
Reconfiguring the Ground: Art and the Visualization of Anthropology

Anna Grimshaw

My concern in this paper is to rethink the visual in visual anthropology by reconfiguring the ground between anthropology and art. Central to this reconfiguration is the development of a new dialogue with those working in the discipline of art history. Of course, anthropologists and art historians have long been in conversation, exchanging ideas about “primitivism,” aesthetics as a cross-cultural category, the status and circulation of objects, culturally specific notions of the artist, and so on.¹ More recent ethnographic work has begun to investigate “art worlds” understood as complex discursive sites in which the relationship between art and anthropology is posed anew.² My purpose here is slightly different. I want to suggest that we change the terms of the debate between established disciplinary positions by considering art and anthropology as analogous practices. Hence, in proposing a rethinking of the visual in visual anthropology, I am not primarily concerned with generating more discourse about the visual. Instead I am interested in extending the scope of image-based forms of ethnographic inquiry by means of a fuller engagement with artistic practice itself.

Questions of the visual have come to a new prominence in the humanities and social sciences. We live in a world where image-based media permeate all aspects of life and reach all corners of the globe. Developing a coherent analytical approach to this new phenomenon has brought about a certain dissolving of established disciplinary boundaries.³ It no longer seems to make sense for anthropology, art history, political economy, or cultural and media studies to continue to exist as discrete areas of academic specialization. The convergence of these different perspectives in the new field of visual culture has raised a central problem. How can we approach the subject of inquiry, image-based ways of knowing, that takes account of the distinctiveness of the visual rather than rendering it textual through the prism of linguistically oriented theory? Specifically, how can we avoid falling into what art historian Barbara Stafford calls “cultural textology”?⁴

I think that visual anthropology offers an unusual space for addressing this problem. Although as a branch of anthropology, located in the academy and subject to discursive pressures, it has also been historically part of a broader landscape of media production. This liminality, the “unruliness” of visual anthropology, as

Faye Ginsburg characterized it, has long served as a challenge to the discipline's textual assumptions and certainties.⁵ But I want to suggest that as *visual* anthropologists we can go much further in drawing on currents that run counter to established academic discourse. In particular, I will propose that the forging of new collaborations at the level of image-based practice is an important step in any bolder and more radical intellectual engagement with questions of vision and visuality. Such initiatives are critical to any transformation in the existing conceptual frameworks by which we understand the visual.

This paper has three sections. First of all, I provide a context for the rethinking of the visual in visual anthropology. In briefly sketching the emergence of the subdiscipline, I want to highlight the process by which it also, paradoxically, came to manifest an anxiety about the visual that is characteristic of anthropology as a whole. The paper's second part is concerned with the constellation of interests in contemporary visual anthropology. Over the last decade, the subdiscipline has significantly expanded and diversified. The substantive, methodological, and conceptual transformation of the field opens up a new space for the creative convergence of cross-disciplinary interests. In the final part of the essay, I present some examples of the kind of work that might be pursued within such a space. My discussion is anchored in experiments in visual practice that I have developed with a handful of artists.⁶

To propose collaboration across established boundaries of practice is always a risky enterprise. More often than not, it provokes anxiety and considerable professional skepticism. Not least, there is the question about how to properly evaluate the objects that might result from shared work. Is the resulting piece of work art or anthropology? But it is precisely the questions that are thrown up by collaboration that constitute the ground for a reconfiguration of the established disciplinary positions of anthropology and art history. For in taking examples of shared practice as the starting point for a different kind of intellectual exchange, I am not suggesting the collapse of art into anthropology or the other way around. My interest is in juxtaposing perspectives to enable new insights concerning technique, knowledge, and forms of representation. Moreover, as I have discovered from my own experience, embarking on collaborative projects with artists is an adventure—surprising, challenging, and often fun.

Background

My orientation toward the field of visual anthropology is a very particular one. It comes out of my background as an ethnographer working in the Himalayas dur-

ing the late 1970s. For me, fieldwork was an overwhelmingly visual experience. My research was conducted in the midst of an extraordinary mountain landscape, whose appearance was endlessly shifting through subtle changes of light and shadow and whose form manifested itself in the faces and bodies of the women with whom I lived. Cast adrift from familiar cultural and linguistic understandings, I was forced to attend closely to visual cues, seeking to comprehend what was going on around me through the intensive observation of gesture, expression, and movement. What I saw was the bedrock upon which all of my subsequent understanding rested. However, when I came to write up my doctoral thesis, I became acutely aware of the discrepancy between my sensory experience of fieldwork and the language of established academic discourse. It was more than just the problem of creating distance between primary research and reflective writing, organizing the chaotic detail of fieldwork into neat categories of analysis. I felt strongly that I was losing something important. For the movement away from the pictorial toward the textual, in which the density of detail within the frame, so to speak, was filtered out in favor of simple clear lines, implied a particular conception—and hierarchy—of ethnographic knowledge.

Some ten years after my Himalayan fieldwork, I wrote what I call a “remembered ethnography.” *Servants of the Buddha* is a book built upon an excavation of images in the mind’s eye.⁷ Taking as my point of departure certain vivid pictures that were lodged in my memory, I sought to recuperate the felt experience of fieldwork and bring it into full consciousness—not by denying the tricks and distortions of memory, but by building them into the writing itself. *Servants of the Buddha* explores an anthropological way of seeing, seeing interpreted not in any narrow sense of vision or the ocular, but as a metaphor for a particular way of knowing, knowing located in the body and in the senses. In making the visual texture of memory the focus of my ethnographic attention, I sought access to fieldwork understandings that had fallen through the cracks of discursive representation. But how to evoke the distinctiveness of such understandings without translating them into a different conceptual register was a question that I constantly struggled with. Without being particularly aware of it at the time, *Servants of the Buddha* marked the beginning of my engagement with visual anthropology, conceived as a broad inquiry into different forms of ethnographic experience and knowledge.

The mantra of modern anthropology, the importance of “going to see for yourself,” stood at the heart of my own training as an ethnographer. Firsthand observation as the basis for knowledge was integral to Haddon’s celebrated 1898 Torres

Strait expedition, and it was subsequently enshrined at the heart of the Malinowskian tradition.⁸ The fieldwork revolution, the shift from the armchair Victorian enterprise to modern fieldwork-based anthropology, involved a rejection of reported speech or hearsay in favor of direct experience. Seeing came to function as a complex metaphor for knowing, but at the same time, that seeing and knowing were linked in different ways; the explicit use of visual techniques and technologies was increasingly abandoned within the new scientific enterprise.⁹ Anthropology as a modern project came to manifest the profound anxiety about vision that characterized twentieth-century thought more generally.¹⁰ I was intrigued by the centrality and the marginalization of vision within the professionalizing discipline of anthropology. Exploring this paradox was critical in expanding the intellectual agenda of visual anthropology beyond the concerns of a narrow subdiscipline largely defined by its particular techniques and technologies.

Visual anthropology emerged as a subdiscipline during the 1970s. It was part of the more general expansion and fragmentation of postwar anthropology as it became established within the universities. The publication of Paul Hockings's book *Principles of Visual Anthropology* in 1975 marked a significant moment in the consolidation of the field. This edited volume brought together a range of interests and activities that had been taking place on the margins of the academic discipline. From the outset, however, what constituted the visual in visual anthropology was quite limited. Documentary film (and to a lesser extent, photography) was central. The anthropology of art existed as a subdiscipline in its own right, concerning itself with "primitive," tribal, or non-Western art. Both subdisciplines shared a sense of marginalization from the textual preoccupations of mainstream anthropology at the same time as they internalized the conceptual frameworks of the discursive discipline.¹¹

Until recently, those working in the field of visual anthropology tended to orient themselves more toward the anthropological part of the equation rather than toward the visual. Consequently, the intellectual agenda of the subdiscipline was largely shaped by the concerns of a textual discipline, inhibiting the investigation of different areas of ethnographic experience that might be opened up through experimentation with a visually based practice. What Taylor terms "iconophobia," a general nervousness surrounding the visual within anthropology, also reverberated through the subdiscipline itself—as the controversy provoked by Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* (1986) made especially manifest.¹² The vehemence with which that film was attacked was evidence of the level of resistance by an-

thropologists to nondiscursive ethnographic forms. But Gardner's experiment was unusual even for visual anthropology.¹³

Although visual anthropologists have often proclaimed their distinctiveness from other colleagues, the textual tradition has continued to remain a primary focus of reference and an important source of their intellectual legitimization. In the case of ethnographic filmmaking, this situation led to the production of what MacDougall calls, following Ruby, films about anthropology rather than anthropological films.¹⁴ By this he means that visual approaches are placed in the service of textual preoccupations. In distinguishing between a film that "merely reports on existing knowledge" (original emphasis) and one that seeks to "cover new ground through an integral exploration of the data," MacDougall suggests that a genuinely visual anthropology is not about the "pictorial representation" of anthropology. Instead it is about a process of inquiry in which knowledge is not prior but emerges and takes distinctive shape, as he puts it, "through the very grain of the filmmaking."¹⁵

Visualizing Anthropology

Over the last decade the field of visual anthropology has greatly expanded and diversified. No longer dominated by ethnographic filmmaking, it now encompasses a much broader range of concerns that relate to vision and visibility. Despite this plethora of interests, the field has two distinctive poles—the first, I characterize as the anthropology of the visual, the second, the visualization of anthropology.

The anthropology of the visual is, as Banks and Morphy define it, "the study of visual systems and visible culture."¹⁶ Here the visual is the object of anthropological inquiry. The second constellation of interests takes anthropology itself as the object of visual inquiry. The visualization of anthropology is a reflexive project of the kind MacDougall envisages.¹⁷ Here vision is understood again as not strictly about the ocular; rather it serves as a more general metaphor for ways of knowing derived from the senses. Central to the visualization of anthropology is a fundamental reorientation of perspective that comes about through engagement with image-based practice. The shift from a word-sentence to an image-sequence approach involves not the modification, but the transformation of one's ethnographic perspective.¹⁸ I discovered myself that using a camera positions oneself differently in the world. It radically realigns the body and brings into view a new range of questions about ethnographic experience and knowledge.

Although I have characterized the field of visual anthropology as comprising two distinct constellations of interest, I am not suggesting that they are

mutually exclusive. Indeed, the critical question is how they might be related. How might an anthropology of the visual draw on a visualized anthropology? What might image-based ethnographic inquiry offer to studies of visual systems and visible culture? These questions bring us back to the important issues that critics like Stafford and Mitchell have raised in their work. "What do pictures *really* want?" Mitchell asks,¹⁹ while Stafford castigates the linguistic bias of academic debate built on "the false separation of *how* things are presented from what they express."²⁰ How can we avoid "cultural textology"? Barbara Stafford argues passionately for a conceptual realignment, one that dislodges the disembodied linearity of linguistically based models of interpretation in favor of approaches that encompass the embodied, sensory, and materially grounded dimensions of the pictorial. The task is to transcend the limitations of logocentrism, with its hierarchies of reading/seeing, text/image, mind/body and to acknowledge the distinctiveness—indeed the "*intelligence* of sight," as Stafford puts it, and other sense-based ways of knowing.²¹

Within anthropology, if not more broadly across the humanities and social sciences, there has been a significant shift in theoretical ground that now makes possible the development of new approaches toward the visual. Assumptions about objects and methods of study that underpinned the emergence of distinctive modern disciplines have come under increasing pressure in the conditions of postmodernity. In the case of anthropology, the belated collapse of scientific ethnography brought about a fundamental rethinking of the ethnographic task itself.²² This reflexive moment is often understood as profoundly textual but it also, ironically, can be understood as marking the end of textuality as anthropology's defining form. Over the last decade or so, the dominance of linguistic, semiotic, and textual models of interpretation have begun to give way to more phenomenologically inflected approaches and to forms of "sensuous scholarship."²³ This growing interest in areas of ethnographic experience that lie beyond discursive reach has brought to the fore questions about existing techniques of anthropological inquiry and its forms of representation. At the same time, there has been a renewed engagement with anthropology by contemporary artists and other visual practitioners. The point of exchange is no longer that of the "primitive," the traditional focus of discussion between artists and anthropologists.²⁴ Interests have started to converge on a new terrain—the shared, intersubjective space of ethnographic practice.²⁵ Here ethnography is understood not as a codified body of knowledge, the objective documentation of culture linked to a scientific paradigm; instead it is a practice or set of practices linked to a critical stance toward questions of culture and iden-

ity. It involves the play of the familiar and the strange, a juxtaposition of perspectives echoing an earlier “ethnographic surrealism” that James Clifford explored in his important essay on the anthropology and art of interwar Paris.²⁶ More recently, Catherine Russell has proposed that ethnography be judged “an experimental practice in which aesthetics and cultural theory are combined in a constantly evolving formal combination.”²⁷

Experiments in Visual Practice

The intersubjective space of ethnographic work is particularly important for what I have called “the visualization of anthropology,” understood as a reflexive inquiry that challenges existing disciplinary conceptions of experience and knowledge. Central to its development is collaborative exchange with artists and other image-based practitioners that is not rooted in the juxtaposition of discursive positions, but emerges through participation in shared projects. In proposing new forms of collaboration, I draw on the established commitment to practice that has always characterized the field of visual anthropology and constitutes its radical impulse. Experimentation with visual techniques and forms, however limited within the domain of ethnographic cinema, for instance, has long served as a basis for both critically interrogating and creatively enhancing the scope of the anthropological imagination.

The examples of collaborative practice that I discuss below originated in my own sense of ethnographic limitation. I noted earlier that working with a video camera alerted me to the fundamental shift inherent in moving from a word-sentence to an image-sequence approach. Nevertheless, as a visual anthropologist, I continued to struggle against the limitations of discursive habit. I had spent too long reading books! In order to investigate what might constitute a genuinely image-based ethnography, I sought to extend my understanding of non-discursive techniques and forms through collaboration with a number of artists who yielded their understanding of the world through the making of visual forms. For the artists themselves—Inga Burrows, Elspeth Owen, and Amanda Ravetz—these projects became a site for a fuller and more coherent engagement with the ethnographic perspectives inherent in their work.

The first project, *The Times of Our Lives*, was a video installation made by Inga Burrows as part of the yearlong Millennium exhibition, *Rites of Passage*, held at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester (figs. 1, 2). I acted as an informal advisor to Burrows throughout the development of her project, from the early discussions

about its potential scope to the later stages of filming and editing. The Whitworth Art Gallery had never before commissioned a video installation—though it had, of course, used video monitors in exhibitions. But certain staff members were interested in experimenting with a different kind of object from the conventional exhibition pieces that were being assembled around the gallery's general theme.

For Burrows, the space in the gallery allocated to her installation was critical in shaping the work. It was a cold, empty, tiered lecture hall. Entering that space was the key moment in Burrows's conception of the piece. Explaining it to me later, she said that immediately on entering the space she had imagined it as animated by

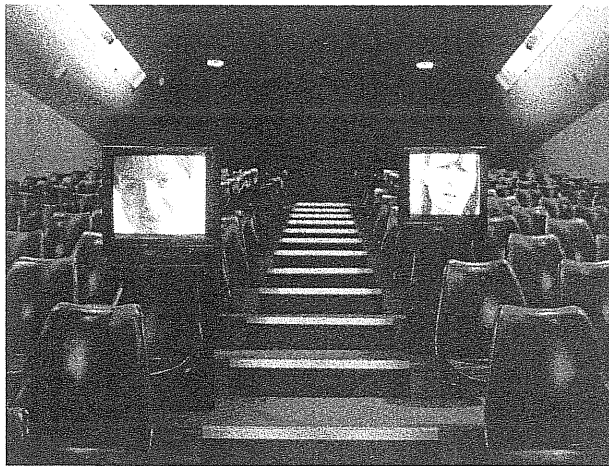


Fig. 1. Inga Burrows (British, born 1959), *The Times of Our Lives*, 2000. Video installation. Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

talking heads. She pictured a series of television monitors placed on different rows of the tiered seats; through them would play a continuous loop of sound. The sound recording was composed of interview material that the filmmaker gathered by inviting members of the public to speak directly to her camera. The project inverted the conventional hierarchy of audience and expert. Burrows positioned her talking heads so they spoke out from the anonymous rows of seats, ad-

addressing the front of the hall, where gallery visitors entered the installation space.

The artist was committed to creating an entirely different space from the areas that were outside the lecture hall. Her installation was to be a dark, liminal place that was enclosed, disrupting the continuous flow of people through the exhibition as a whole. She wanted to change the nature of peoples' engagement from the detached viewing of objects to a more active encounter with talking heads. Burrows thought of her piece as animating space and bringing to life the objects that were collected and displayed in the glass cases outside.²⁸

I was interested in the way that Burrows interpreted the available space and in how she envisaged the role of video within a gallery setting. As a site-specific work, the setting itself was actively incorporated into the piece. It was integral to how the film worked. In interpreting the gallery's broader theme, rites of passage,



Fig. 2. Inga Burrows, *The Times of Our Lives*, 2000. Video installation. Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

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Burrows created a space akin to the middle phase of Van Gennep's classic tripartite structure of ritual (separation, liminality, integration). Her piece, *The Times of Our Lives*, was not about an anthropological subject matter. It was an attempt to create an experience of it.

For me, Burrows's project suggested new kinds of sites and objects through which anthropological understandings could be communicated. Although there are important examples of ethnographic experimentation, anthropologists have not gone very far in pushing beyond existing conventions. Even in the area of visual anthropology, filmmakers tend to make pieces for conventional screening or they work with

museums to present knowledge through particular arrangements of textually situated objects. Collaborating with Burrows led me to wonder what new ethnographic forms might be created through a more active interpretation of particular sites. What would be involved in putting anthropology in different spaces—for example, in an art gallery conceived as an ethnographic site in its own right? Would the work still be recognized as anthropology or would it be judged to be some-



Fig. 2. Inga Burrows, *The Times of Our Lives*, 2000. Video installation. Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

thing else? Increasingly, artists have begun to challenge and rework conventional forms of ethnographic knowledge as displayed in the contexts of museums.²⁹ Burrows's piece raised interesting questions about how anthropologists themselves might engage differently with visual objects and gallery display, such that particular cultural spaces might be recast through an exercise of the ethnographic imagination. Her project led me to reflect on the nature of anthropology's own site specificity: by this I refer to the disciplinary space of the academy. What might we discover about anthropology if we approach it from the perspective of artistic practice? What kinds of artifacts, textual and non-textual, constitute the discipline? How are they made and displayed? What knowledge claims are made for them and what is the basis of these claims?³⁰ These questions came into sharp focus within the context of a second collaboration that I developed with the Cambridge-based artist Elspeth Owen.

I invited Elspeth Owen to work alongside me in teaching a course for post-graduate anthropology students. We wanted to orient students toward the notion of fieldwork as about techniques of material practice, rather than about methodology. In particular, we were seeking ways to realign the researcher's body within the process of inquiry such that understanding might encompass the full range of the senses and emerge from embodied intersubjective encounter. Conceiving of fieldwork in this way strongly resonated with Owen's artistic work rooted in ceramics. Central to her approach is a highly developed tactile or haptic sensibility. Her engagement with anthropology grew out of what she believed were its inherently haptic qualities—her sense of ethnographic perspectives rooted in the notion of emplacement, people understood as materially connected to the objects and to the world they inhabited.³¹

At Owen's suggestion, we organized the course around the theme of the telephone, at once an everyday object and a complex mediating technology that has transformed contemporary fieldwork practice. To open the course, Owen devised an exercise that required students to work in small groups to make a telephone in an hour, using materials that cost no more than a pound. This exercise established the agenda for the subsequent sessions, one that foregrounded ethnography as a process of working with found materials. Owen and I were trying to foster a particular kind of self-consciousness among our students that went beyond the now-established conventions of textual reflexivity. Specifically, we wanted them to think about research as a process of making objects. We asked students to consider their selection of materials, to explore their distinctive qualities, and to understand how they fashioned them into objects. We asked them to think about who made the object and who owned it, to consider in what context objects were viewed and what claims were made for them. In encouraging students to approach their work in this way, we were suggesting an analogy between ethnographic and artistic practice, since anthropologists, as many artists, work with found, everyday materials, fashioning them into certain kinds of objects that acquire meaning only when shown in particular settings. Usually this process of making involves the translation of three-dimensionality into two, as sensuous, rounded tactile knowledge is turned into the flat linearity of the academic text. This process of transformation became the basis for the piece that Owen subsequently made.

Inviting Elspeth Owen to collaborate with me as an artist in the context of teaching provoked considerable difficulties. But these, in turn, raised some important issues. The group of students became very sharply divided. For example,

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some students strongly resisted our attempts to persuade them to work from the perspective of bodily practice (technique), rather than from instruction (method). And many had an acute anxiety about knowledge. What was legitimate knowledge? What kinds of objects were legitimated as appropriate forms for the communication of anthropological understandings, and why? Why were certain kinds of representational forms acceptable but others not? What were the criteria for evaluating different kinds of research objects? What was anthropology and what was, as some students put it, "just art"?

From our collaboration, Owen produced a photo-essay, *Give Me a Call* (figs. 3–10). Here she juxtaposes an image of her father with different sorts of texts. There is an interesting play between two- and three-dimensionality, and between different registers of meaning expressive of the struggle between image and text as representational forms. Over the course of the piece, the image of Owen's father fades. The process of his dying is mirrored in a collapse of textual coherence, but this movement of the text from legibility to illegibility runs counter to the process of textualization within the traditional teaching context. For then Owen began the process of collaboration by making marks on a page, loose scribbles, jottings, random notes, which later developed into more fully articulated ideas. In some places, rectangular marks disrupt the flow of the text, as interruptions that the artist interprets as question marks. Owen's photo-essay makes visually manifest the conflicting currents inherent in the rendering of ethnographic knowledge and suggests the final irreducibility of image to text, the sensory to the discursive.

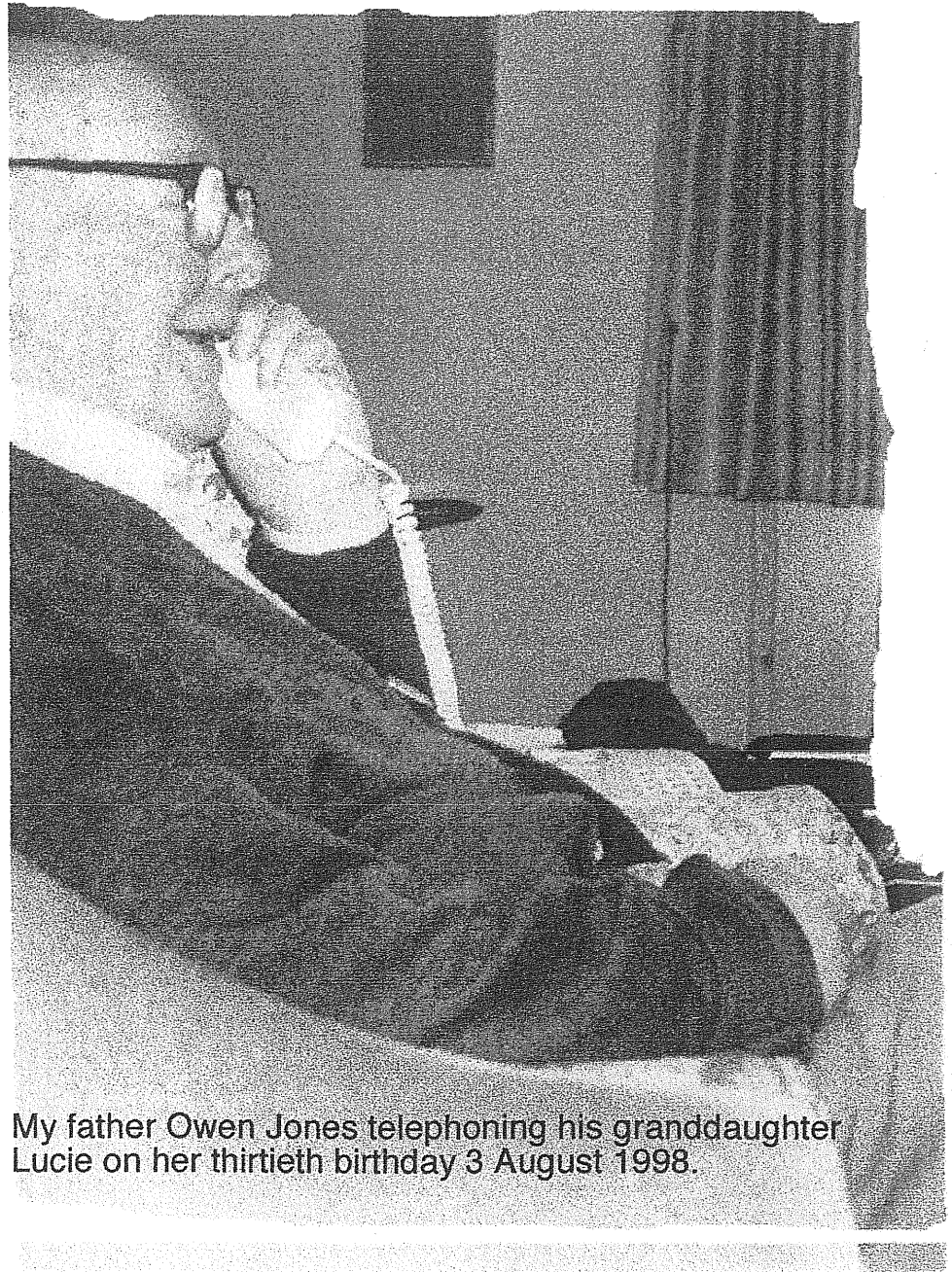
Questions about ethnographic knowledge—how it is made, represented, and the processes of its disciplinary legitimation—are critical to the final example of collaboration that I wish to discuss. The work of Amanda Ravetz has been forged directly in the space between art and anthropology. It emerges from her own movement between the two traditions of practice and, as autoethnography, it is animated by a desire to reconcile expressions of individual subjectivity and social location.³² Working first as an artist, Ravetz created a series of ephemeral pieces, often based upon her own body, in the Pennine landscape where she lived. Later she moved into anthropology in order to extend her understanding of situated practice by undertaking a more systematic exploration of the ways people live in, know, and see the landscape. The problem, however, that Ravetz confronted in moving into anthropology as an academic discipline was its deeply rooted iconophobia. She discovered that trying to develop a more fully image-based anthropology that drew upon her background in art was immensely difficult. Not only did she discover

GIVE ME A CALL

Elspeth Owen

My
Luc

Figs. 3–10. Elspeth Owen (British, born 1938), *Give Me A Call*, 2002. Photo-essay. Photos courtesy of the artist



My father Owen Jones telephoning his granddaughter Lucie on her thirtieth birthday 3 August 1998.

Where is the space - actual or conceptual - for transmuting three dimensions into two or two into three? Can it happen in 'the art gallery' or only in 'the artist's workshop' or 'up the magician's sleeve'? Registering that elusive combination of tactile and intellectual experience which we can recognise as 'real life' means including information from all five (maybe more) senses. The one which often proves so awkward in two dimensions is touch.

As an artist and historian, I have read anthropology for my own ends, not in order 'to contribute to the discipline' or 'to take part in the current debate'. One of the assumptions I had made for myself is that anthropology is the study of daily life. For me daily life is given its meaning to a very large extent, through my relationship with objects. Conflating these two things together, I had taken it for granted that anthropologists study people's relationship to the things around them, and that the things are as powerful as the people. Anthropologists using cameras, in particular, I had assumed, are interested in how to present a specifically different illusion of three dimensions than is given by prose description or analysis.

These were the preconceptions that I realised I had when Anna Grimshaw proposed a collaboration between us on a project with research students in the department of Social Anthropology and at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in the University of Manchester. I suggested that we make the telephone, that ubiquitous object with its striking visual, aural and tactile qualities, the focus of mini research projects over the term. The telephone seemed to offer a rich opening into major contemporary social and political preoccupations - preoccupations with technical innovation, with privacy and surveillance, fashion, libertarian and authoritarian communication, money, family, intimacy, inclusion and exclusion etc., etc. I especially wanted to enable students to validate their haptic knowledge within an academic context and to highlight for them the importance of touch at each end of the experience of the world of electronic communication. I was excited to explore with them how to make visual representation of their own physical use of the telephone as well as of some of its many other social contexts and meanings. I also hoped that the metaphor of the telephone conversation as an activity which starts off without knowing where it might end would serve as a model for the whole undertaking.

If students in anthropology want to produce work which records the 'experience' of the telephone by others, a crucial first exercise seems to me to be an examination of their own experience. Not their theories of meaning, their own telephone practice. In this way their analytical preconceptions, both about themselves and about other 'telephonists', can be temporarily brushed aside. I threw them in at the deep end with a mini-project designed to provoke spontaneity, daring, determination, open-mindedness, compassion, variety and wit: as a member of a group of four or five they were to make, and devise the use of, a telephone costing no more than one pound and functioning within that first morning. Perhaps I should not have been taken aback at how resistant some students were to my approach.

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In the early seventies, before I was either an artist or a university tutor, I taught in a village primary school. My inspirations were Sybil Marshall's *An Experiment in Education* and Seonaid M. Robertson's *Rosegarden and Labyrinth*, two books by teachers who had boldly introduced innovation directly into the classroom. For them, classroom learning was a social activity. It was not enough to absorb instruction from a central figure. The teacher's true task was to unlock peer group exchange, to alert children to the myriad ways there are to acquire and apply knowledge, and to help them in the practice of spreading those ways among themselves. The teacher gave few general instructions and instead trusted the curiosity and neighbourliness of the children to instigate learning by open trial and error.

There are (at least) three powerful factors within present-day higher education which are in stark contradiction to such socialist aspirations. First of all, the purpose of learning is seen as the development of individual expertise, status and power. Universities, for instance, are extremely discomforted by the concept of joint assessment. Great stress is laid on private ownership of knowledge and the institutions bristle with hierarchy and competition. Secondly, and much more recently, universities have cravenly succumbed to the ethos of the market with the result that teaching is understood as a commodity and students are thrown into a constant anxiety about whether they are getting their money's worth. This results in students seeing education as training, training so as to be able to meet an existing demand in the market place. This in turn means that teachers are deliverers of goods, and not there with a learning role themselves. Thirdly, and perhaps for me most significantly, there are hardly any teaching spaces which really encourage the idea of learning as an exchange. Lecture halls and seminar rooms are so antipathetic to this circle and therefore to the practice of an honest to - and - fro between equally valued participants that it is small wonder that students skulk in rows, resentful of the power exercised over them by architecture.

Anna and I had these constraints to take into account in making our experimental collaboration. Three out of the four groups of students who worked on the telephone project approached the sessions with constructive responses and developed various schemes in which they tried to meld observation, commentary and a visual style. I think the problems for the fourth group, which were focussed on a resistance to using a camera, all arose out of issues related to power within the overall group. These issues included the relationship between myself and Anna; the relationship between the two groups of students, one from Anthropology "proper", one from Visual Anthropology; and the relationship between Anna, the students and the University.

One of Anna's outstanding contributions at the Granada Centre has been her creative introduction of "outsiders" as stimulants and provocateurs within the academy. Her doing this inevitably raises questions of authority, intellectual, personal and sometimes institutional. Perhaps because of our different relationship to the University, she and I reacted differently when some students denied any value in my approach. I was eager for direct confrontation but my participation was intermittent and meanwhile Anna had to handle what was basically a criticism of her judgement in inviting in an "artist" whose "knowledge" was not validated by the academy. This issue was a version of the one that was already defining the relationship between the "Proper" and the "Visual" Anthropologists as to what constituted genuine contributions to the body of anthropological knowledge. Add to this the profusion of loyalties and obligations felt by teacher and students, to each other, to the University and even to Anthropology! and you can imagine that tensions ran high in the sessions. What surprised me most of all was that the group who did not believe in the camera did not have the courage of their convictions; and instead of taking the creative opportunity to demonstrate just why the video was not their medium of research, they spent their time trying to prove their point by making a bad video. Perhaps their response shows just how little our education system allows people to act on the basis of what they know for themselves. Instead the primary concern is to satisfy a set of arbitrary demands however angry they make you feel.

It is true there is always a current pedagogic mode; and there are always gaps and chinks through which experiment, wily or innocent, can slip.

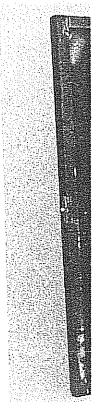
At the time of my visits to Manchester, nearly two years ago now, my old father was becoming very frail in mind and body. As part of my engagement with the telephone researches, I planned to look at how his new dependency was changing the way my father used and gave meaning to the telephone. I did not make much headway with this, mostly because giving him the attention he needed took precedence over research. As I have been writing these paragraphs my father has died. My father is dead. When I told Anna, she said (who never knew him) 'he has always seemed to have such a distinctive presence'. I have some recordings of his poignant cries of 'Can you hear me?' as he grappled with the reality that an answer machine does not answer you. The tape isolates and emphasises his increasing croakiness. After his death, when I ring his number, it is not his voice that talks about the funeral arrangements.

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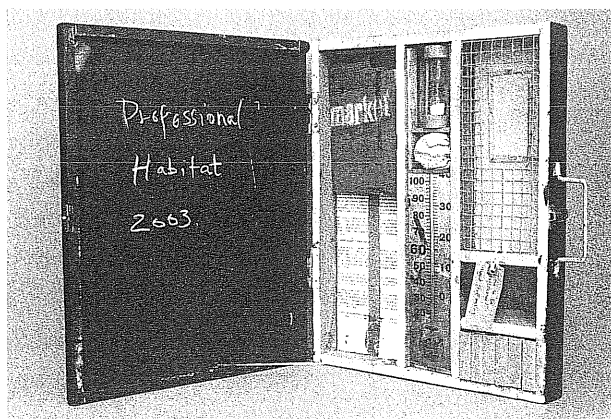
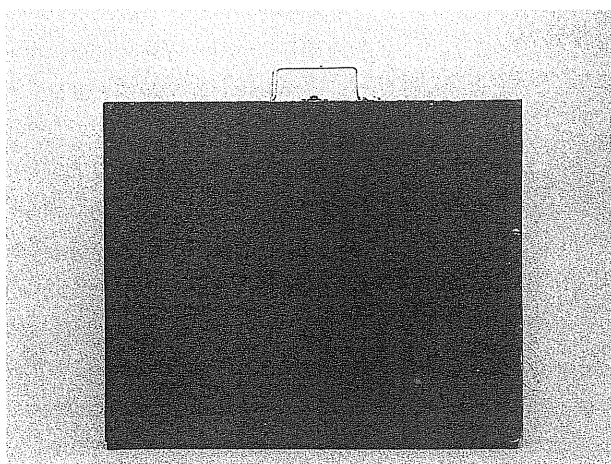


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that conventional categories of anthropological knowledge were limited to a very narrow range of forms; she also soon found that to present anthropological work as something other than a particular kind of text was to run the risk of it being dismissed as “art.” Her attempts to explore what was distinctive to sensory ways of

knowing were inhibited precisely by “the false separation of *how* things are presented from what they express,” to quote Barbara Stafford again.³³

Responding to the pressure to textualize her visual anthropology, Ravetz left academia in order to experiment more freely with different forms for the communication of ethnographic understandings. The piece, *Professional Habitat 2003* (figs. 11–13), came out of her critical engagement with academic anthropology as a textual discipline—its professionalization, specialization, and organization of knowledge. Working with her grandmother’s painting box, Ravetz here “visualizes” anthropology, presenting anthropology as an object fashioned in a particular way from disparate materials. In so doing, she renders visible certain disciplinary habits of thought at the same time as she draws attention to the distinctive



Figs. 11, 12. Amanda Ravetz, *Professional Habitat 2003*, 2003. Wood, paper, and wire construction, 13 x 15³/₄ x 2³/₄ in. (33 x 40 x 6 cm). Photos courtesy of the artist

texture of the materials that call up associations that spill over the compartments of contemporary academic culture. In a second piece, one still in progress (fig. 14), Ravetz works with the draft of her doctoral thesis. Here she disrupts the neat, disembodied quality of academic knowledge by cutting into the text and, in allowing red pigment to flow into it, she seeks to return to the object something of the orig-

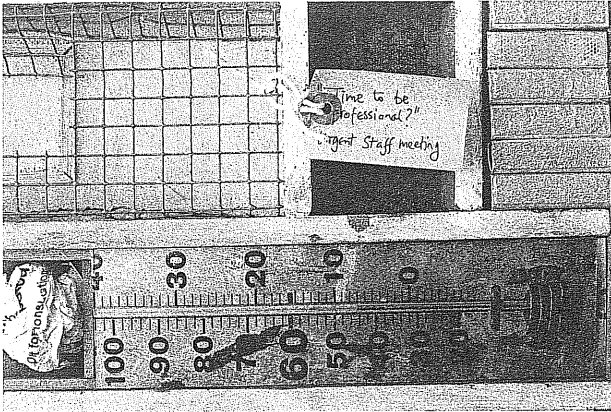


Fig. 13. Amanda Ravetz, *Professional Habitat* 2003, 2003. Wood, paper, and wire construction, 13 x 15 3/4 x 2 3/8 in. (33 x 40 x 6 cm). Photo courtesy of the artist

inal qualities of lived practice.

Ravetz employs techniques of the artist to interrogate ethnographic forms, seeking to make visible the ghost of Victorian anthropology and the deeply ingrained habits of collection, classification, and hierarchy. For the professionalization of the discipline, intensified in Britain by the rise of an auditing culture, has revived an older project that the pioneers of modern anthro-

pology believed they had repudiated. Put most starkly, the open, inquiring, profoundly antidisciplinary spirit of early twentieth-century anthropology that challenged established hierarchies of literary scholarship has been replaced by something akin to a piece made by conceptual artist Dieter Roth. Taking the complete works of Hegel, Roth pulverized the individual volumes and hung them as a row of sausages, whose differing size and weight reflected the number of pages comprising each book. The

piece stands as a striking image of a particular turn in contemporary academic culture. Ravetz's work can be understood as a response to this state of affairs. In its place, she proposes a "portable anthropology." It is rooted in a different sort of ethnographic practice—one that is expansive and experimental. The project Ravetz envisages moves through different spaces; it attends to the specificity of materials and sites; and it generates

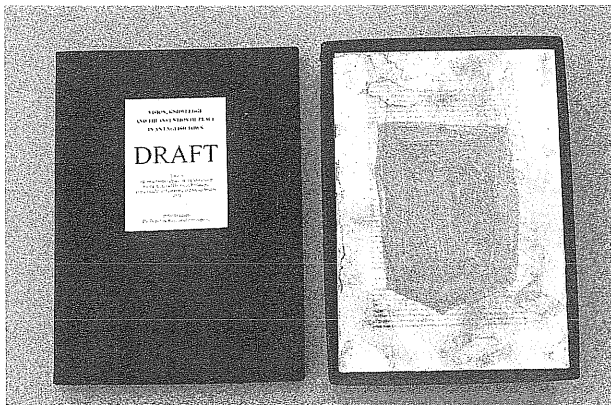


Fig. 14. Amanda Ravetz, *Thesis*, 2002. Paper, card, glass, and powdered pigment, 9 1/2 x 12 3/4 x 3 1/8 in. (24 x 32 x 8 cm). Photo courtesy of the artist

new forms of understanding from an open exchange between art and anthropology as related ethnographic practices. Whether such a project should be labeled "art" or "anthropology" is a moot question.

ived practice. employs technician to interrogate forms, seeking the ghost of anthropology and the rabbits of collection, and hierarchy. visualization of the diffused in Britain identifying culture, a larger project that modern anthropology, profoundly challenged something akin to the works of Hegel, usages, whose each book. The striking image of contemporary Ravetz's work as a response is. In its place, a table anthropology in a different practice—one and experimentation—Ravetz envisages different spaces; efficacy of material it generates anthropology labeled "art" or

Conclusion

Writing in her classic essay thirty years ago, Susan Sontag passionately argued "against interpretation," seeking instead to reinstate the power of art and to restore to it the physical, sensory, and emotional dimensions that demand response, not explanation. Nothing could be more misguided than the attempt, as she puts it, "to assimilate Art into Thought, or (worse yet), Art into Culture." In her call for an "erotics" rather than a "hermeneutics" of art, Sontag reminds us of the problem at the heart of anthropology and art history as academic disciplines.³⁴ Their very constitution has hinged upon the curbing, the discursive disciplining, of the power that emanates from direct contact with the object of inquiry. Moreover, for both enterprises deeply rooted in traditions of Western thought, the site of the visual has long been a focus of such concern. In the case of anthropology, art and other forms of visibility have been marginalized and suppressed by a text-oriented discipline, while art history has established a particular kind of critical discourse that only rarely admits the power of images.³⁵

Although there are important overlaps in the fields of anthropology and art history, not least an anxiety about the visual, the emergence of the academic disciplines over the course of the last century hinged upon their separation and specialization. Anthropologists and art historians pursued their interests differently through the creation of distinctive objects of study, techniques of inquiry, and theoretical frameworks. However, the practices of contemporary art, specifically the turn toward the ethnographic, call into question many of the established divisions between art history and anthropology as they have come to be constituted as modern disciplines. Art reminds us of the conventionality of these divisions—that they are expressions of particular academic habits rather than inherent in the materials with which we work. Today everything seems much less clear-cut. Anthropologists can no longer ignore questions of aesthetics, just as art historians cannot remain oblivious to questions of culture. Moreover, these questions are themselves posed anew. Hitherto understood as discrete areas of theoretical expertise, culture and aesthetics are increasingly recognized as unstable sites in which meaning is not fixed, but is produced in specific moments of encounter.

The ethnographic turn in contemporary art necessitates a reconfiguration of the ground between anthropology and art history. I have suggested that the rethinking of established disciplinary positions should not be pitched at the level of discourse but should instead emerge from experiments in visual practice. The development of collaborative work with artists and other image-based

practitioners opens up new perspectives on anthropology and art history as about the making and communicating of particular kinds of knowledge. Understood as visualizing disciplines, such initiatives are part of a reflexive project. But they are also more than this. Inherently subversive of conventional disciplinary assumptions and forms, experiments in visual practice are fundamental to the transformation of the existing frameworks by which we approach those areas of human experience that lie beyond discursive representation.

This work is part of a broader project, *Visualizing Anthropology: Experiments in Image-Based Ethnography*, that I am pursuing with my colleague Amanda Ravetz (Bristol: Intellect Books, forthcoming). My paper builds in significant ways on her work and insights. I am very grateful to Inga Burrows, Elspeth Owen, and Amanda Ravetz for their intellectual engagement, generosity, and friendship in the search for new collaborative forms.

1. For example, Susan Hiller, ed., *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); also Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton, eds., *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
2. George Marcus and Fred Myers, eds., *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).
3. For debate about the emerging field of visual culture, see *October* 77 (summer 1996).
4. Barbara Maria Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1997), 6.
5. Faye Ginsburg, "Institutionalizing the Unruly: Charting a Future for Visual Anthropology," *Ethnos* 63, no. 2 (1998): 173–201.
6. See also "Visualizing Anthropology," a special issue of the *Journal of Media Practice* 3, nos. 1–2 (2002–2003).
7. Anna Grimshaw, *Servants of the Buddha: Winter in a Himalayan Convent* (London: Open Letters Press, 1992).
8. See Anita Herle and Sandra Rouse, eds., *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
9. See Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and Anna Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Modern Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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10. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
11. Paul Hockings, *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); Coote and Shelton, *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, 1–11.
12. Lucien Taylor, "Iconophobia: How Anthropology Lost It at the Movies," *Transition* 69 (1996): 64–88.
13. Amanda Ravetz, "News From Home: Reflections On Fine Art and Anthropology," *Journal of Media Practice* 3, no. 1 (2002): 16–25. These are issues also discussed in a very informative essay and interview with Robert Gardner. Ilisa Barbash, "Out of Words: The Aesthesodic Cine-Eye of Robert Gardner," *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 4 (2001): 369–413.
14. David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 76, original emphasis. MacDougall is drawing upon Jay Ruby, "Is an Ethnographic Film a Filmic Ethnography?" *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 2, 2 (1975): 104–11.
15. Ibid.
16. Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy, eds., *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.
17. David MacDougall, "The Visual In Anthropology," in *ibid.*, 276–95.
18. Ibid., 291.
19. W. J. T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures Really Want?" *October* 77 (summer 1996): 71–82, original emphasis.
20. Stafford, *Good Looking*, 21.
21. Ibid., 4–6.
22. See James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
23. See, for example, Michael Jackson, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).
25. Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" in Marcus and Myers, *Traffic in Culture*, 302–9. See also Alex Coles, ed., *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000).
26. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). See also Clifford, "An Ethnographer in the Field," in Coles, *Site-Specificity*, 52–71.
27. Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1999).
28. For Burrows's own account of making the piece, see "The Experience and the Object: Making a Documentary Video Installation," *Journal of Media Practice* 3, no. 1 (2002): 26–33.
29. See Ruth Chanty, Christopher Pinney, Roslyn Poignant, and Chris Wright, eds., *The Impossible*

Science of Being: Dialogues between Anthropology and Photography (London: The Photographer's Gallery, 1995).

30. See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 17–78.

31. For a fuller discussion of the haptic, see Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2000), and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

32. Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 276.

33. Stafford, *Good Looking*, 3.

34. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (1966; reprinted New York: Picador, 2001), 3–14.

35. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989).