conduct their political and emotional labor in self-referentiality, in the foregrounding of the self or one’s “home,” in the articulation of one’s positions and subjectivities, to have their efforts thus construed as solipsistic and contaminated by the ego? Confused and defensive, my reply to Camnitzer included the following excerpt:

I did recognize in my paper that reflecting on my own work might be construed as a kind of solipsism. While I was writing the first draft, I was in fact not very comfortable with the mention of my own work and struggled to decide whether there is any value to be found at all in such an attempt or not. However, in the history of anthropology, it has been a struggle for “native” anthropologists to insist on the necessity of writing about and reflecting on their own culture. . . . The difficulty in articulating one’s positionalities and subjectivities may perhaps even be more complex with the conflicting layers of “nativity.”

It was during the moments of reflection aroused by this exchange that I revisited Philippine personhood theory, a route that many Filipino scholars have also taken during moments of confusion with their work or with the social relations in which they are embedded.¹⁹ Filipino scholar Virgilio Enriquez (2008: 52) defines the concept of *kapwa* as “the unity of the ‘self’ with ‘others’ . . . a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others.” The related term *pakikipagkapwa* is the “fundamental ethical relation between the self and the other” (Guevara 2005:9). I wrote to Camnitzer again on August 25, 2012, and my email included the following excerpt:

19. I recognize the generalizing and essentializing ramifications of Philippine personhood theory, as there are many different streams of culture in the archipelago that may have their divergent respective value systems.

I am inhabiting and embodying the roles of student and occasional artist . . . roles that are often assessed based on individual merit. As a person who claims to “come from the periphery,” I think that I may have overlooked the aspect of relationality in the art-/film-making processes, and I realize now that while I may have been guided by a certain politicized intentionality for this film project, I eventually chose to mute the voice of the cameraman who, like myself, was also only aiming to deliver his own statement. However, I think that it was not my mention of my work/film that, as you wrote, “contaminates” the paper. I would suggest that it was my failure to listen to and to acknowledge the positionality of the cameraman, and the failure to reflect on my individualism, that “compromised” the paper.

This discussion of interpersonal relations in the context of production contributes to the further nuancing of conceptualism as practiced outside its mainstream definitions. Okwui Enwezor (1999:110) suggests that in African conceptual art, objects “were never ends in themselves”—a statement that reflects Kosuth’s shift from tautological conceptualism to anthropologized art. Jean Rouch advocated for the transfer of authority to his anthropological subjects as early as the 1950s. In the case of Pairez and myself, the accusations of exclusion and othering were traded between conationals whose shared status in their host society (Japan) could only ever be that of foreigner. Pairez, a friend from my undergraduate years, studied fine arts in the Philippines. After following his family to Tokyo, he found himself working unstable grocery store jobs while occasionally teaching art to Japanese children. He frequently expresses his own politics as an anarchist artist through guerilla performances that address the perennial marginalization and disenfranchisement of part-time foreign workers in Japan. Yet it was through the intersections of our lives as temporary migrants in Japan that the idea for staging *Performing Naturalness* arose. Despite imagined solidarities, the divergent experiences that Pairez and I had in Japan resulted in challenging differences in our positionalities and agenda.

My reflection here on *pakikipagkapwa* demands further background explanation. As mentioned earlier, it was after Pairez’s purchase of his camera that I began to conceptualize *Performing Naturalness*. Furthermore, Pairez was willing to accept only a partial payment for the cost of film and processing—perhaps anticipating co/ownership or a collaborative role in the film through his material contributions, without explicitly expressing this expectation to me. His willingness to help and contribute can furthermore be interpreted as his way of acknowledging our both being *kapwa*. Indeed, to expose his presence during the shoot to the same surveillance that he detests was an act of solidarity—*pakikipagkapwa*—not only with me as a fellow Filipino but also with any racialized others in Japan.

Asking Pairez 4 years later about our acrimonious exchange, he confirmed that because the project was “based on a common/shared experience,” he saw it as “a shared oeuvre.” For him, the conflict between us arose because one of us (me)

wanted “to own” the concept. He resolved that “we could not escape that because we were brought up in a romanticist/modernist foundation in school.” Asked about what he thought of what had happened in terms of *pakikipagkapwa*, he said, “I think we did realize *kapwa* one way or another, but one has to cease to be an artist to fully actualize it.” For Pairez, the act of individualist-oriented creative production itself impedes solidarity. Indeed, as Jaime Guevara (2005:19) writes, it is through the concept of *kapwa* that a person “transcends egotism in a radical way . . . because it requires the self to let go of his [or her] egotism and to be touched by the otherness of the other.” My exchange with Pairez demonstrates that the process of knowledge production within the terms of *kapwa* comes in conflict with Western capitalist-individualist rationality. Neferti Tadiar (2009:433) comments on the effect of Western individualism on *kapwa* relations: “In a society tending toward the production of humans as either individualist subject or undifferentiated objects, *kapwa* increasingly becomes obsolescent as a vital term of social interaction.” During production, Pairez implicitly expected to “share” a lot more, while I had envisioned myself as the film’s sole author.

Our later interaction revealed to us that our subjectivities were in fact not shared. Our denial of *kapwa* to each other can be read within the issues penetrating the project’s concept, which revolved around the racialized and gendered experience of surveillance and profiling in Tokyo. While we shared the same racialized experience of surveillance, Pairez’s unexpected input on the day of the shoot could be read as a manifestation of his exercise of power as the male artist who wields the camera, and thus frames the scenes, with a woman as his subject. Tadiar (2009:386) critiques earlier literature for neglecting the dimension of gender in the operation of *kapwa*. As the originator of the concept and as the performer of my own narrative, I demanded self-representation of my own gendered experience. Meanwhile, Pairez asserted his rights as co/creator by controlling the framing of the scenes, grounded also in his perspective as a racialized temporary migrant. *Kapwa* became finally subsumed by our argument over authorship, made still more complicated by our respective positionalities. In the end, neither of us took the smooth route that *pakikipagkapwa* prescribes as a manifestation, despite gender differences, of unity of the self with the others. Having been friends since our undergraduate years, we had both expected (but eventually failed) to acknowledge each other’s voice. My conceptualization of the project was perhaps seen by Pairez as strikingly at odds with my privileged status as a government-funded student at Japan’s top university, a position that I held while trying to assert my authorship. Our differing trajectories inevitably affected our *pakikipagkapwa* relations, and *kapwa* came to be “individuated in the Western sense” (Enriquez 2008:54). With both of us wanting the right to speak and to be heard, we were ultimately unable to resolve our dispute in terms of either *kapwa* or in terms of Western rationality.

This part of my ethnographic metacommentary exemplifies how valuable personhood theory can be in processes of self-reflection, as a way of better understanding some of the chal-

lenges faced in the era of postcolonial knowledge production. Researchers already offer conceptualizations of persons as perceiving in “dividual” or multiple modes (Strathern 1988), as characterized by selves that are porous or permeable (Smith 2012), as drawing from “multiplicitous” identities (Lugones 2003), and others. Visual anthropologists need to consider relationality in knowledge production more seriously as they deepen their problematization of issues of power and authority in the making of their subject and in the production of their experiments and ethnography. By understanding knowledge production as being inevitably linked to our interpersonal and social relations, we may be able to better understand each other amid the white noise that suffuses contemporary personhood and thought (Filipino or otherwise). Writing this furthering has led me to reconsider how I understand my multiple locations: in the sometimes-conflicting and interweaving worlds of art, anthropology, and migration, and as a globally mobile person from postcolonial Philippines, whose lifeworld is entangled in messy ways with the lifeworlds of others.

Conclusions

This article introduces and demonstrates what I call “ethnographic metacommentary,” a method that I locate within the framework of “ethnographic conceptualism” postulated by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov. My proposal that we take the long route of ethnographically writing up our visual and other creative projects is an intervention into approaches to ethnographic methods in visual anthropology, and in anthropology in general, especially to those concerned with issues of the complexity and visibility of the subject and object of representation. I bring in conversations from conceptual art, which I believe are productive to the anthropological project of understanding the multiple narratives inherent in visual and other forms of cultural production.

Critiques such as those by Weiner have failed to fully problematize the paradoxes of representation in their demands for an elaboration of the “complex.” Suhr and Willerslev have fallen short in showing in practice the infinite possibilities in unpacking the nonvisual dimensions of the objects of our interest. More recent conversations loop us back into the same debate, and I hope that my suggested ethnographic metacommentary will be useful in moving forward from this tautological impasse. Ethnographic metacommentary is useful for anthropologists interested in disentangling both the visible and the invisible aspects of their projects. Ethnographic metacommentary does not simply aim to deliver the “explanatory passage” that Weiner demands. The writing on the political situation from which the project emerged, the experiment that the project employed, and the genealogies and flows of art practice situates the project within different terrains of context. Furtherings that are experiential, processual, and protracted attest to the value of anthropology’s immersive and in-depth research methods. Furtherings uphold the open-endedness of the anthropological project. My borrowing of methodological tool kits and epistemologies from other disciplines shows how

anthropological production—in visual, performed, written, and other forms—inescapably intermingles with multiple fields and thus demands inquiry into different modes of knowledge production and learning.

Reflecting on personhood concepts from the Philippines, self-reflexive processes were set in motion, allowing me to identify further ruptures in the fabric of the social and the self that had remained hidden to me. I argue for the need to read beyond the message sent through visual work, for example, about the policing of racial difference and strategies for immigration control in the contemporary world. Through this demonstration of the method, I suggest that there is a need for anthropologists to take the laborious and sometimes emotional—yet productive—route of ethnographically reflecting on their own performances of “naturalness” in the field, as well as on the different kinds of data produced from their research.

Ethnographic conceptualism pushes for ethnography to begin doing things rather than merely stating complexity as the defining characteristic of their projects. Investigating layers of contexts and furtherings locates the project’s operational infrastructure and entanglements that would otherwise retreat from anthropological ethnography. In my illustration of the method, I zoomed in and out of focus and folded in conversations on autoethnography, politics, art, race, theory about surveillance/performance/personhood, and a blend of issues that together make up this ethnographic metacommentary. *Performing Naturalness* and this accompanying ethnographic writing about the film raise important questions about the inexhaustibility of stories behind rolls of celluloid and gigabytes of footage and the thousands of images and pages of our field notes. We also have yet to hear the reflections of Pairez himself, and perhaps his version might be radically different from my own. Engaging with ethnographic metacommentary can offer an autotransformational (and, to an extent, decolonizing) potential that could help anthropologists think about the unresolved tensions between competing concepts of personhood that we hold. A deepened reconsideration of our interactions with others could open space for the renegotiation of our kapwa relations.

Finally, fleshing out these stories stemming from a very short film serves as a methodological example for scholars from the Global South and the “peripheries” who are struggling with their multiple locatedness, persons who might find themselves negotiating their respective ways through education carved out by colonial histories, interlaced with indigenous worldviews, and upbringings in an increasingly globalized world. On this note, I briefly return to the introduction of this article where I cited Camnitzer et al.’s *Global Conceptualism*. Their book has been critiqued for bidding to enforce a certain political agenda (Morgan 1999), as well as for failing to critically interrogate its own paradoxical positionality of revising art history by advancing the marginal, while playing the convenient yet dangerous card of globalization (Meyer 1999). My article reflects the critiques leveled against *Global Conceptualism*. As I understand my own positionality, it can be taken as wielding the twin cards of “the marginal” (or pe-

ripheral) and the “global.” I have unpacked here this self-positioning, while demonstrating that these efforts to complicate positionality also involve a laborious journey on a long road. This demonstration of ethnographic metacommentary shows that one’s self-aware situatedness and political intentionality, carried on from within the intersecting worlds of art, the home/s, education, friendship, and others, are useful guiding principles in grounding visual works (in visual anthropology, art, or elsewhere) in the domains in which we are multiply situated.

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Comments

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To See and Be Seen: Visual Art as a Mode of Ethnographic Meaning-Making

Eschewing a conventional text-based ethnographic approach, Dada Docot interprets and depicts the surveillance and profiling of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in central Tokyo through a 3-minute motion picture called *Performing Naturalness*. Produced with an artist collaborator, the film manifests the potential for a productive interdisciplinary convergence between art and anthropology. Drawing reflexively from her experience as a student in Tokyo and as a conceptual artist herself, Docot takes on multiple participatory roles in the film as a performer, anthropologist, and ethnographic subject. In the course of so doing, her main contribution lies in an endorsement of an anthropology in which ethnographic work is imbued with visual literacy and creative imagination, one that draws upon an approach to fieldwork that is open to a plurality of subjectivities and epistemologies. It is in this context that Docot’s discussion of “ethnographic metacommentary” is meaningful. Channeling the anthropologist Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov’s (2013) notion of “ethnographic conceptualism,” the paper sheds light on a few important questions: First, how does anthropology as a discipline benefit from deliberately integrating modes of visual artistic conceptualism into its empirical modus

operandi? And, conversely, what is gained by visual and performance artists when their artistic output is qualified as “ethnographic?” Docot’s investment into these questions comes in the form of a thoughtfully introspective depiction of an anthropologist as conceptual artist, thereby laying out the complexities and insights that emerge from a self-consciously experimental treatment of the ethnographic encounter.

In spite of the growing popularity of filmic depiction among ethnographers, Docot’s work reminds us that anthropologists have not fully used the potential of visual forms of knowledge production. Even prominent ethnographic filmmakers such as David Macdougall (2006) concede that visual modes of depiction continue to be thought of as merely auxiliary to text, still conceived of as “a maverick anthropological practice that was always at odds with the anthropology of words.” Visual anthropologists Christopher Wright and Arnd Schneider suggest that the discipline can address this challenge by adopting multiple devices and artistic mediums and installations in our ethnographic work (Schneider and Wright 2006). Docot makes a substantive contribution toward this end by emphasizing the empirical capacity of art as a system of meaning in and of itself, one that is an “evocative tool for data gathering.” This is reminiscent of a concept of visual art as more than an aesthetic form—what anthropologists George Marcus and Fred Myers (1995:1) described as “one of the main sites for tracking, representing, and performing the effects of difference in contemporary life” (see also Preiser 2010). By performing what is “natural” in the OFW experience in Japan, Docot is largely successful in conveying how art as a data-gathering tool can prove effective in depicting and representing radicalized and gendered subjects.

There remain formidable challenges in the convergence of conceptual art and ethnography. It is interesting that Docot and her artistic cocreator had seemed to be in agreement on the empirical capacity of art: that its main purpose was not to create something beautiful or aesthetically pleasing but to recognize the primacy of truth in the struggle of representation. Whereas the ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch had extolled the ideal of a shared anthropology in which there was a sense of creative equality between the director and the subject of film, Docot’s subsequent argument with her collaborator offers insight into how the differences in the intentions and locatedness of otherwise well-meaning artistic protagonists fleshes out the pitfalls of shared modes of ethnographic depiction.

Quite apart from her contributions to the discussion of the politics of knowledge production, the relevance of Docot’s work also lies in its engagement with the politics of representation. In *Ways of Seeing* (1972), the art critic John Berger famously argued that “We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are. Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen” (Berger 1972:9). How the ethnographer sees, in other words, is always in a dialectical relationship with how she is being seen. In reflecting upon this

dynamic, Docot puts forth her concept of “furtherings” as a progressive modality of reflexivity, which moves past a politically correct navel gazing about power relations toward engaging organically with the local, political, and ontological context from which ethnographic thickness arises. Seen in this light, Docot’s discussion of the fault lines of art production in the Philippines and the position of anthropology within an activist-inclined Philippine academy take on added significance. From this, she draws meaningfully upon Filipino concepts of horizontal personhood (*kapwa*) toward an insightful commentary on the empirical implications of porous subjectivity, even in the course of pursuing ethnographic insight.

A few works, to be sure, have already been critical of the lack of conceptual collaboration between artists and ethnographers—a testament to a historically contingent tendency to see a radical distinction between art and science. Docot’s paper offers some resolution to that dichotomy by positing what Ivan Brady has in this journal called an anthropology of “artful science” (Carrithers et al. 1990:273). The value of Docot’s analysis lies in reminding us that visual art cannot be seen as apart from systems of knowledge production and can be a potentially enriching component of a more human, more imaginative, and more visceral empirical regimen. In that respect, her analysis adds much-needed conceptual substance to the prognosis that experimentations with art are, as George Marcus and Fernando Calzadilla (2006) have suggested, the proverbial light at the end of the anthropological tunnel in the ongoing effort to foster a more innovative and flexible approach to ethnographic meaning-making (see also Krstic 2011).

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Dada Docot’s “ethnographic metacommentary” provides a vivid and frank reflection on method, and on the relationship between method and theory, which extends far beyond most anthropologists’ comfort zones. The style and content of Docot’s self-reflection is particularly interesting, because—unlike confessional classics such as Paul Rabinow’s Morocco diaries—Docot names her interlocutors and calls on them to respond. In this sense, Docot’s intervention also develops some of the ethical and methodological points of departure of ethnographic conceptualism. Anthropologists tend to pen their reflexive ruminations after returning from fieldwork, primarily for the consumption of their professional colleagues. Ethnographic conceptualism, by contrast, calls for anthropologists to treat their fieldwork interlocutors on the same level as they do other scholars: “as legitimate ‘audiences’ for anthropological writing”; and, furthermore—and perhaps more problematically (as Roger Sansi-Roca [2015:148–150] has argued

with reference to my own work)—to treat both colleagues and informants as conceptual artists treat their publics: “to extract reactions by means of provocation from audiences of informants” (Murawski 2013:58).

Docot does not discuss provocation per se, but she touches on commensurable issues in her discussion of performance. I would like to suggest that her provocation takes place on several complex levels. On the one hand, the premise of *Performing Naturalness* is built around a (non)provocation framed as an experiment: How long will it take Japanese immigration police in Shinagawa Station to stop her, purely on the basis of her appearance as a Filipino woman? The experiment is extremely successful—although her film roll lasts 3 minutes, she is stopped within less than 1 minute. Docot emphasizes, however, that she went to some lengths to avoid provoking police intervention—she disregarded a suggestion made by a male artist acquaintance to dress in an extravagant manner, which would caricature but also reinforce widespread Japanese stereotypes about Filipino women. Instead, she “performed naturalness,” stepping into the station concourse dressed in the most unassuming way possible. In this case, as Docot demonstrates, naturalness did not help—when combined with her (racialized and gendered) alienness, the absence of performance (or absence of provocation) was in itself considered a provocation by the agents of the Japanese state. One of the things that remains fuzzy in Docot’s reflexive analysis is the role of the camera operator in the police intervention. Was he filming her openly, thereby violating the monopoly over the means of surveillance cherished by the state (and its subcontractors) and providing the police with an additional excuse to intervene? Was he carded along with the artist? Docot does not provide the answers to these questions, but should she have? Such are the perils of “ethnographic metacommentary”: once you start being frank and honest, how far can you reasonably be expected to go?

Docot’s interaction with her camera operator, Jong Pairez, is at the heart of her argument. Docot and Pairez knew each other from the Philippines, and they shared a strong understanding and friendship—a mutual identity and solidarity as migrants in Japan, which Docot refers to by way of the Philippine concepts *kapwa* and *pakikipagkapwa*. Perhaps because of the level of (perceived) mutual understanding, they ended up interpreting the exercise of shooting the film differently: for Docot this was to be her project, with Pairez as cameraman, and she thought she had been clear about this; Pairez, in turn, saw himself as coauthor and sought to realize a rather different vision of the film from that which Docot had in mind. This led to tensions that reverberate to this day. I had a comparable experience the only time I carried out a fieldwork project in collaboration with a camera operator, and I am sure many other anthropologists have had similar experiences. These stories are often generative, even if fraught with professional, ethical, and personal complexity, but it is always a good idea to continue to experiment with the ways that we tell them, publish them, and learn from them (Kravchuk and Murawski 2018:22, 23).

This touches on what is perhaps the main question at the heart of Docot’s analysis—What is the role of self-reflexivity, and can there ever be too much of it? Anthropology is already much more methodologically introspective than most disciplines. This may in part account for the rather aggressive and patronizing response that Docot received from conceptual art theorist Luis Camnitzer, to whom she had sent a draft of her essay. Docot, Camnitzer wrote, had allowed her ego to “contaminate” her paper. One would hope that an anthropologist—especially a senior male anthropologist writing to a junior female scholar—would be a little less quick to make these kinds of judgments. However, there are still certain types of reflexivity that appear to be fairer game than others for anthropology—at least for work published in peer-reviewed journals. Docot’s work makes an important step in pushing the boundaries of convention and leveling the field of anthropological reflexivity. Why shouldn’t we include quotes from emails with editors, esteemed senior colleagues, and peer reviewers in the published versions of our work? Peer reviews in particular are anonymous, so why does this constitute a greater violation of the ethics—or the aesthetics (the “good taste”)—of the discipline and the academy than the inclusion of quotes from informants in our monographs and articles?

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Conceptual Art and Immaterial Labor: Artist-Ethnographer, the New Old Subjectivity in Late Capitalism

Normally, people desire to forget memories unpleasant to them, but 10 years have passed since my unlikable affair with Dada Docot and the memory remains fresh to me. However, in contrast to people who cannot move on from a bitter memory, I consequently developed different thought processes, learning from the memorable experience with her. And I am going to discuss this by commenting on Docot’s metacommentary of her ethnography, where I am an insider. To do this, I will center my commentaries upon the notion of collaboration, which I think is an important aspect of Docot’s essay but which was left trivial in her entire text.

Thus, more than a rebuttal to Docot’s text, I want to take this opportunity to contribute by problematizing further the predicament of accumulating symbolic value from immaterial labor and bring forward the relevance of negative collaborative practice in reframing recent approaches in anthropology, ethnography, and contemporary artistic practice. Following this, I am introducing related frameworks to help elucidate the tumultuous-yet-interesting possibilities of negative collaboration—that is, a collaboration that distances critically away from optimism with the political economy of symbolic value fueled by discursivity (Kwon 2002:14; Lasay 2005).

Moreover, after unpacking the frameworks, I will expand my commentary, reiterating previous research showing that

the quasi anthropology prevalent in new public art and artistic knowledge production today is a legacy if not a handiwork of conceptual art (Alberro 2006:14; Foster 1996:112).

Starting from negative collaboration. Since after the Cold War, approaches to different aspects of knowledge production have gone relational, and the term “collaboration” consequently became an important component of the political economy of immaterial labor. However, this notion remains positivist, similar to the idea of cooperation, which shows the paradox and dangers of postpolitical globalism and liberal democracy today. In her short but rich text, Fatima Lasay (2005), a computer artist from the Philippines, responds to this danger by arguing that collaborations are not benign. She furthermore argues that when collaboration in knowledge production is placed “within the reality of interest and power” motivated by the altruistic pursuit of symbolic value, the tumultuous terrain of collaboration becomes invisible (Lasay 2005). In other words, it transcends the negativity inherent in collaboration. Consequently, the danger behind this is apparent in the asymmetrical relations of collaborative practice. Lasay, thus, asserts the importance of failure in every collaborative process because the conflict in collaboration acknowledges not only the value of differences but also the proceedings of dissensus. In contrast to consensus, this exhaustively inherent quality of collaboration consequently articulates what the political means in social relations (Lasay 2005).

Devising a concept she termed “conflict-in-collaboration,” Lasay therefore believes that collaboration in this approach destabilizes the economic expediency of symbolic value. The destabilization, in turn, emphasizes the importance of conflict as an alternative to optimistic collaboration models.

Miwon Kwon, on the other hand, in her critical study of site-specific art examined a predicament similar to what Lasay had discerned. In her observation, Kwon noticed that after a decade of notoriety for being critical against institutions as part of its methodology, site-specific art has surprisingly become complicit in the gentrification of marginalized communities today. This shift from radicality to being complicit, according to Kwon, is the result of many factors. But one key factor to consider is found in the strategy of conceptual art itself, which is to dematerialize objects as a critical response to the hegemony of materiality in art.

Quasi anthropology legacy of conceptual art. This strategy is a heritage from poststructuralism that was consequently inherited by the linguistic turn in the 1970s. And according to Irit Rogoff (2010:33), it allowed different sites, whether art or texts, to be devoured across various discursive practices. Ricardo Basbaum (2006:96), on the other hand, argues that conceptual artists were not actually in pursuit of the dematerialization of art but only wanted to extend the preoccupation of modernism concerning “discourse” and “visuality.” Following Hal Foster, this shift has furthermore enabled quasi-anthropological approaches in contemporary artistic practices today, meaning that it permitted art to intersect with social life. Ironically, contemporary mainstream institutions and the art market were quick to exploit this opportunity by coming

up with the concept of new public art, an approach through which museums today aim to engage the public (for museum revenue) or engage a site (mostly marginalized communities targeted for city development projects) by deploying artists who assume the role of a community organizer and anthropologist or ethnographer (Foster 1996:185).

Thus, to complete the work in succeeding from altruistic and or developmental approaches to collaboration, failure must be prevented. Kwon (2002:154), noticing the dangers behind this *modus operandi*, consequently introduced a tool she termed “collective artistic praxis,” an approach that acknowledges the impossibility of “total consolidation” and “unity” in collaboration. Kwon (2002:154) furthermore says that “here, a coherent representation of the group’s identity is always out of grasp.” *The Docot affair.* My involvement in Dada Docot’s artistic ethnography was more than as a cameraman or technical person. Contrary to her belief, my role was not as a subordinate to her grand idea. It was, first of all, a collaborative action responding to the everyday experience shared by people who continue to be racially and culturally profiled in Japan. But because we have ignored the political nature of our collaboration, our ambivalent difference concluded antagonistically when one of us tried to transcend the impossibility of a coherent viewpoint.

In her performance piece, the concern was weighed upon the discursivity of immaterial representation backed by an ethnographic framework. She performed her conceptual ethnography, embodying a racial and cultural typecast imagined by hegemonic Japanese society. Apparently, this is symbolically valuable to current discourse in contemporary ethnography and anthropology. However, ironically, without the material data upon which the performance piece can be read, there is nothing to discuss. Thus, my single 8 mm film and camera that became witness to her performance piece were crucial to complete her work. However, upon invoking my agency by splicing the film according to my liking, the conflict ensued that consequently put an end to our affair. I surrendered my film to her as if I stole it, and we parted ways. However, I thereafter became interested in the process and articulation of power relations in the production of meaning attached to the political nature of collaboration. From this learning experience I began asking the question, How do we reveal creative possibilities from the difficulties of collaboration? What kind of creative possibility is this?

Toward an open-ended continuity. In Docot’s metacommentary, she approached the difficulty of our collaboration from a discourse in identity politics, a legacy inherited from modernism, which according to cultural anthropologist Charles Macdonald (2010:74) is tied to the tradition of representation and transcendence important to the making of coherent social organizations. Coherency is to cut across the concrete reality of uncertainty, and applying this concept in the unreliable characteristic of collaboration consequently sterilizes difference. Thus, it is not surprising to see why Docot followed the binary quality of ethnographic conceptualism that she used in the notion of “furtherings,” an approach that she employed to

transcend concrete difficulties of collaboration toward the textuality of conflict, which in turn enabled an open-ended approach to thinking about itself.

This seemingly hermetic approach of asserting self-representation is for me simply a new way of representing an old subjectivity in late capitalism. Hal Foster (1996:180), however, would identify it as self-refurbishing, a dangerous side of “ethnographic self-refashioning.” Today, this is in vogue in contemporary art, especially in the quasi-anthropological artistic practices popular among socially engaged artists.

However, there are creative possibilities that we can discern from negativity in collaboration. For instance, Lasay, sensing the asymmetrical collaboration consequential to the political economy of immaterial labor, asserted that one creative possibility that can be attributed to negativity in collaboration is bringing back the concrete reality of conflict. This conflict-based collaboration can be found in some curatorial practices that Irit Rogoff (2010) described as the “educational turn,” a nonauthored approach to curatorial and artistic practice. On the other hand, in Kwon’s problematization of accepted notions of site specificity, she contests that it lost its potency and recommends a more complex and fluid reframing of engaging sites.

With these destabilizing approaches to collaboration and engagement of sites, the accumulation of symbolic value becomes irrelevant. Thus, by applying this different approach to knowledge production in anthropology, ethnography, and contemporary artistic practice, the legacy of conceptual art that thrives today among the said disciplines is no longer limited to the binary of visibility and discourse but instead exists in the space of their relationship to each other, without one discrediting the other or becoming the other and the same.

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On Taking an Even Longer Route: Art and Anthropology and Such Always Unfinished Readings

It is a precious opportunity to have been invited into this intermittent conversation²⁰ with Filipino artist-anthropologist Dada Docot running for close to a decade now. The initial encounter was both serendipitous and circuitous, and perhaps this juncture is only fitting to activate the argument she makes here for the meandering processes that ethnographic metacommentary call up. In this framing of her research *vis-à-vis*

20. My first recollection of engaging meaningfully with Docot’s artistic practice began in 2008, as my personal research focus on performance practices in the Philippines congealed through her video, *Performing Naturalness*, which she mentions as being at the intersection of our exchanges in relation to a key section in her essay “Taking the long route: ethnographic metacommentary as method in anthropological film practice.”

such broadly shared projects—of pushing not only against the outward boundaries of what could be seen as productive aesthetic performance and thus the subject of art studies (my own home field) but also toward the ongoing problematizing of the history of conceptual art beyond Euroamerica, which she traces through Luis Camnitzer’s publication work, the kindred desire to winnow still largely untethered inquisitive modes persists.

Docot’s positing of metacommentary as arduous and circuitous but necessary is earnest and familiar territory by this time to any academic investing in variants of reflexivity. That ethnography is labor, and now often comes as instances of transgression into other disciplines, is yet another key point Docot raises. Perhaps, as she suggests, we could more pointedly draw from such acts of infidelity to rationalize the implicit hesitation to merely interpret and render meaning. Weiner, via Docot’s surfacing of anxieties over Western anthropological approaches in regard to explication, while insisting on distance or affected objectivity, ironically renders the complication that she herself reveals as problematic. In invoking “montage” as both a concealing and a revelatory tool, the essay further calls out ocularism for foreclosing a broader sensorial realm to make the legible sensate and to allow interfaces between the experienced and imagined.

Furthermore, the reciprocated artist-anthro envy she summons in making the case for interdisciplinary methods and tools really hits home and actually cuts both ways now. When considered in regard to her keywords “complexity” and “representation,” the interfaces between both social and individuated spheres become even more undeniable. In her reckoning, the art historian-critic, like the anthropologist, is, despite the push to discursivity and a spectrum of meanings, still largely rendered an “expert” and still generally expected to craft interpretation and enable narrative. So the insistence on a stripping of this veneer of gravitas is no small charge.

Of course, at the heart of the argument is a constructivist inclination: if the idea that the camera that reveals also screens out is to be disputed—if the claim instead is to be made that the technology imaginably can do both simultaneously—then space is made for agency in regard to not only the voyeur but also the watched/visually captured.

Presumably, the nonconstructionist non-West cited by Docot via Weiner could be reimagined as possibly not as passive as previously perceived. She makes her case by detailing how other parallel perspectives on “screened” (in the filtered-ungenerous sense) culture carefully do carve out room for criticality but perhaps even more so for reflexivity with regard to the practice of the watcher and then ultimately narrator—or in this specific paper’s case, the art scholar and the anthropologist. Apart from lending needed humbling upon the visual realm, there is also Docot’s pointed questioning of the privilege of text over other modes of representation. The case is made for an ethnography that accounts for itself, dare I say just as more and more contemporary art seems to be merely posturing in regard to form/materiality, process, and intent particularly with regard to an imagined and/or real public. In

looking at both anthropology and art studies structurally as prompted by her writing, an implicit ethicality is surfaced. Even so, Docot's own creative and intellectual lineage appear to pull her into looking to technology alongside agency, that is, with an assumed dialectic constituting both context and interplay of modes of asking to keep the sensing and thinking going on.

Perhaps what could also be said is that Docot's surfacing of the possibility of a flexible itinerary through ethnographic conceptualism need not foreclose its practice among only those identifying with the Global South, particularly owing to the realization that neither the Global South nor the North are monoliths and have within them nuances such as enclaves of power and effusive sites of resistance. Her "Failings" and "Relationality" sections could be seen as acute renderings of such a multifaceted predicament. Although not being privy to the presumably many other considerations that propelled the completion of this recent writing, I would say that she perhaps could have gone even farther in her furtherings. There is much earnest and soul-wrenching work that evidently went into looking back at her dealings with compatriot artist Jong Pairez, for instance, but it appears to me that she held back in probing the relational precarities of submitting her work to the privileged voice (seemingly oblivious to the violence wrought by his presumed positionality) that was Luis Camnitzer's. Much more could have been done, perhaps, or could still be done elsewhere in trawling through the tropes of class, race, gender, and accumulated cultural capital in the global art world most certainly. We could maybe then extend Docot's citation of mask-wearing as manifest in shifting subject positions that pervade the work of research- or practice-based art researchers as well as anthropologists like herself. As negotiations of positionality enable even more such mindful work to proceed, artists may occasionally step back from taking the lead in a participatory art project, just as anthropologists should downplay perceived academic expertise—neither merely asking nor merely concluding in belabored gag reflex.

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Dada Docot takes us into a world where certain human beings must carry so-called "alien cards" to be able to demonstrate their legality when the gazes of other human beings—undercover police officers—single them out as potential "illegal migrants," or subjects for detention or deportation. Her film is recorded at the Shinagawa railway station in Tokyo, but the world depicted is not confined to this locality. It is our world: a peculiar place in which human existence has been separated into categories of legal and illegal, separations that more often than not trail the markers of skin color, dress, or other signs of perceived racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious difference.

Docot's film provokes us to reflect upon the extent to which we have come to live in such a world. It draws our attention to the ways that national borders are enacted within cosmopolitan cities and what it means to have the privilege and freedom of mobility or to be deprived of it.

In her article, Docot courageously analyzes how her film materialized in a political and aesthetic disagreement between herself and her cameraman, Jong Pairez, who initially hoped to be involved as a collaborator or coauthor. She details how the urge to "own" the project and appear as authors of the film prevented the recognition of their "shared identity" and "unity," both attempting to confront the challenges of being Filipino migrants in Japan. Docot's discussion highlights how we need to carefully consider the struggles we want to invest ourselves in and who we want to conceive of as our opponents.

If the struggles we have with each other over intellectual and aesthetic preferences do not enhance but rather obstruct our ability to address issues of wider concern—issues such as the brutality of the system of surveillance, control, and illegalization that Docot critically addresses in her film—then they are not trivial but rather deeply problematic.

This insight also struck me as significant when considering how Docot framed her article in relation to previous works in visual anthropology—including an article I wrote with Rane Willerslev (2012)—which she perceives as an effort to "simply recognize visibility and invisibility in practices of representation." I was surprised by her reading, and I disagree with the message that Docot associates with our article, namely, that "the only interpretations that can be conjured are necessarily bound to the visual, as if vision is the only available sense through which we could extend our perception, understanding, and experience of the image."

But perhaps there is more in our work that is shared than what sets it apart. Docot's concept of "ethnographic meta-commentary" as a "method of expanding our thinking beyond what is representable on-screen and in our writing," shares the ambitions of anthropologists whose work inspired several ideas in Willerslev's and my article (see, e.g., Connor, Asch, and Asch 1986). Her point about bringing "the explicitness of social realist aesthetics" into dialogue with a conceptual approach as well as her recognition of the productive insights generated by "failures of collaboration" were also central in our work (see also Asch in Ruby 2000; Suhr 2018; van de Port 2018).

Docot proposes "that we take the long route of ethnographically writing up our visual and other creative projects," which is a long and laborious mode of writing that unpacks cultural production, deepens contextualization, and "fleshes out ruptures in the filmmaking process that are often concealed from the audience, and even from the filmmakers." But perhaps Docot underestimates how film can provide such a metacommentary. A key value of film recordings is the way that they almost inevitably "bear the scars of the encounters that produced them" (Castaing-Taylor 1996:79). If we carefully attend to the recordings of cameras, they often provide deep insights into the ruptures of their making.

Raised in the Philippines and at the time of filming finishing her studies in Japan, Docot brings herself into her film as a subject to immigration control. Docot also shows how she, as an educated artist and anthropologist, is by no means exempt from racial profiling.

The anxieties provoked by such profiling are in Docot's film emphasized by slow motion, blue-greenish colors, and the accompanying soundtrack *Your Empty Lives* that evoke the "surveillance culture at a time of increasingly atomized urban lives." As she states "I have been living in Japan for almost four years now. And I wonder. How long does it take for one to belong?"

One might object that the authorial control Docot exercises over how we are to perceive the scene through editing, framing, colors, and music leaves little space for the contextualization and analysis that can be provided by film. Docot's autoethnographic reflections are insightful and strong, but even in this short format I would like to dwell more on the interactions: the peculiar tasks of "spotting" and "stopping" that are carried out by the police officers, their questions, the tones of their voices, how their bodies perform the little bow (*ojigi*) that Docot describes often concludes the confirmation of a subject's legal status as a form of apology.

I appreciate how Docot decided to anonymize the police officers in order not to impose on them the same cruelty that their surveillance imposes on her and also how, in the article, she emphasizes that not every police officer is the same. One officer simply refused to arrest undocumented Filipinos because for him "Filipinos work hard and do no harm to Japanese society." Such small acts of disobedience speak to the multiple ways that people attempt to resist oppressive immigration regimes and find ways to live their lives in spite of them. Another strong part of Docot's article are the paragraphs recounting the reflections the film elicited among the 50 people whose comments she collected after they had watched her film.

Discussions such as those between Docot and her interviewees and collaborators, as well as her own reflections, could have been the subject of an ethnographic film. This would have been a challenging and time-consuming ethnographic meta-commentary, but it seems to me that film is in fact particularly well equipped to explore in this way how our understandings, analyses, and representations of the world arise from our interactions with it.

Reply

Response: Imperfect Furtherings

This publication marks my arrival in one of anthropology's heavily peer-reviewed spaces. I acknowledge that as I reach this milestone, I have had to spend my time away from the urgent

work of political organizing that needs to be done at home, where the ongoing war on drugs under the Rodrigo Duterte regime, according to many news sources, has already resulted in more than 27,000 deaths. In times of ongoing human rights violations and injustice in the Philippines, Filipino academics are in peril and being red-baited for being at the forefront of critiquing the regime. Artists are centering their work to support a mass-based protest movement. Photographers and journalists are resigning from their salaried work to avoid censorship and to uphold their integrity. I acknowledge that the academic position from which I write is one of relative privilege and comfort.

This said, I am thankful to Julius Bautista, Michal Murawski, Jong Pairez, Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, and Christian Suhr for generously contributing their time and energy to this academic engagement. I begin my response by addressing what the readers seem to have found to be the article's most useful intervention—the proposed strategy of "furtherings." Bautista calls furtherings a "progressive modality of reflexivity"; Murawski writes that furtherings are akin to being "open" and honest, but, as he correctly points out, furtherings raise a question about the extent of one's openness. Legaspi-Ramirez's response reflects the same concern, that I may have "held back" on certain aspects in my furtherings. Murawski wants to know more about the situation of interrogation by the police as experienced by Pairez. It is indeed possible to extend the furtherings that I had written for the article. Researchers have already addressed the concern of how comprehensive one's account is/can be—for instance, Ruth Behar's (2013) moving and intricate autoethnography, Carolyn Ellis's (2007) approach to relational ethics in ethnography, and Jeremy MacClancy's (2007) demonstration of how to write a multifaceted ethnographic biography, among others.

In my article, I referred to intentionality as an important factor that organizes one's passions, work, and advocacies as an anthropologist, researcher, artist, educator, and so forth. In another article that appeared in a geography journal (Docot 2017), I argued for the need to gauge one's commitments with the relationalities that could be produced or that could be broken apart by knowledge production. This means that non-production or not-doing within the modes expected by academia could be reframed in a positive sense; what I have called "negative production" potentially holds relationalities together even if not-doing goes against the expectations of academic productivity. Therefore, it could be said that just as making claims and activities such as research and writing are political acts, so is holding back. It is an academic preoccupation to sail through various tides of critique. For example, the peer-review process can generate well-meant productive criticism (Hojat, Gonnella, and Caellegh 2003), but it can also result in barely veiled posturing/embittered gatekeeping, and both types still need to be addressed, so some of the precious word count inevitably goes toward responding to those questions/concerns. Accordingly, holding back also means working to keep the relationships with the critics of one's work open and negotiable.

There is still much to be written about the politics of mediation in academic publication and on the intentionalities that drive postcolonial anthropologists such as Anand Pandian (2012), among others, who have appealed journals to reconsider their contributions upon receiving an initial unwelcoming peer review.

Another major point of critique that was consistently raised by both the reviewers of the various drafts of my article and by the invited commentators is the issue of collaboration, which they say I could have covered more thoroughly. It has been a decade since the filming of *Performing Naturalness*, a project that at the time animated my friendship with Pairez. Pairez contributed his ideas, time, equipment, and energy to make sure that the project was executed within my time line (i.e., before it was time for me to leave Tokyo upon graduation). In his response, Pairez acknowledges the bitterness that followed the project, but to my great relief, he takes the high road in analyzing our interactions. I have had various thoughts arising from our initial bickerings, but like Pairez, the emotional side has become more subdued over time. I am grateful to *Current Anthropology* for accommodating my conversation with Pairez, which I hope demonstrates that healthy debate (and a possibility for reconciliation) can still be one of the outcomes of collaborative failings.

As Bautista observes, Pairez and I seemed to both agree that art was not about making something visually appealing but that it could be mobilized “to recognize the primacy of truth in the struggle of representation.” In another view, Legaspi-Ramirez raises the problem of the “participatory” in art projects, and she hints that artists could back down from taking the presumed leading role, while anthropologists could learn to “downplay [their] perceived academic expertise.” Legaspi-Ramirez suggests that the work of “experts” is undergirded by “implicit hesitation” and that academics as experts push for discursivity, which then becomes part of an endless loop of critique and interpretation. Thus, the work of discursivity appears to be at an impasse, just like Sisyphus who is doomed to roll endlessly a big boulder up the hill. Interdisciplinarity enriches but also complicates collaboration. Pairez argues that conceptual art bore a “quasi-anthropological” practice among artists. He also raises the point that art could also be mobilized as “opportunities” for engagement and he hints of this as an “old new” strategy of appropriation by academics who craft new masks for themselves (as activist-anthropologists, etc.) in an effort to keep their projects relevant.

But Legaspi-Ramirez, more than making a commentary on the irony of my critique of Weiner’s article, seems to not only appeal for humility in both the art world and academia but also appeal for a practice that “accounts for itself” and that goes beyond “posturing.” She points out that “form/materiality, process, and intent” are often mobilized in the Philippines by artists as they enter the art market. Despite shortcomings, I hope that my article provides a sufficient self-accounting of the material (in this case, a very short film), thought process, and intentions that make up the project’s whole spread (including the meta-

commentary and this response). Legaspi-Ramirez likens academic writing to that of a “gag reflex,” but my article could also be read as a very long artist statement, which I think she would agree is rare, especially coming from the brand of conceptualism in the Philippines whose practitioners have historically elided the description and accounting of their work, a responsibility that has largely been left with and taken up by art critics.

The keywords of my article, as Legaspi-Ramirez points out, are “visibility” and “representation.” My article follows a genealogy of debates published in *Current Anthropology*, one piece of which was written by Suhr, one of the invited respondents of my article. I am grateful to Suhr for taking the time to engage with me by writing his response. I appreciate his acknowledgement of the situation of surveillance and othering that is pervasive in the world in which we live today. This is followed by his concern about the struggle over certain “intellectual and aesthetic preferences,” which he says finally obstructs “our ability to address issues of wider concern.” Suhr writes that I may have misread or misinterpreted his ideas, as he says that the article I critique in my current essay, as well as his other works, articulates concerns similar to the arguments that I am making. However, in his response, Suhr reiterates the primacy of the visual. He suggests that my demonstration of the ethnographic metacommentary could have made an interesting ethnographic film, which confirms my critique of overattention to visuality. The entire project, from film production to publication, has already required an immense amount of emotive labor. Bautista commends my use of film as data-gathering tool, but I would like to point out that the project included a performance that was also anxiety inducing and therefore emotionally taxing. While I agree with Suhr that film is “well equipped to explore” issues such as the ones I discuss, such a furthering currently goes beyond what I am ready to face.

Finally, I would like to make a brief comment on Pairez’s view that anthropology and art are trapped in “the predicament of accumulating symbolic value from immaterial labor.” As I write this response, I am only 3 months away from starting my tenure-track clock as an assistant professor at a university in the United States. This position was likely facilitated by the “forthcoming” entry with *Current Anthropology* that was prominently displayed in my curriculum vitae. Pairez notes that his labor and equipment completed my project and ethnography involving *Performing Naturalness*. Despite ambitions to foreground the oppressed and the precarious, whether in our written work or in other forms, it cannot be denied that attaining the security of tenure in the academy remains dependent on knowledge production, which contains the immeasurable material labor of the people whose stories we want to foreground. Like others (England 1994; Jackson 2004; Young 2005), I worry about the extractive tendencies of research, but I also hold that anthropology is a hopeful field that continues to envision and work toward a kinder, more inclusive, and diverse future.

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