



announcement, the latest in a series of efforts he had made to do something about what he had heard was going on at HAU, took some guts; Graeber knew he was inviting people to shoot the messenger, and some people duly did do that. Whatever people think of the message or its timing, there is no doubt that it finally triggered an intense public debate when there had been no such debate before. Other attempts to address issues behind the scenes had failed – and I should know, as I was amongst those who had tried some quieter options without any effect.

Before this event, many working at HAU were seriously worried about going public for two reasons. First, that if a scandal broke out it might spell the end of the journal, and that would add insult to injury: dozens of people had burned the midnight oil and given enormous amounts of their labour to bring HAU into existence. Most had done so for political as much as intellectual or professional reasons: they believed in the idea of an open access journal designed and controlled by anthropologists themselves: not by the big multinational publishers, nor by the universities or funding bodies, but by a transnational collaboration of scholars within anthropology working together. That is certainly what motivated me to become involved when I did not actually have any time to spare.

Seeing HAU fail was not wanted by anyone that was involved with the project that I had met, even those who expressed the strongest statements about the intimidation, gaslighting and aggression directed towards them when they were working there.

This level of political support for HAU is hard to remember now, because one aspect of the social media debate has focused on its failings as a radical political project: many have noted that HAU was developed in, and supported by, elite western universities (Cambridge and Chicago in particular); that it was publishing many of the A-list western world anthropologists, and re-publishing many of the classics that created the foundations of that elite, masculinist, grip on the discipline, with virtually no recognition of the implicit historical inequalities and



biases that this was reproducing; that it was reliant upon a dense, highly northern-hemisphere-based network of insiders, who used the journal and book series as a vehicle to consolidate their own power, in the face of more recent challenges by anti-colonial, anti-racist, feminist, and LGBTQI efforts. What is more, even the name of the project, HAU, was borrowed from Māori without so much as a discussion with Māori people about it. In addition, there were others, more based in Europe and some parts of Latin America rather than the US, who attacked the journal's approach using critiques circulating around issues of class and the diverse forms of capitalism: HAU turned out, for those critics, to be yet another project that was deeply soaked in the inequalities and the academic precarity generated by neoliberal capitalist structures and ideals, and should never have been supported by so many anthropologists in the first place.

By the time the social media discussing these kinds of arguments had had their say on the HAU project, it became hard to understand why so many people felt so passionately about it when it had begun. The project had focused squarely on open access and the idea that anthropology needed to get back to taking ethnography seriously in developing its concepts, rather than borrowing from western philosophers (which could also be seen as a neo-colonial, masculinist practice). Yet at the time at HAU, everyone was so busy trying to meet the next impossible deadline that these additional political issues circulating in anthropology more widely, and brought up in the subsequent social media storm, were not a strong focus. Moreover, there was nothing in the structure of the project that would ensure that such issues would be critically examined on a regular basis.

In short: questions about how the project would be structured, questions about its political and moral positioning, and also questions about what its intellectual project really was, and why that project rather than the many available alternatives, were sidelined at HAU.

This is an important lesson: it is not a good idea to begin such an enterprise



before that process of thinking and structuring has been carried out, at least to a reasonable degree of depth.

In any case, and this is the second reason that little was said in public once the troubles began to emerge, confidentiality clauses had been included in just about every contract that HAU issued, and was also written into HAU's constitution. Absolutely no dirty laundry was to be hung out in public, and the threat of some kind of sanction - legal, financial or reputational - was always hanging in the air if anyone was considering it. People were frightened. In the early days, it did strike me, along with a number of other people, as somewhat odd that such an open access and, in principle at least, collective effort should emphasise secrecy so much, and should also have a constitution written in such a way that the Editor-in-Chief held virtually unimpeachable power. Indeed, several people (including myself) said so at the time. Yet this was a small, informal, idealistic project based on trust and mutual excitement about its potential; everyone imagined that everything could be ironed out later. In any case, nobody really had the time to go through the articles and sections of the constitution more than once to check whether suggested changes had been implemented; it would be sorted at some later date if it needed refinement, as this was just the beginning.

That level of inattention was definitely a mistake: we should all have made the time, asked the awkward questions, and put in place rigorous structures to provide for a separation of powers. It would be too late once the enterprise got going. For me, that I let this slide was especially ironic: my doctorate had been a study of radical and revolutionary lesbian feminist separatism in London. In the course of that research, I had learned a huge amount about what Jo Freeman famously called "The Tyranny of Structurelessness:" the fact that when there are no pre-arranged rules to deal with trouble when it happens, then there is no way to protect the vulnerable, and the most manipulative, aggressive, and anti-democratic people tend to float to the top.[\[2\]](#) Throughout the period when I began to understand something about the problems that had developed at HAU, the lessons I learned from those feminist separatists in London kept returning to haunt me. I should have listened to my own formative ethnographic experience



more carefully.

On that point, and just in case I am misunderstood by those who do not know either Freeman's work or my own rather ancient ethnography: contrary to the assumption that LGBTQI people or feminists (and I count myself as being both) are all much the same because of their politics, I found, just as Freeman had in women's consciousness-raising groups in the 1960s and 1970s, that some of the most politically passionate and committed people in those groups were also occasionally amongst the most anti-democratic and fundamentally power-hungry people I had ever met. Being on the right side of a political argument does not excuse obnoxious behavior. The need for structures to deal with obnoxiousness (and sometimes worse) in passionate small groups had been completely obvious to me in the late 1980s. Clearly, I had not properly remembered that lesson by the time I became involved with HAU as the Chair of the External Advisory Board (EAB). The EAB had been set up in a way that made it effectively powerless to either carry out its tasks or enforce any recommendations. Most importantly, there was no separation between the EAB and the Editor-in-Chief, who was a member of the EAB. In practice, this turned the EAB into window-dressing.

Back to this summer of 2018: when Graeber lifted the public lid by publishing that apology, it sparked a veritable explosion of debate on social media, an excellent summary of which can be found on Hilary Agro's Twitter page.[\[3\]](#) Many other posts, blogs, pages and articles have appeared since that initial explosion in June 2018, expressing all kinds of opinions about the matter. Within those many and varied discussions, some of the pent-up anger, fear, and frustration felt by many who worked at HAU was expressed. The statements from those directly affected (as opposed to the thousands of opinions from those who had not been directly involved) appeared anonymously in two letters. The first was a letter collectively written by seven former staff members at HAU, originally prepared in December 2017, and published in the Footnotes blog on June 13th 2018.[\[4\]](#) The second was published on June 14th by four more members of HAU staff, both current and past.[\[5\]](#) Both the contents of those letters and the fact that they were anonymous



spoke reams about the problems that had confronted those working at HAU: the accusations were serious and collectively expressed, yet these authors were still too terrified to identify themselves, even as a group.

The tyranny of the structurelessness in this case was entirely obvious to see.

Also somewhat ironically, this structurelessness was highly structured: as Ilana Gershon analysed in her blog in Allegra on what had happened at HAU, the open access software used to run the project could be used to propagate hierarchical knowledge sharing: the Editor-in-Chief could see everything that everyone was doing, but other people had more limited views.[\[6\]](#) Nobody, except the Editor-in-Chief, Giovanni da Col, knew much at all about what was happening at HAU. Even as chair of the EAB, I had no knowledge or experience of what was happening on a day to day basis within the project: there was no office to be visited, or even electronic place where I could somehow follow what was happening. People who worked at HAU were scattered across the planet and communicated individually and electronically.

On June 17th, I made a statement on my Facebook page about #HAUTalk, as the former chair of the External Advisory Board (EAB).[\[7\]](#) In it, I made the point that there were crucial faults in the way the HAU enterprise was structured, and in particular, an absence of a separation of powers, which prevented any kind of proper oversight, so that if something went wrong at the top of the organization (i.e. in the person of the Editor-in-Chief), there was no way, in practice, to enforce any changes, because no changes could be made without the agreement of the Editor-in-Chief. That created an impasse that I was unable to resolve. For that reason, when I left the EAB and resigned from the editorial board in May 2017, I wrote a final report in which I recommended that the EAB should be disbanded and replaced with something that had power, an executive board. An interim chair for the EAB, Carole McGranahan, was appointed to set up any changes the EAB decided to adopt.

Between May and the autumn of 2017, I deliberately avoided involvement in HAU,



having handed over to the new interim chair. The EAB was replaced by a Board of Trustees of the Society for Ethnographic Theory (SET) in January 2018, after SET became a corporation registered in Companies House in the UK. Yet the founding director of the new company was the Editor-in-Chief, Giovanni da Col. Although this legal structure gave the Trustees considerably more power than the EAB had enjoyed, the inclusion of the Editor-in-Chief as a director struck me as highly problematic. I had strongly advised that there should be a separation of powers between the editor and any board that was supposed to have oversight over the organization, the lack of which in the previous arrangement had been key to the EAB's inability to act.

In the run-up to this change, during the autumn of 2017, I began receiving informal reports that serious problems were still occurring at HAU, despite all the transformations underway. Several appeals to the interim EAB chair made by a number of people between the end of 2017 and early 2018 (not yet knowing that by January 2018, the EAB had been replaced by SET) were not met with any significant response. Indeed, the concerns expressed to the EAB from late 2017 onwards seemed to be interpreted at HAU as being only attacks, acts whose only purpose were assumed to be attempts to harm HAU for some unspecified reason; as such, they were defensively rejected out of hand, rather than being taken seriously in terms of their content.

That was the background that led to the release of the public statement by Graeber. And in addition to my own statement on Facebook on June 17th, I also signed a petition jointly written by Ilana Gershon, David Graeber, myself and Keir Martin, published on June 18.[\[8\]](#) Given the relative lack of response from the Trustees, this petition was a call for action: it requested a full investigation of the accusations against the Editor-in-Chief of HAU, Giovanni da Col; that he be suspended from his position until this investigation was completed; that a set of rigorous and enforceable structures should be put in place to ensure that no abuses of power occurred in future, and that if they did, there were procedures for catching them and dealing with them; and to ask that the whole question of



open access be thought about again at HAU, given the journal's recent move to be published by University of Chicago Press, and shifting towards a more standard subscription and green open access model. The petition was signed by over 600 people, only a handful of which were obviously invented names.

On June 29th, and after a tumultuous 18 days of social media debate, the remaining Trustees of the Society for Ethnographic Theory (the majority of the Trustees had resigned by that stage) sent out an announcement, stating that they were suspending Giovanni da Col from his post as Editor-in-Chief, that they endorsed the move to “redress power inequities, bullying and all manner of harassment,” and that they were appointing an interim editor while they negotiated the terms of Giovanni da Col's resignation.[9] It looked like, at long last, the issues were being addressed by a body that had the power to do something, and had now, at least temporarily, created a sufficient separation of powers in order to be able to actually carry out the work needed.

Yet in practice, nothing appears to have actually happened. At the time of my writing this, October 10, 2018, [Giovanni da Col's name still appears as Editor-in-Chief of the journal](#); no interim editor that I am aware of has been announced; no results of any audits of accounts or investigations have been made public; no statement about what happens next has been made, and no commentary on any form of redress or apology to those harmed by their experience with HAU has been made.

In fact, there has been no news at all from the Trustees about any of the issues that were raised during the social media storm since June 29th. Surely enough time has passed now for an update on progress?

I am writing this now both to provide an alternative narrative to the others currently available on social media (especially of the ‘shoot the messenger’ kind), and to remind people of the core problem that originally sparked the debate – publicly airing the situation at HAU and attempts to have the problems properly



inquired into and identified, to request acknowledgement of, and at the very last apologise for, the harm caused where that is merited, and to try and fix things to prevent similar conditions in future. As the debate developed into lengthy discussions about a variety of wider issues, those matters seem to have become somewhat lost in the mix. It would be wonderful if the remaining Trustees would work to help to complete that task.

[1] <https://davidgraeber.industries/sundries/hau-apology>

[2] <https://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm> . See also Green, Sarah 1997. *Urban Amazons: Lesbian Feminism and Beyond in the Gender, Sexuality and Identity Battles of London* London: Macmillan.

[3] <https://twitter.com/hilaryagro/status/1006995504205459456>

[4]

<https://footnotesblog.com/2018/06/13/guest-post-an-open-letter-from-the-former-hau-staff-7/>

[5] <https://haustaffletter.wordpress.com/>

[6] <http://allegralaboratory.net/pyramid-scheme-hautalk/>

[7]

<https://www.facebook.com/sarah.f.green.7/grid?lst=590459156%3A590459156%3A1538843798>

[8]

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe93a8JsWa_8Yd5Bs37oPjDFsi3pAPmZ8tDI4Tsjv2vvVvpqg/viewform

[9] <https://twitter.com/haujournal/status/1012718350567395328>



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Real-time rituals of elite male privilege #Kavanaugh

Sara Shneiderman
October, 2018



The late September 2018 public testimony of Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh before the US Senate Judiciary Committee gave the world an opportunity to observe the real-time production of elite white male privilege



within the highly ritualized context that is the US political system. As an anthropologist whose work has focused on the relationship between ritual and politics, watching the video footage was analytically illuminating yet personally wrenching. The gendered hierarchies on display felt eerily familiar: I happen to have attended high school in Bethesda, Maryland (like both Ford and Kavanaugh) and taught at Yale University (where Kavanaugh continued on to college and law school).

Conducting ethnographic research in fractious political contexts where many competing realities vie for attention has taught me that watching what people actually do, how they behave in relation with others, and how they say what they say tells us much more than the written word can—whether in legal documents, media accounts, or otherwise. Watching Ford and Kavanaugh speak and act *in the ritual context* of the hearing itself gave me that kind of visceral knowledge not only of these two individuals, but of the hierarchies that structure the shared reality they inhabit. While some commentators talked about the incommensurability of their worlds (she said she was 100% sure and so did he), to me it's clear that they are bound up in a mutually constituted sociopolitical structure [which relies upon the devaluation of women's experiences to produce male privilege.](#)

Their worlds are not incommensurable, precisely because Kavanaugh's reality cannot exist without Ford's.

Men like him (not all men, but insecure men who feel entitled to positions of power) cannot get to the high places to which they aspire without demonstrating that they belong to a certain elite 'fraternity' (in the general as well as specific sense, in Kavanaugh's case), [one of whose rites of entry is to objectify and devalue women.](#)

That is what Kavanaugh was doing when he was 17, and it is what he is still doing now. This is what was happening in my own late 1980s Grade 9 science class—in a Montgomery County, Maryland public high school adjacent to the Columbia



Country Club of which Ford spoke in her testimony—when the male teacher addressed all female students as “bimbo” when calling on them. I and several other uncomfortable female students complained to the female principal with our parents; she heard us out, but then told us that the teacher in question was a popular coach of one of the boys’ sports teams and loved by those students. A note was placed in the teacher’s file but no action was taken. (I should also mention that there were many other wonderful teachers who supported our complaint, gave us strategies to cope with such everyday structural challenges, and even more, tools to think towards transforming the system.)

This is what some of my Yale students in Anthropology of Religion wrote about when they turned their emergent ethnographic sensibilities to the university’s secret societies and fraternities, such as the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity to which Kavanaugh belonged - whose members were sanctioned during my first year on the Yale faculty in 2011 [for chanting the horrific slogan, “No means yes, yes means anal!”](#) This is what was in plain view in Kavanaugh’s testimony completely aside from the specific allegations or denials. He never directly faced his accuser; but in his [badgering of female Senators Dianne Feinstein and Amy Klobuchar](#), Kavanaugh was [demonstrating to all of the other men in the room that he was man enough](#) to advance to his desired seat at the pinnacle of the system.

One of the key insights of anthropological work on ‘rites of passage’, a concept coined by Arnold van Gennep and popularized by Victor Turner, is that rituals are never only about changing the status of their apparent subject. In this case, it is Kavanaugh’s proposed elevation from US Circuit Judge to Supreme Court Justice that is the status transformation at hand. The political process is aptly called ‘confirmation’. Rather, such rituals are about maintaining the hierarchies that enable an entire social structure to function, by pointing out the differences in status between various ritual participants and encoding those inequalities through a specific set of actions that must be carried out by those wishing to move up a notch.

Concomitantly, it is not only those in dominant positions who maintain the



system as a whole; rather all participants are implicated.

This is why it is a mistake to see the testimony as ‘he said, she said’, or to paint the episode in the oppositional terms of ‘male against female’. Women are also an essential part of the system, just as are the many men who may wish to transform it. When we observe closely, we can see that such political rituals are so powerful in part because their pageantry can obscure the disjunctures between the particularities of ‘the real’, as embodied in the individual high status participants who enact them (Brett Kavanaugh, the heavy drinking youthful abuser of women to whom truth is irrelevant in the process of ascending to the status to which he believes he is entitled), and the imagined generalities of ‘the ideal’ that those participants’ actions are intended to reproduce (a liberal democratic system in which all citizens are equal, which holds truth and justice as core values). Yet rituals also contain within themselves the potential for their own transformation when those in structurally subjugated positions refuse to accept the abstract vision of the ideal, instead holding those above them accountable for the real effects of their actions.

Towards this end, Ford’s testimony provided an alternative way of envisioning the world, one in which these fixed hierarchies might not be simply reproduced endlessly, but actually upended by a female voice seeking to change the terms of engagement in the system itself. Her action was particularly powerful because Ford [broke ranks with her own social milieu](#) to follow through on what she called her ‘civic duty’. Further change will require many, many more brave women and men to acknowledge their roles in perpetuating these structures and commit to transforming them.

I think of my son, who just started high school this year. I hope that he and his peers will have the maturity and self-consciousness to dismantle this system by creating new rituals—in the classroom, on the sports field, in governance—that help everyone do the hard work of growing up without requiring so many to suffer for the privileged benefit of a few.



Acknowledgement: I would like to thank the many friends, family members, and colleagues who read and responded to these ideas in their initial Facebook post form. Your encouragement and astute feedback led to this publication.

Featured image by [Mark Fischer](#) (flickr, [CC BY-SA 2.0](#))

WE NEED YOU! Fundraising campaign

Allegra
October, 2018



Allies, friends, colleagues,

It's this time of the year again... and we've had to make essential maintenance on the website. As the repairs were somewhat more extensive than initially expected, they exceeded our budget by a small amount. As such, we need your help to keep the labour of love that is the Allegra Collaboratory going — to keep the site running and, if you're feeling generous (Allegra is registered in Finland as a non-profit organization, by the way) implement some of the changes that we would like to make to the website to make Allegra even more of a collaborative tool for the anthro community (see below for the technical details). So be it a one-off donation or a steady trickle of monthly support from as little as 3€, we could definitely use your help. Check out the ['donate' section](#) on the right-hand side of individual blog entries for ways to pay.



And thank you very much in advance!

Things we would like to do in the future if we had funds:

- * Implement changes according to new visual assets**
- * Mobile-friendly Friend and Relationships page**
- * Enhance Google AdWords / SEO**
- * Systematise / streamline the tags**
- * Automated Google Analytics reports**
- * Start using Mailchimp for better email campaigns and subscription management**
- * Twitter Icon**
- * Articles to PDF**
- * Searchable author profiles with areas of expertise, and languages**

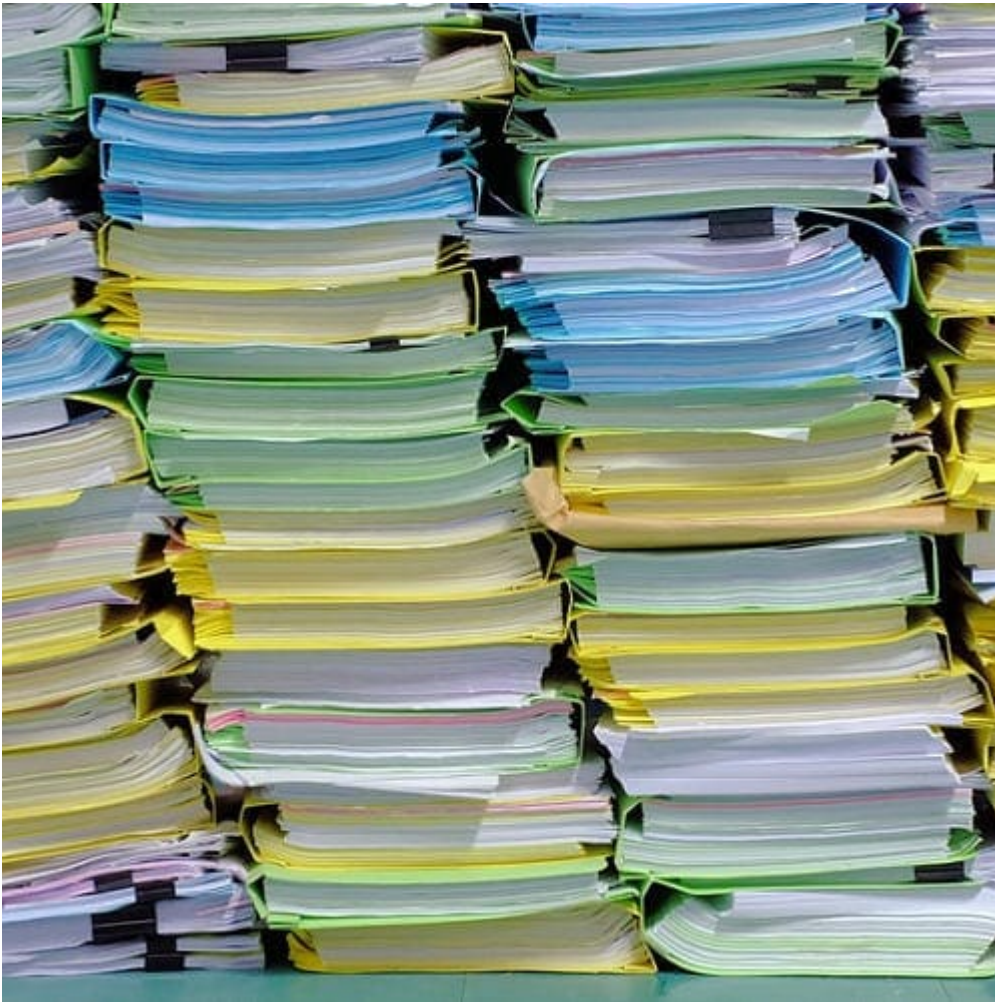
Allegra Lab Association is registered in Finland as a non-profit Association. The board of the Association for 2018 is Judith Beyer (chair), Julie Billaud (vice-chair), Miia Halme-Tuomisaari (treasurer), Agathe Mora, Jon Schubert, Antonio De Lauri & Felix Girke.

[Featured image](#) courtesy of pixabay.



What's wrong with the 'power of writing'? A reflection on language in academic research

Estella Carpi
October, 2018



Numerous are by now the accounts that label international academia as '[neoliberal](#)', that is, a system which, these days, almost functions like a firm aimed at increasing productivity and impact. However, hardly any attention has been paid to the language itself that we use to produce, disseminate, and, above all, fund academic research, especially that addressing development and



humanitarianism. In this post I discuss how bureaucratic managerialism in academia is intertwined with the role of the 'power of writing' and the greedy hunt for funding, which, through partnerships with non-academic entities, counters academic complexity by imposing simplistic and standardised language.

I propose that these are some of the key issues that often underlie today's [discontent](#) among academics, echoing the "[bullshit job](#)" syndrome, according to which we cease to believe in our own profession.

With this commentary, I aim to reflect on the peculiar dynamics that, to my mind, lead academic researchers to comply with the power of writing, and often lead research grant funders to prioritise quantity of outputs to the detriment of an in-depth understanding of the research context and its factual history. The so-called "[Research Excellence Framework](#)" (REF) in British academia, for instance, outlines the number, impact, quality, and type of outputs that a piece of research should have to be considered "world-leading". Having policy relevance, showcasing a formal engagement with non-academic institutions, producing measurable impact, and homogenising cultural ways of writing are seemingly becoming far more important than verifying the data we collect in our areas of study, or feeling confident that our personal interpretations are based on a continual contact and empathic engagement with the field (even though there is nothing like rocket science, and objectivity is not even desirable).

Moreover, in the contemporary era, academic researchers working in institutions of the Global North often have to cope with a massive bureaucracy in order to obtain official ethical clearance to be able to travel to 'the field'. Sociological and anthropological research, which are by definition primarily data-driven, have also been put under bureaucratic pressure by evaluation structures like the abovementioned REF. In the wake of these increasingly bureaucratic measures, if the country or subjects of study are not available to the researcher on a daily basis, international researchers (un)knowingly experience the phenomenon of professional '[bunkerisation](#)'. Implemented through a series of forms submitted to



academic Ethics Committees, this ethics clearance is *de facto* aimed at protecting research institutions from reputation-related, financial, and physical risks by keeping fieldworkers distant from the countries they normally work on in times of instability. Against this backdrop, *working on* a country or a topic cannot be but correlated with the importance of *working in* that country, or working among the insights that the topic generates. I want to point out that this is not just a problem for academia: international non-governmental organisations similarly produce policy briefs and reports by paying only *ad hoc*, short-term visits to the field.

Against today's difficulties surrounding academic jobs, I suggest that

academic managerialism increasingly relies on the 'power of writing', to the extent of making the latter a primary criterion for excellence.

Indeed, theoretical wrapping-up and a high command of English *academicese* problematically trump the importance of ensuring continuity of (both remote and *in loco*) forms of fieldwork and, therefore, the possibility to develop fine-grained knowledge of the places we study.

There is therefore a risk implied by the devaluation of extensive local knowledge: the major focus placed on language combined with the redundancy of new knowledge. This tendency is the reason why we witness such a massive proliferation of publications nowadays. In this regard, the abovementioned English *academicese* at times may ensure acceptance in the publication process by arbitrarily building intellectual authoritativeness, but it is not the language choice that can ensure the quality of field research behind outputs. *Academicese*, in fact, manages to exercise epistemic sovereignty over the researched 'margins' by claiming itself to be at the centre regardless of where it is produced, and therefore building a neo-colonial relationship within the realms of human thinking. To quote Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Dialogic Imagination*, "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated - overpopulated - with the intentions of others". In this sense,



the intentional power underlining our linguistic structures should however not prevail over contents.

The 'power of writing' is surely not only about *academicese*. The increasing number of partnerships that academic institutions develop with non-governmental organisations and UN agencies is resulting in a push for academics to embrace plain language. The latter still entails structural power, as it simplifies language in order to simplify facts and, in turn, [make management successful](#). On the one hand, NGOs request the use of lay-language in academic outputs. On the other, academic researchers themselves simplify their writing in a way that at times looks like a paternalistic process. In fact, the presumption that non-academics will not be able to grasp complex language - which should not be confused with *academicese*, by any means - is double-edged. I personally interpret it as the emergence of a common knowledge-production culture, according to which academics, people who have seldom been involved in policy-making and practice, are expected to advance concrete recommendations. In short, when I happened to work in the framework of these hybrid partnerships, I realised how NGOs and other non-academic institutions expect me, with little experience of their everyday job, to tell them what to actually do in order to sort out deadlocks and discontents. The evident result is a proliferation of off-the-cuff 'research' which would better be defined as desk-work, from both academic outputs and professional consultancies (a massive financial industry nowadays, [despite its discontents](#)). Paradoxically, most of the research rationales underpinning such research consultancies actually aim to explore field-related people, attitudes, political and economic processes, and expectations.

In a nutshell, what seems to be happening in this joint writing culture is the replacement of English academicese with English bureaucratese (bureaucratic language), where fixed idioms populate reports produced by short-term field research (idioms such as 'assistance and protection', 'the rights and needs of the refugees', 'best practices', and other set-piece utterances).



Some scholars have called this phenomenon [“politics of language use”](#), which is clearly imbricated with the political rule and its predominant ideology. As such, the rejection of the complexity in writing for development does not encourage a challenge to the emptiness of *academicese*, which indeed fails to bring much-needed complexity into non-academic debates. Similarly, *academicese* does not help us fight the simplistic technocracy of some non-academic systems, as seen in the development and humanitarian sectors. *Academicese*, by definition, does not manage to deliver the important message that, if people are not willing to accept complexity of meanings, they will be unlikely to accept complexity in their everyday work.

If the [‘ego-politics’](#) of academia have long since been characterised by snooty ivory towerism, the latest trend of resorting to bureaucratic plain language in various research environments unravels a (similarly problematic) paternalistic sovereignty, which will not rescue us from the unbearable lightness of *academicese*. That is to say, this shared writing culture, which devalues fieldwork and makes knowledge redundant, is already gatekeeping non-academic as well as academic research rationales, funding sources, and publication acceptances and rejections.

Linguistic *poiesis* serves as a healthy reminder here. From the ancient Greek *poiéo* (meaning ‘to do, to make’), *poiesis* indicates that [language](#) can do, create, modify, and destroy. As I have said above, academic and non-academic writing cultures increasingly build on *topoi*, sophistic idioms, fixed structures, and patterns of expression which silently lead us all towards the homologation of mindsets, and to repetitive knowledge production.

In the light of this, liberating knowledge production from academicese as much as from bureaucratese needs to be one of our major endeavours, while fighting tooth and nail to defend the empirical inevitability of complexity.

Contemporary academic managerialism, which does not allow researchers – especially seniors – to develop extensive first-hand experience in the field, may



seriously impinge on the possibility to collect strong empirical evidence and pose the most relevant research questions, which should, in turn, instruct global research funders. Presently, it is the funders themselves who dictate research rationales, and reward *grapho-kratia*, or 'the power of writing'. In this framework, empirical reality risks becoming of secondary importance in today's academic and non-academic production, since wrapping theories or policies around quick field visits at high speed has become key to winning the game of obtaining financial resources. In this scenario, in-depth fieldwork and multilingual skills may at times be valued, but will not make a big difference in attracting sustainable funding. We'll probably be fine as long as our writing complies with the dominant politics of language use: cryptically academic to be able to publish journal articles like hot cakes; or bureaucratic language, bereft of empirical complexity, to boast public engagement and impact. The space for new knowledge dauntingly becomes narrower and narrower.

We therefore need to challenge the problematic sociology of 'neoliberal' academia by resuscitating the primary importance of empirical depth and relevance. It is thus time to drop *academicese* without giving up complexity, and to drop *bureaucratese* without forgetting the fundamental role of research in producing socio-political change.

Le plus beau métier du monde

Miriam Odoni
October, 2018



Giulia Mensitieri's book [*"Le plus beau métier du monde" Dans les coulisses de l'industrie de la mode*](#) examines labor in the cultural and creative industries. Analyzing fashion as a system, Mensitieri focuses on the workers involved in immaterial labor. Since 1960, fashion has undergone deep transformations, evolving towards a globalized system. At the heart of the book is the contrast between the fashion world as an enchanted world, made of dreams, imagination, and images, combining beauty, luxury, splendor, creativity, excess, power, and money; and on the other side, the materiality of the system: work and workers working almost for free, precarity, and exploitation. To bring these two aspects together, Mensitieri uses Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Heterotopias are places outside of the ordinary, even though they are locatable. They may take the form of imaginary places and parallel worlds, yet really exist somewhere. Mensitieri argues that if fashion exists as a dream, this dream is a heterotopia,



deploying itself in the places where it is produced and staged.

The fashion world, pushing for consumption by creating desire, coexists with various forms of precarity, exploitation, domination, and quests for power.

It has all the characteristics of capitalism. As a result, it constitutes a privileged field for studying capitalism, functioning like a magnifying glass to explore global dynamics and associated imaginary dimensions, as well as subjectivity and subjection. Heterotopias function as a contrasting definition of the norm, normalizing exceptions. Mensitieri studies this professional sector where free labor has become institutionalized, where precarious work is generalized, and where payment for services is symbolic instead of economic, the result of a process of demonetization of labor.

Mensitieri deconstructs these fantasies by going behind the scenes, observing how reality becomes dream and examining work conditions in this context. She describes many situations where these images are produced and performed, going from photo shoots to fashion shows, following stylist Mia, her exclusive industry insider, or immersing herself in a fashion designer's studio through an [internship](#).



The book is structured in three parts, the first analyzing the fashion system and its connection to capitalism. Mensitieri studies the economic and political roles of fashion's imaginary dimensions and their relation to globalization, considering their global circulation and production delocalization. She shows how models' bodies are used as working tools to produce images and are transformed into aesthetic bodies, primed and optimized under the lights. This transformation is performed by stylists, photographers, and other fashion workers, who create looks destined for magazines. Stylists produce stories and articles, taking part in the production of the fashion fantasy world. These fantasies are then diffused through magazines, which have a dual role as a commercial and cultural product. They interweave consumption and production, defining, by combining publicity and editorial, what is fashionable and what fashion is. Fashion is legitimized and built as a social world through magazines. This process has a twofold function: on the one hand, it renders this world familiar and an object of desire for consumers; on the other, it produces and stabilizes the "world of fashion" in which workers can identify.

This part also focuses on haute couture production. Each piece of haute couture is unique, made entirely by hand, requiring hundreds or even thousands of hours of work, as well as precise and varied skills and know-how. This production is provided by skilled workers who manufacture luxury goods while keeping their





place as workers in the social strata. The industry is governed by a high social division. For example, dressmakers are not allowed to witness the final presentation of their work on models, nor at fashion shows. And while manual work is the very foundation of haute couture, those who produce it and have the skills to make the designer's vision a reality do not fit into the social world of fashion. The example of haute couture is proof that those who produce material glamor are at the same time excluded from it. They do not participate in the social and symbolic construction of fashion.

In terms of production, haute couture entails exorbitant costs. As a sector, it never covers its expenses, despite the dresses' prohibitive prices. From a strictly economic point of view, the industry produces entirely at a loss. Yet haute couture shapes brand image, creating profit with the derivatives and accessories of the commercial lines. Images of haute couture dresses circulate in the press and on television, engendering desire in those who are not able to afford them. Eager to identify with this world, these consumers buy products that are within their reach (lipsticks, glasses or perfumes of the brand) and thus produce the major turnover of the fashion industry.

Fashion is also a globalized industry, producing goods and fantasy circulating on a global scale, driven by mobile and cosmopolitan workers. Therefore, as Mensitieri shows, a study on fashion is by necessity an anthropology of globalization. Methodologically, she studies globalization through ethnography, considering it a component of locally-observable practices and situations (Agier, 2013), and focuses on situations where participants have to deal with issues related to globalization. Since the 1970s, many clothing companies have relocated their production to China as well as to other Asian countries. As early as the 1990s, brands producing luxury goods followed the trend, no longer able to offset the costs of local labor force. Access to globalization is differentiated according to social class and status. In this context, Mensitieri uses the category of the "cosmopolitan elite" (Friedman, 1999 and 2002), which applies to most fashion workers, according to their mobility and their identification with a transnational dimension. She underlines how two different forms of elite have been produced by



globalization and are linked through the fashion world: a cosmopolitan elite, who are mostly fashion workers, and an economic and financial elite, embodied by haute couture clients. Fashion workers produce highly valued symbolic capital and build the dream of capitalism, practicing desired professions, even though they live in a condition of economic precarity. As shown in the example of stylist Mia, she participates temporarily in situations of luxury, wealth, and power, identifying herself as a “star”. Yet her discourse is ambivalent and full of elements that contrast with this identity, such as anxiety, solitude, disorientation, and condition uncertainty. These feelings constitute the price to pay to be part of the cosmopolitan elite.

The second part examines the assignment logics of the economic and symbolic values that govern this world. In this context, it means that the more some work is considered prestigious, the more poorly it is paid. This section also considers the diversity of fashion professions and the precarity of its workers. As Menisitiери shows, fashion is a sprawling system that produces a highly heterogeneous professional environment. She gives insight into these forms of precarious work from sales people, models, and designers.

To introduce this second part, Mensitieri uses the metaphor of overexposure. This metaphor points out the attractiveness of the dream engendered by its constant illumination, but also its opacity, in other words the impossibility of perceiving the realities underlying this fantasy, made invisible by the extreme visibility.

Fashion is a system that is simultaneously overexposed and opaque. Overexposed by its omnipresence in the media, driving desires and consumptions, and opaque because it is very difficult to see what is happening behind the produced representations.

In fashion, everything happens as if excessive exposure made the realities and internal rules of production impenetrable, obscure, unknown, and sometimes deliberately hidden. This overexposure produces and maintains desire by mediating only the dimension of dream and prestige, keeping the conditions of



production invisible or opaque.

Exploring various work situations in fashion, Mensitieri takes the case of modeling as an example to reveal the rules of the fashion game, namely that the most symbolically rewarding and career-making work is the least well paid, while the well-paid work is penalizing for the career. Fashion is governed in all spheres of its production by a symbolic hierarchy which places work considered artistic, creative, and independent at the top of the prestige scale, while work defined as commercial is at the bottom. In line with Mears (2011), Mensitieri argues that this binary separation between “commercial circuits” and “artistic circuits” (Zelizer, 2013) is fundamental to fashion economies. Although fashion is an industry dedicated to profit, its valuation process depreciates the economically lucrative benefits. While the artistic circuit is the most valued in terms of prestige, it is also the one in which financial remuneration is the exception, not the norm. Conversely, the commercial circuit is very well paid but does not offer any gain in symbolic capital. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal is for agencies as well as fashion models or workers to hit the “jackpot” (Mears, 2011). Those who aspire to this must build their career by juggling between accumulating symbolic capital, essential to evolve in the profession and build a reputation, and earning economic capital, necessary for survival. Therefore, they need to accumulate prestige through free work, while in the short term ensuring their material survival through commercial services.

Wages are not the only form of compensation in the professional fashion sector: visibility is another form of social consecration.

In fashion, visibility is frequently obtained in exchange for free work and involves structural uncertainty and precarity.

It is a symbolic capital potentially convertible into money. Contextualizing fashion work with work in the post-Fordist era, Mensitieri shows the logic of demonetization of labor in these professional sectors, raised as reference models by capitalism. This includes low wages, flexible working hours, precarity and



uncertainty, the importance of networking and social capital, isolation, and a strong tendency towards self-exploitation (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010). This dynamic of free labor is central to the production of today's capitalism. In this context, the notion of the "jackpot" is typical of the neoliberal political project and emblematic of the incorporation of uncertainty and normalization of a lottery-style dynamic. The industry's structural inequality is not seen by workers in terms of injustice or exploitation, but in terms of chance and risk, notions that depoliticize inequalities and bring them to an individual and personal level.

Another form of recompense in the fashion industry are "perks" (Mears, 2011): non-monetary transactions. Socially and culturally valued objects in the fashion world, like shoes and clothing, become a currency of transaction in the field — elements of distinction and belonging — and indicators of a certain way of life. These objects are also used to place the workers where they belong only temporarily, namely in the dream. Objects are the means by which to symbolically access other social geographies and amplify and obscure the gap between economic status and social representation. As for precarity, defined here as economic vulnerability, professional instability, and lack of horizon, it takes the form of an in-between state. Fashion workers are constantly and structurally straddling two levels of existence: the commercial circuit and the editorial circuit; the accumulation of economic capital and that of symbolic capital; the world of luxury and that of precarity; the symbolic status of elites and the material one of precarious workers.

Finally, Menisitieri questions the forms of subjection and subjectification in fashion worlds by considering the role of emotions in professional hierarchies, the obligation to be and appear compliant to a professional role and the workers' strategies to address inequalities and various forms of domination. Menisitieri analyses the "subject" not as a fixed entity, but as a process, something that is always being done or undone, the product of interactions, power, and contexts. As she argues, today's capitalist productivity no longer relies on the exploitation of physical labor force but on the workers lives, their emotions, relationships, creativity, sensitivity, and ability to manage themselves. Fashion work implies



specific subjectification modalities or, in other words, specific constructions of subjectivities induced by power structures, which are then assimilated by the individuals and performed by them in various situations. Workers are not forced to be there, but they are forced to “be” in a very specific way.

Following Sherman (2007), Mensitieri here specifies the perspective adopted in her work: to understand from within the motivations, desires, expectations, and constraints of workers, while placing these situations and discourses within the framework of contemporary capitalism, of its structural inequalities and power structures. She then presents examples of questions of power, exploitation, free labor, and situations of humiliation or violence via an internship at a designer’s studio, preparing for the Paris fashion week. This enables her to highlight the role of affects and emotions in the production and preservation of hierarchies in fashion world. She argues that the power of subjectification through emotions individualizes the effects of domination, and thereby depoliticizes them. Through various examples, Mensitieri also shows that fashion work produces a specific kind of personality that workers have to perform in order to not be excluded. The obligation to be “cool” forces them to appear in a good mood, smiling, motivated, enthusiastic, and creative, even when overwork, stress, authoritarian or tyrannical behavior, and financial worries and precariousness should cause a different attitude. It is a new form of social control and implies a specific power structuring demonstrated by the tyranny of some and coolness of others. Coolness is also a form of submission to structural hierarchy.

Lastly, Mensitieri argues that passion is a major reason to stay in and endure the fashion industry. Interviews show that passion for work is always connected to sacrifice and suffering.

Precarity, exploitation, and domination are accepted and normalized as the price to pay for a desired, passionate, and fulfilling work.

The subjectification processes described here are therefore the signs of a major anthropological transformation, which no longer sees work as the source of



economic capital but as giving meaning to life. These transformations are beneficial for capitalism, which can put to work and make profit out of the workers without having to pay wages.

Mensitieri's work is a major contribution to the anthropology of work and capitalism. For fashion is only partly an exception connected to creativity, desire, beauty, and luxury. As described in this book, this industry is also emblematic of a work organization specific to contemporary capitalism. As Mensitieri argues in her conclusion, if the neoliberal project is to succeed, creative work has to become the norm, and the social world would take the form of an archipelago of exceptions inhabited by heterotopic subjects, renouncing labor law and social protection in the name of self-expression and self-fulfillment. Deconstructing the dream of fashion makes it possible to understand how this sector is representative of current forms of work, and probably prophetic, in its excesses, of those to come. It is therefore an important work to read now, as important as it is to reinvent solidarity, new forms of collective mobilizations, and a common political project, in a world where individuality has been powerfully valued.

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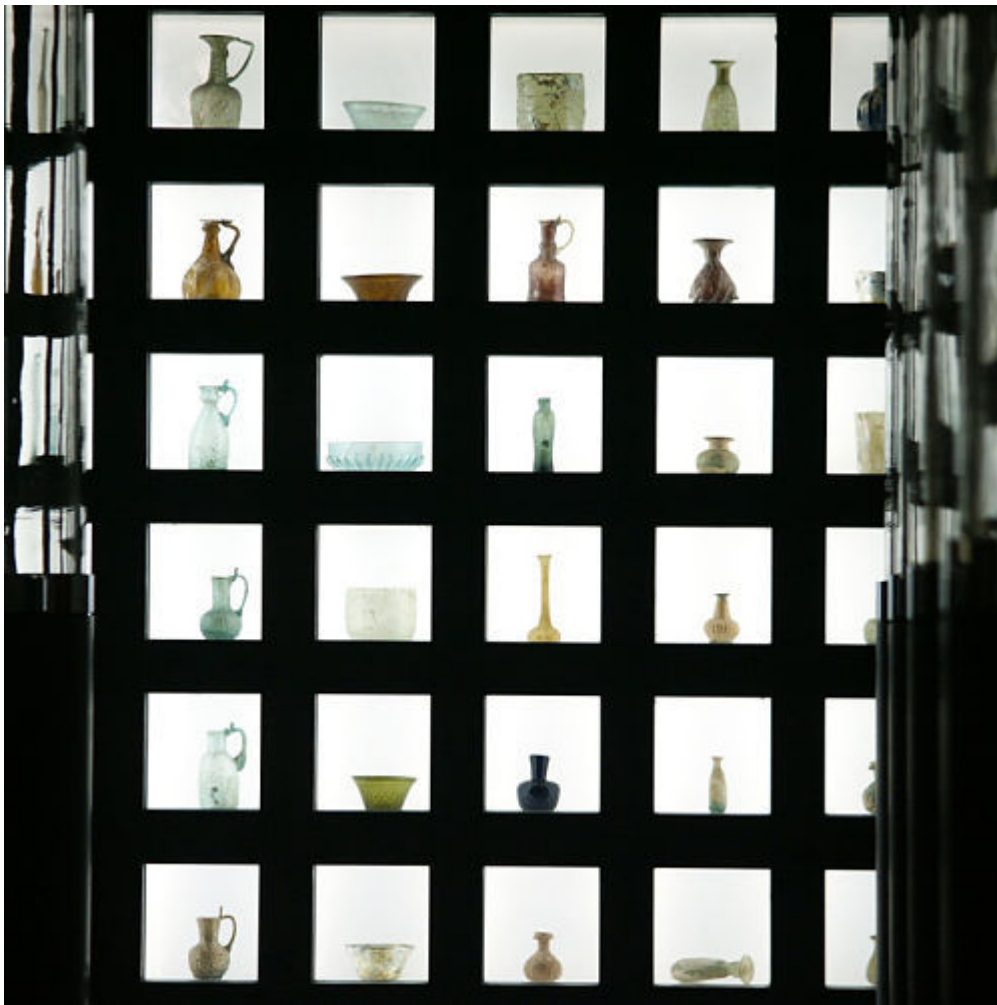
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The Un(der)revealed Relations of Things in Museums: an introduction

Minke Nouwens
October, 2018



I was at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam one fall afternoon when I decided to take a shortcut through the exhibition from the library to my office. To take a shortcut via the museum exhibitions required opening a lot of heavy wooden doors with a security key card. This was not an easy feat when my arms were loaded with photocopied research materials and books, as they often were. But this afternoon I was in a hurry. My mind was still on a particular query to do with the upcoming show on Vlisco wax prints that I was assisting one of the lead curators on, when I traversed the gallery and in was suddenly struck by the absolute silence around me. I had been buried in books on print techniques for long enough to lose all sense of time and I had stayed in my 'second office,' as I jokingly called it, until after the museum had officially closed. I had never been in the museum when it was completely empty of human visitors, completely devoid of the sounds of shoes on wooden floors, hushed voices, and joyful cries of



children carrying upwards along the marble stairs from the Children's museum on the first floor.

The silence was palpable enough that it made me look up. And the sight of material things standing there by themselves was powerful enough to make me stop and forget about my hurry.

I had taken this internship at the Tropenmuseum out of a deep interest in material culture and museum anthropology. I could not yet put my finger on what in particular I was fascinated with as a budding anthropologist in this well-established field. But I enjoyed my explorations immensely and devoured every book by Mary Bouquet, Sharon Macdonald, Ivan Karp, Tony Bennett and the likes I could get my hands on. This specific fall afternoon, however, was my first encounter with material things by themselves. I stood in the middle of the room, surrounded by masks, statues, tools, music instruments, etc. Some were lying on the floor, others hung on the walls, or were suspended from the ceiling. There were photos placed next to them, as well as, small plaques with texts. Except for me, there was no human being in the entire exhibit. But the air was still pregnant with their presence, like how a warm cup of tea in an empty room signals that someone was only just there.

At first, an eerie sensation befell me. I felt like I was being watched by these objects, as if they were waiting for me to come closer and interact with them, to look at them and imagine their former lives when they were still touched by human hands. The uncomfortableness I experienced made me want to rush on, towards the wooden door, where I could again hide in the hallways behind the museum exhibits and explore material things and their everyday lives in a more indirect manner.

But my feet would not move and I stood still in the middle of the exhibit floor, pondering the relationships between material things and human beings for a good while.



A history of relationships

The relationship between human and non-human beings, material and organic things, is one, I believe, that is at the heart of museum institutions and its collection and exhibition practices. Many museum collections originated from the eclectic drive to bring together a universe peopled with “strange” things and objects by educated white noblemen in sixteenth and seventeenth Europe. Labelled *cabinets de curiosités* and *Wunderkammer*, these collections were put together with the specific aim to question the relationship between human beings and the world beyond the theological doctrine. Every question could be legitimately posed and every connection between different objects in the collection examined. These collections thus took on a role as a kind of storehouse of knowledge in which the person with the time, inclination, and cultural training could decipher the relationship in which each object stands to the whole of the world (Bennett 1995). To spark their curiosity and that of their guests, collectors were particularly invested to find the most rare, unique, and exceptional things. As such, these cabinets also became signifiers of class, status, and prestige and collectors would compete with one another to have the best collections.

This educational definition of the relationship between human and non-human beings, including material and organic things, continued with the formation of museums in the nineteenth century in a myriad of ways. Museums were tasked with the cultural governance of the population. As institutions, they had to educate the masses on culture, taste, and design with their collections on art, history, and the natural world. Furthermore, they had to instil forms of behaviour into their visitors through museum visitation etiquette (e.g., talk in hushed tones, keep a respectable distance to objects, dress appropriately). And they had to exemplify the power of the nation in its ability to disciple, punish, and govern its population, including and/or especially colonial subjects. World fairs in particular became events where technological progress and empire subjugation were put on display. Often literally, as with the ‘human zoos’ in which native peoples were taken from their villages and put in an enclosure where they had to exhibit their everyday ways of life to European and North-American spectators.



Since the 1960s, museums in Euro-America have been critically questioning their educational relationship with humans as well as their connections with the material and organic things in their collections.

With the independence of former colonies and their growth into nations of their own, and with the increased ease of travel and information dissemination, museum curators have had to rethink their colonial pasts and rewrite their exhibition practices to address the many different voices and knowledge perspectives of communities. Particularly important questions have been asked in regards to non-Western knowledge practices and how to put together exhibitions that reflect myriad forms of relating to the world, to issues of ownership of objects and the right to restitution (e.g., Herero body remains in German museums), and to queries of cultural representation in regards to what objects are exhibited, whose voices are heard, and how well the curatorial staff embodies the multicultural make-up of communities. The efforts of museums to rethink their human and material relationships - to various degrees of success - has also consolidated into a reinvigorated questioning of the relationships between material and organic things themselves.

Thing-relations beyond humans

Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) currently receives a lot of scholarly attention as an example of such thing-oriented questioning. While difficult to boil down to a few key tenets, OOO has enthused many scholars and practitioners in and beyond the museum world, because it holds that the external world exists independently from human awareness. Thus, it moves away from an human-centric perspective of relationships between things and puts humans on a democratic and equal footing with all other things (as opposed to, for example, phenomenology). The focus for OOO is on the properties of things and how they impact on their direct and indirect environment instead (Bryant 2011; Harman 2018). One example to grasp this non-human centric effort to understand relations in a democratic and equal way is this: say, I have a blue mug on my desk. As a OOO scholar, I would



state that the colour of the mug is one of the properties of this object, next to its spatial shape, texture, temperature, etc. However, I would not classify this colour as its true colour. Blue is the colour I see - it is my relation with the properties of the mug and the lightness or darkness of my environment - but in principle the mug has an infinite number of colours. Its colour is dependent on the relation the mug enters into and there are a multitude of relations with things available to it at all time (Bryant 2011: 77). For a non-human being with a wider visibility spectrum, the mug might have a different colour - one which we cannot experience - or it might perceive the mug in a completely different manner than colour, like as a light wave or a dust-like fog.

What is next?

The focus Object-Oriented Ontology places on the properties of things and the myriad of ways in which these properties enter into relations with other things - next to and beyond humans - also makes this philosophical approach of specific interest to the introduction of this thematic week.

Because the aim of the essays in this thematic collection is to draw attention to the secret, hidden, and alternate lives of objects.

Lives that - through different material configurations - question the possibly taken-for-granted relationships we as humans might have with these objects, and which thus highlight other potentials for being. The essays that have been brought together here expose these un(der)revealed lives through textual and visual forms. They aim to elicit knowledge and understanding through a fully embodied approach, provoking and questioning our minds and our senses. Finally, the essays have been ordered - curated - to inspire not only a conceptual thinking about human and non-human, material and organic, relations, but to explore these relations by doing.

Lauren Reid starts the thematic week with an essay on artistic strategies from the contemporary art world to open up the meaning of objects. Specifically, she



focuses on strategies that have the potential to overcome the still common traditional exhibition presentations that arose from the colonial legacies of museums and can support the much needed decolonisation efforts of museum institutions. On Wednesday, you will have the privilege to experience a new artwork from renowned interdisciplinary artist Brook Andrew who examines dominant narratives, often relating to colonialism and modernist histories through museum and archival interventions. We conclude this thematic week on Thursday with an exhibition of photographs from Allegra's own extensive archive. These images have previously been incorporated as extras to written essays, but will now enter into a stand-alone relationship with each other.

We will not publish an essay on Friday. Instead, we have left this day open as an invitation to reflect on the secret, hidden, and un(der)revealed relations of objects and to provide a space for you to share your impressions, stories, or comments with us on Allegra's website, Facebook, or Instagram. We also very much welcome opportunities for future collaborations to follow-up on this thematic week. And we would be eager to hear from you if you have experience curating exhibitions that expose alternative lives of things, have an artistic practice that critically examines dominant narratives, or research decolonisation efforts in museums, and want to comment on the essays presented this week with an essay of your own.

The efforts toward institutional decolonisation in and beyond museums are both necessary and urgent today. With this introduction, I have tried to contextualise this necessity and urgency through a reflection of the hidden and revealed relationships at the heart of museums between human, non-human, material, and organic things.

My aim, through this perspective of thing-entanglements, has been to show how some aspects of these relationships are clearly informed by colonialism (e.g., World Fairs), while others are less-clearly so (e.g., the organisation of collections by historical time or geographical era). In doing so, I hope I have made clear that



decolonisation is not limited to a particular corner of the museum, but that it impacts all aspects of doing and thinking about museums. Because, we stand to gain much from a critical re-evaluation of the lives of things in museums, and a firm commitment to decolonisation efforts. Lauren Reid and Brook Andrew's excellent contributions emphasise this point even more. And they both also show very well what such a commitment may look like in practice. Now, let us continue and explore these human, non-human, material, and organic relationships between things further.

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Layers - A Photography Exhibition

Minke Nouwens
October, 2018



Allegra has an extensive archive of photographs. These images are usually incorporated as supporting materials to written essays. This exhibition is a small intervention in the archive to allow some of the photos to enter into a stand-alone relationship with each other. So they may create new entanglements and expose - to us and each other - their fluid and multiple realities, as visual images, as material objects, as historical dialogues, as cultural aesthetics, and more. In short, this is an exhibition that aims to let breath the layers - the accumulations of traces deposited on a photograph as it moves through different spaces (Edwards 2001) - of six photographs from the archive.

Images (from left to right):



1. Woman and Child Health Development Project (ADB Loan 2090), Photo by Morgan Clarke, From [Islam and New Kinship #anthroislam](#)
2. Maria from the performance group LEM, backstage (Gelsenkirchen (Germany), 1989, Photo by Axel Schön, From [The Art of Being IN: Road tripping, photographing and hanging out in post-soviet Russia #INTERVIEW](#)
3. Dance Performance: Priya Srinivasan performing a 'talking dance,' Photo by MS Subbulakshmi, From [Some Thoughts on Movement and the #MMTW](#)
4. City Play 5: Ibtesam and Paloma shooting a football game, Photo by Khaled Kamel, From [City Play: Collaborative Filmmaking with Children #VisualANTH](#)
5. [Photo](#) by [World Bank Photo Collection](#) (flickr, [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)), From [#Review: Anthropolog, Theatre and Development #Performance](#)
6. [Photo](#) by [Peretz Partensky](#) (flickr, [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)), From [#Review: Muslim Women of the Fergana Valley](#)

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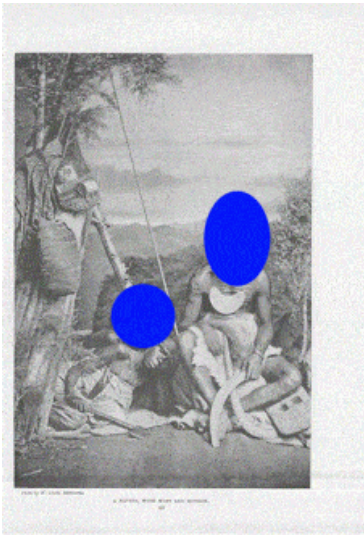
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What's Left Behind - A visual essay



#livesofobjects

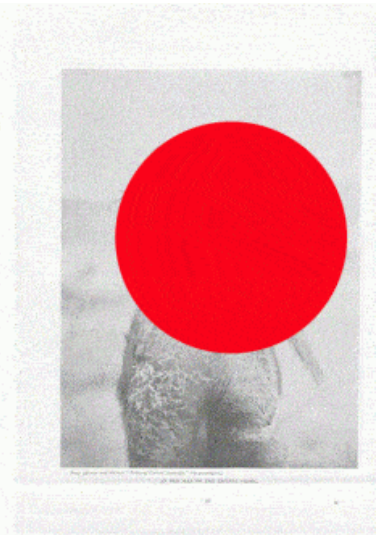
Brook Andrew
October, 2018



PRTA Native with wife & mothe...



253_PRT_An Abdal.Santon or Kalen...



254_PRT_An old man of the Aru...



PRT_Cenematographic the cro...



258_PRT_Certiface of Authenticity-...



259_PRT_Danseur des Isles Sar...

Brook Andrew is an interdisciplinary artist who examines dominant narratives, often relating to colonialism and modernist theories. Through museum and archival interventions, he aims to offer alternate versions of forgotten histories,



illustrating different means for interpreting history in the world today. Apart from drawing inspiration from vernacular objects and the archive he travels internationally to work with communities and various private and public collections to tease out new interpretations.

For this thematic week, Brook has developed the visual essay below. To interact with the essay:

1. Click on an image to enlarge the art work.
2. Dive into this unique exploratory adventure.
3. Let your mind and senses swim.

Want to know more about Brook?

Most recently he presented *What's Left Behind*, a new commission for *SUPERPOSITION: Art of Equilibrium and Engagement*, the 21st Biennale of Sydney. In 2017 he created an intervention into the collection of the Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, Switzerland; presented *Ahy-kon-uh-klas-tik*, an interrogation of the Van Abbemuseum archives in The Netherlands; undertook a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, with the Smithsonian Institute, USA; and *The Right to Offend is Sacred* opened at the National Gallery of Victoria, a 25-year reflection on his practice.

His current research includes an ambitious international comparative three-year Federal Government Australian Research Council grant titled *Representation, Remembrance and the Memorial*. The project is designed to respond to the repeated high-level calls for a national memorial to Aboriginal loss and the frontier wars: www.rr.memorial.

Brook Andrew is represented by Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne; Roselyn Oxley9



You can find the entire cosmos lurking in its least remarkable objects - Wislawa Szymborska, Polish poet

It's 2013 and I am poring over the Ethnographic Collection of the University of Göttingen with two anthropologists from the research network Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia (DORISEA). We are preparing for an exhibition, later to be called *Haunted Thresholds: Spirituality in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. The collection manager is carefully opening tissue-filled boxes to reveal all sorts of fascinating objects from Indonesia: wooden hand-carved ancestor figures holding the spirits of the deceased, daggers imbued with supernatural powers, a book of spiritually potent medicinal recipes and calendrical drawings and much more.

As we select objects for the exhibition, we debate what information should go alongside them. For the ancestor figures from Nias - How to explain the relationships between the living, the gods and the dead? Should we explain the overarching religious cosmology? What about the cultural context of Nias then and now? In this conversation, we hit a moment of crisis: one anthropologist suddenly felt that we should not show them at all, asking

How can we even exhibit an object if we cannot communicate its full meaning?

This question echoes a curator's recurring dilemma: how to effectively convey the layers of meaning and significance in an object? The confines of the traditional museological display of a glass vitrine and a short accompanying paragraph can make this feel especially difficult, let alone the awareness that the paragraph might not be read at all, due to a lack of time, energy or desire from visitors.

When exhibiting cultural artefacts, we must inevitably grapple with the difficulty of telling their fluid and multiple realities and histories. This is especially important when presenting artefacts from colonial collections, which form the foundation of many museums. Museums are typically designed to act as informal classrooms, teaching the history of the world, other cultures, medicine,



technology and so on. It is therefore generally taken for granted that what is presented in a museum is as 'truthful' and 'objective' as possible.

In contrast, when visiting an art exhibition, usually we are not primarily looking to learn about history or cultures but instead, we are expecting to encounter ideas that are open to interpretation and up for debate.

As viewers, we know that we are going to need to work a little to try and understand the intention of the artist and the significance of the artwork. Artistic approaches, therefore might contain some clues for how to deal with this issue of how to communicate the 'full meaning' of an object by bypassing this goal altogether and instead opening up the possibility of subjectivities and fluidities.

In this article, I share three examples from the contemporary art world that have used artistic strategies to tease out the meanings held within objects. In particular, these strategies also aim to subvert still so common traditional exhibition presentations that arise from the colonial legacies of museums.

Strategy one: contrasting

The position of one object next to another can create new associations and ideas for that object. As a very crude example, if a salt shaker is placed next to a pepper shaker, it suddenly becomes a reminder of the dinner table. If instead the salt shaker is placed next to a pair of maracas, we might re-imagine it as a potential musical instrument. The New York born and based artist Fred Wilson is an expert in these kind of association shifts. Rather than creating a completely new artwork like a sculpture, performance, or film, he is usually more interested in working with and reassembling already existing objects.

For his 1992 exhibition *Mining the Museum*, Wilson was invited to work with the collection of the Maryland Historical Society. Originally founded in 1844, the collection was established to preserve and study the history of the state of Maryland. While it had an extensive collection, the exhibitions shown to the public



tended to reflect the perspective of its white male founding board.

For Wilson, “What they put on view says a lot about a museum, but what they don’t put on view says even more” (Fusco, p.148).

Wilson set about ‘mining’ the collection to tell an alternative history to what was usually presented, highlighting the history of African Americans and in particular, slavery in America. One example of how he did this is with the installation *Metalwork 1793-1880*, which presented a vitrine containing ornate silver pitchers, and teacups, side-by-side with a pair of iron slave shackles. Traditionally within a museum, ‘artefacts of trauma’ (like the shackles) are presented separately to ‘arts and crafts’. Through the juxtaposition of these different artefacts, Wilson created an uncomfortable visual link to two coexisting realities, where the leisure and decadence of one was made possible by the enslavement of the other. Rather than relying on lengthy explanatory text or moralising, Wilson’s seemingly simple placement of the two contrasting objects activates emotional reactions that provoke and shock its viewers.

Strategy two: shifting perspectives

Wilson’s case highlights not only how rearranging objects reveal hidden histories, but also how visual language can draw out emotional and intuitive responses from audiences in ways that text cannot. Brook Andrew is another artist who is especially interested in the multi-layered and alternate realities and meanings of objects, digging into stories related to history, memory, identity and race. However, unlike Wilson, he adds his own interventions to the collections that he works with by creating new methods of display, adding text or obscuring archival imagery with, for example, brightly coloured shapes. Andrew anchors his artistic research in Australian colonial history, while also taking a global perspective to explore how other cultures choose to memorialise past atrocities from the Holocaust to the 1864 Sandy Creek massacre in Colorado, USA.

In the 2018 Sydney Biennale, Andrew presented the work *What’s Left Behind*



(2018) which consisted of five sculptures created by the artist that also act as vessels or vitrines echoing a stereotypical museum display. The goal of the work was to draw together many voices to bring light to shadowy histories. He invited four additional artists to create displays within his vitrines using objects chosen from the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney. The artists used the Museum's collection to each explore a range of subjects related to colonial histories. Rushdi Anwar (Kurdistan/Melbourne) focused on the British period of administration (1921 - 1958) in the then Kingdom of Iraq, while Shiraz Bayjoo (Mauritius/London/the Indian Ocean region) explored technologies used to map the colonies such as the marine chronometer. Vered Snear (Israel/USA) dug into British colonisation in Palestine and Australia, and Mayun Kiki (Japan) highlighted the suppression of minority cultures such as the Ainu people of Japan. Finally, Andrew interrogated the exoticisation of the East and its enduring legacy.

One notable aspect of the vitrines was that the artists not only created additional artworks to enrich the objects from the collection, but they also included additional historical items sourced either from their own collections or purchased especially for the exhibition. On one hand, in a cynical frame of mind, this makes apparent that the Museum of Applied Arts and Science was missing significant artefacts related to colonial histories. On the other hand, I think we can be much more generous and see how this points to the infinite nature of material culture and the intricately tangled web of significances and meanings woven between objects and histories. How can a museum contain every object related to every history in the world and tell every story? This case highlights the difficulty of dealing with material culture: what objects to choose and which stories to tell?

By building on the collection and adding additional interventions of artistic creations, self-made displays and historical artefacts, the artists showed how one single collection can open up many personal perspectives to point toward many different (and often untold) histories, cultural experiences and interpretations.



Strategy three: revealing

Returning to the scene of my initial curator's dilemma in the ethnographic collection of the University of Göttingen, one of the discoveries that we made there was that each object in the collection was accompanied by a beautiful handwritten index card with a pencil drawing of the object. The cards stated the location of origin, the collection that it came from, the year it arrived in the Göttingen collection and a basic description of the object's function, size and dimensions. I frequently (and it turns out naively) asked the collection manager when an object would have been in original use, but the only certain answer he could give me was the date that it arrived in Göttingen.

I was quite struck by the seeming double life of these objects.

Initially 'born' in Indonesia they held a distinct cultural position, and played significant roles in rituals, ceremonies, performances and so on. It wasn't until they arrived in Göttingen, marked with a new year of origin, that they were 'born again' as ethnographic objects. With this new existence came a new function: the perusal and education of the German public. Of course I'm not the first to have this thought, Alain Resnais, Ghislain Cloquet and Chris Marker's video essay *Les Statues Meurent Aussi (Statues Also Die)* from 1953 portrays the 'death' of Sub-Saharan African masks and sculptures as they enter colonial archives, losing their original function to be transformed into a museum artefact.

"What if we exhibit the index cards?" suggested one of the DORISEA anthropologists, Karin Klenke. This seemingly simple suggestion became a way for us to point toward the double life of the objects and the unique context that they now found themselves in. In the exhibition, we displayed the cards separately to the ethnographic objects, as 'artefacts' unto themselves. In doing so, we wanted to reveal for the audience how these objects are classified 'behind-the-scenes' and to tell the story not only of how the object came into existence but how it then came to be on display in front of a viewer for their consumption and education. We also hoped that viewers might gain some awareness that their



understanding of the object is shaped through a very specific 'Göttingen lens' and that the objects have travelled on a somewhat messy and contested journey that will continue in future.

These three case studies show how creative approaches to exhibiting cultural artefacts can help to overcome the traditional museum dilemma of attempting to convey their 'full meaning' and instead open up their multiple realities.

The juxtaposition of historical objects can create new conceptual links to uncomfortable stories, while inviting different practitioners to work on the same single collection can emphasise the myriad interpretations and narratives contained within objects. Finally, by acknowledging how objects arrived in collections and highlighting their current social function and location, their display in an exhibition can act as a mirror to reflect back our own role within the shifting realities of these objects.

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Engaged Anthropology: Politics Beyond the Text. A Conversation



with Stuart Kirsch

Ilana Gershon
October, 2018



How can an anthropologist who teaches at a university work towards helping indigenous people in their efforts to make their lives better? Many turn to publishing as an answer, but Stuart Kirsch in this book explores various strategies by which being an anthropological expert can support indigenous communities in their legal battles against extractive corporations and governments. He describes the paths he took as an activist, and explores the ethical possibilities and pitfalls in becoming an engaged anthropologist. Ilana Gershon sits down with Stuart Kirsch to discuss his new book [*Engaged Anthropology: Politics Beyond the Text* \(University of California, 2018\)](#).



Ilana Gerhson [IG]: You ask in your book whether engaged research is good for anthropology. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about where this question comes from for you, and some of the paths you took towards making up your own mind about this.

Stuart Kirsch [SK]: The question is provoked in part by the kinds of things you worry people might say when they read your tenure or promotion file, or tell your graduate students when your back is turned. I used to have a dean who always introduced me as “Stuart, our *engaged* anthropologist,” said in a way that reminded me of the Talking Heads’ *Psychokiller* (“Qu’est-ce que c’est . . . Run run run run run run away . . .”). Or as I mention in the book, when I was still a visiting professor without a tenure track position, I had a colleague who told me that jobs in the academy were reserved for scholars who think great thoughts, not for anthropologists who chase ambulances.

So I wanted to tackle the question head on: Is this kind of work good for anthropology?

Answering the question poses a challenge. When we become advocates in the field, does this invalidate our research or distort our results? If I’m a supporter of indigenous land rights, can I possibly be fair to New Zealand sheep farmers (Dominy 2000, Dominy and Walford 2001), or to creole gold miners in the interior rain forest of Guyana?

One way to shut down engaged anthropology is to argue that the results are biased, but I think with greater reflexivity you can maneuver your way around that, and the language of bias presumes a concept of objectivity few of us in the social sciences would be comfortable with. Another way to shut down engaged anthropology is to assert that taking a position will limit who you can talk to, although the people actually doing this kind of work have found that doing engaged research provides them with access to a much broader range of people (Kirsch 2002; Sawyer 2004; Loperena 2016), including those who might shut the door on anthropologists who assert their neutrality.



But the other part of the question is whether people who are advocates in their research, who do engaged anthropology, produce “good enough” ethnography (see Scheper-Hughes 1992)? By this I mean research that is valuable beyond the immediate context. And that’s a question that runs throughout the book, and is to some extent its *raison d’être*. I didn’t want to answer this question via arm-waving or citing French philosophers; I wanted to answer it through concrete, ethnographic examples that show both the challenges and shortcomings of engaged research but also the insights that can emerge in these contexts, ideas that travel beyond the problem at hand. I wanted to provide readers with the evidence needed to answer the question: “Is engaged anthropology good for anthropology?”

IG: How would you compare your experiences of long-term engaged research with your more short-term experiences?

SK: Downstream from the Ok Tedi mine, where I have lived and worked for thirty years, people know me and I know them. In many cases, I know their parents or they remember meeting me when they were children. For many years, during the long-running lawsuit (1994 to 1996, and again from 2001 to 2004), against the Australian mining company BHP, the case was pretty much all people wanted to talk about with me, which was somewhat limiting.

But that work built on my earlier dissertation research, during which I learned to speak their language, learned about things like their responses to sorcery and their male initiation myths, etc. (see Kirsch 2006). When people ask me about their interactions with the environment, I have things to say, rather than having to look up the answers in a book or an article written by an earlier anthropologist, or make essentialist claims about Papua New Guinea, which is especially ill-advised.

But that’s never going to be the case in short-term projects. I have to work with an interpreter if they don’t speak English. I will never have deep familiarity with their relationships to the environment. And to claim that what happens in Guyana



is the same as what happens in Papua New Guinea because they are indigenous is to turn one's back on the discipline's fundamental understanding of the importance of cultural differences.

Nonetheless, being politically engaged offers a set of shortcuts. You have a common goal: to produce an expert report or document their perceptions and experiences of a problem in a way that will support their cause or claims. People mobilize themselves to help you achieve this goal. You aren't there to obtain a holistic overview of society, but clues do drop out of conversations and from visiting the places where the problems are. I always like to experiment with methods, and focus groups are a key component of how I'm able to do short-term engaged research.

It is surprising how much you can learn in a short, concentrated burst of fieldwork when people are motivated to work with you.

I'm equally conscious of the fact that getting beyond that initial level of understanding acquired in a few weeks would require proper Malinowskian fieldwork, starting with the language but including digging in for a year or more. The trade-off is that I get the benefit of first-hand access to comparative knowledge when I move between fieldsites. And the community gets the benefit of an expert opinion or report, etc., that contributes to their political struggle.

IG: One thread in your book that I didn't expect was a prolonged discussion of how affidavits function as a genre, and how anthropological research should be presented anticipating a court as audience. What are some of your suggestions for future anthropological writers of affidavits?

SK: I do write a lot for lawyers and courts. In some ways, the principles of good writing are the same: be clear, provide examples, be persuasive, and as Igor Kopytoff once advised me, "Don't be wishy-washy." But you also need to let go of some of our disciplinary habits, especially extended use of specialized vocabulary. Actually, you can use whatever technical terms you like as long as you define



them. But when I write for the courts I always whisper to myself: “Don’t fall down any rabbit holes.” Anthropologists are like Alice in this regard: the magic comes *precisely* when we enter a new world! But when writing for the courts, you need to keep moving forward, minding the odometer, so to speak. There isn’t time for those lovely, scenic detours that make the anthropological journey so memorable.

In fact, writing for the courts has some similarities to the genre of proposal writing as we try to teach it to our graduate students.

In this case, imagine someone reviewing thousands of pages of testimony and other legal documents; how do you capture and hold their attention? Part of the answer, I think, is that anthropologists have the ability to take a complex situation and do the following two things for their readers: (1) Show them that their everyday assumptions, their ordinary ways of thinking about the problem, are insufficient, and (2) Provide them with a productive way of seeing the issues in a new way, which is relevant to the decisions they will have to make. Don’t just add facts, provide them with the means to organize or frame the information in the case. If you can accomplish that, your work for the courts will be valued, and hopefully be of value to the people whose stories and experiences you are sharing.

IG: Not all your accounts of engaged anthropology involve traveling overseas to communities who have requested your presence and anthropological expertise. You also have a chapter on being an engaged anthropologist at home. What insights or cautions would you give other anthropologists and/or activists trying to transform institutions based on your experience?

SK: I have a colleague who is critical of campus protestors, colleagues and students who act up and act out in a safe space rather than tackling problems in the real world, which is a lot more perilous. I wanted to disabuse him of this notion for two reasons. First of all, as readers of Victor Turner know, the liminality and *communitas* of public protests can move beyond their initial context to provoke real structural change, and protest movements in universities have done this in many times and places.



But the second reason is that while participating in campus politics may occasionally earn you an appreciative nod, it can also alienate other colleagues. Certain doors will swing shut as you speak out. For example, the people running an initiative on ethics declined to fund a project that examined the influence of corporate investments on campus because I wanted to talk about specific examples of the mining industry's presence, including BHP's logo on the engineering school's solar car, a key symbol of the university's commitment to sustainable development (see Blumenstyk 2007).[\[1\]](#)

Or to take an example I discuss at length in the book, some of my colleagues were critical of the support I provided to a group of graduate students trying to provoke discussion on the archaeology museum's policies towards the repatriation of Native American human remains. The irony is that even though that situation subsequently turned 180 degrees around, to the point that the museum now receives praise and offers of collaboration from the Native American community in Michigan, nobody comes back and says: "Sorry, we realize everything the graduate students were saying was true." Or acknowledges that speaking up on these issues helped to bring about a positive solution to the problem.

But I'd like to end on a positive note: that even as some doors may swing shut, others will open up. For every opportunity that might be foreclosed, I receive another invitation to speak or write something, or gain access to new opportunities because of my willingness to do this kind of work. For every colleague who might object to or belittle engaged anthropology, there are many others who support it. And if your work doesn't make at least a few people uncomfortable, or even occasionally upset, you may not be doing a good job! These are signs you are helping things change.

[\[1\]](#) A side note: the logo is no longer there. □



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Featured image: [Donatus Moiwend](#), 'Politics' (Photo (cropped) by Rosa Moiwend)



Environmental Panics: The emission scandal in Germany

Sophie Roche
October, 2018



In September and again in November 2015 the famous German car company, Volkswagen AG at its headquarter in Virginia, received two violation notices from the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Shortly later, the German public media drew attention to Volkswagen's manipulation of applications for



control of air pollution. Only in August 2017 did politicians sit together with the German automobile producer to discuss what by that time had become coined the “Abgasskandal” or the emission scandal. While politicians in Germany traditionally protect the car industry, they came under pressure to take measures and discuss new ways for reducing pollution, which environmental activists had long been protesting.

Meanwhile the issue was being discussed in popular media. The car drivers of concerned diesel motor cars felt “cheated” by Volkswagen as if they had not known before that diesel cars pollute much more than other cars. The town councils and district politicians were angry because Volkswagen had ridiculed the system of emission control. In short, everybody talked about the scandal from one’s own perspective. The discussion was further pushed by environmentalists who highlighted known cheating of the automobile industry at least since 2007. Thus the “scandal” could have hardly been surprising to politicians in Germany. Why did the information lead to environmental panics this time?

Whereas environmental discussions in Germany have been going on for a long time, the Abgasskandal or also the Diesel Skandal condensed the whole debate and led to moral panics. If the scandal was of juridical nature, why wasn’t it simply a matter of the court? Moral panics in the way that Stanley Cohen^[1] defines them are not simply about scandals that are solved in legal procedure; they affect all levels of society and uncover social tensions. Moral panics are not only context dependent but more importantly, they are deeply rooted in cultural, social and political history. In other words, any issue in Germany that involves cars more generally becomes an issue for the whole of society.

Thus environmental issues, technical advancement, infrastructure and many other topics raise particularly emotional discussions when motorways and cars are involved.

Stanley Cohen has observed how youth gangs in the 1960s drew the attention of the media, politics and economic actors by becoming folk devils. After a serious



fight between two youth gangs, the Rockers and the Mods, the media, politicians, society and economic actors overreacted with discussions and blame, a reaction that Cohen calls moral panics. But at the end of long emotional discussions in the media and politicians declaring these gangs a scandal nothing happened beyond moral panics. Cohen's descriptions of how specific events turn into societal moral panics teaches us the need to look at scandals less through the event itself, but rather through the parties involved in making it a scandal and the social effects they have or fail at delivering. According to Cohen, moral panics develop, first, through exaggerated attention by the media, politicians and those who believe they are losing economically in the process. Second, predictions of further scandal spread fear across all levels of society, and, third, symbols emerge that mark "the devil" in the scandal. The panic culminates in political measures that have symbolic character. The scandal usually dissolves with astonishingly few solutions.

The process that Cohen has outlined can be applied to many groups and events such as migrants or non-human actors and even technologies. However, not any subject will trigger moral panics in every society, usually only subjects that touch on cultural and social sensitivities have the potential to provoke moral panics.

I use the term environmental panics as a specific form of moral panics to characterize the superficial discussions about the environment and the hype around the recent emission scandal in Germany. Environmental panics in Germany, so the argument, will always be linked to cars.

It has been well known for long that "Diesel" is a polluting fuel for cars. Germany had reacted by integrating filters on the fuel system and had established a bureaucratic system to implement environmental standards for cars. Every time a new law was passed, the press has reacted with anger and those using diesel felt their freedom restrained. In Germany since March 1st, 2007 about 55 cities have been closed to polluting cars. Each car is registered with an Umweltplakette (environmental badge) that shows the grade of pollution. Only those driving a



“clean car”, that is, with an appropriate catalytic converter receive a green badge that allows the driver to enter the protected districts (usually city centers). The automobile industry had to invent technologies that could be integrated into existing cars and complained that the law would raise the prices for cars and endanger thousands of jobs. Since then, the trade with “cleanliness” between the automobile industry and politics has been going on.

The car industry enjoys a special status in German politics and society just as cars do in German families. Proverbs demonstrate the cultural relevance of the car showing that the car becomes a “competitor to the wife” and the “dearest object for a man.” One saying goes that “men pay more attention to their cars than to their own wives” and women chose a car “because it looked so sweet” while men would chose according to technical considerations. Songs and jokes specify the use of different brands, such as the “Manta” joke series of the 1980s (Opel Manta came on the market in 1970 and was a car that according to prejudices was favored by little intelligent people that like to show off). The car has a cultural place in German society linked to status and to the family. Certainly, the car is important in other societies as well. The question is whether environmental panics could develop around the car in the same way or whether other cultural sensitivities such as water supply or animals would play a more important role.

In November 2015, the United States Environmental Protection Agency based in Washington D.C. published a Notice of Violation: “As detailed in this Notice of Violation (NOV), the EPA has determined that VW manufactured and installed defeat devices in certain model year 2014 - 2016 diesel light-duty vehicles equipped with 3.0 liter engines. These defeat devices bypass, defeat, or render inoperative elements of the vehicles’ emission control system that exist to comply with CAA emission standards. [...] Each VW vehicle identified by the table below has AECs that were not described in the application for the COC that purportedly covers the vehicle. Specifically, VW manufactured and installed software in the electronic control module (ECM) of each vehicle that causes the vehicle to perform differently when the vehicle is being tested for compliance with EPA emission standards than normal operation and use.”[\[2\]](#) Following this



Notice of Violation VW was taken to court and the enterprise was fined accordingly.

The media reported on the subject as “Abgasaffäre” in 2015 (not yet a scandal, just an issue, an affair). There was no serious reaction neither from the population nor from politicians or VW in Germany. Probably nobody was seriously surprised to learn that their most important industry was cheating on harsh environmental laws. The affair grew into a scandal in the media (Abgasskandal) and pressure was put on politicians to take responsibility. Politicians in Germany started to react (slowly), to call for investigations and to define whom and what was to blame. Newspapers printed the events repeatedly so that its readers could identify “the scandal”, that is, the beginning of the manipulation of the software (in 2005/2006) and the individuals that should be blamed, the economic loss and the number of jobs endangered. The population reacted angrily, developing a panic about the future of their cars, their freedom of movement and their very existence in a motorized society. In order to defuse the increasing panic and VW’s economic collapse, the automobile industry reacted by downplaying the issue. Hundred thousands of cars were called back and modernized. The costs for this action rose from 6,5 billion originally to 30 billion Euros as the case developed. The stock exchange rate collapsed within days in 2015 whereas the former leader of VW, Martin Winterkorn, refused to take responsibility and to appear in court (the US had issued an international warrant of arrest against him). He became the scapegoat against whom the new VW leadership considers a complaint.

Politicians like the Federal Minister of Economics, Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) or Minister President and VW Aufsichtsratsmitglied Stephan Weil (SPD) proclaimed that they would check on the issue. The media continued to push the issue not regarding the environment—after all this had been the key issue when the emission control had been introduced—but regarding individual responsibility and economic damage for the population. Politicians used the environment solely to take control of the situations and set the blame on mid-level managers.[\[3\]](#)

The issue became more confusing and exciting as VW-files disappeared



mysteriously from the state chancellery and the leadership was replaced, whereas economic loss rose astronomically. The scandal grew further, more cars were involved, more countries complained by the end of the year 2015. Beside NOX emissions now VW “found out” that they had cheated on CO2 emissions as well, again more cars underwent control. Eventually, the EU-commission interfered and demanded information about affected cars.

VW announced that they will not pay their business tax for 2015 and since the main political fear is—not the environment but—the loss of employment, they compromise. While the case is still open in the US, efforts to obtain individual compensation in Germany have been denied by the judge. The state as the protector of the environment and of the industry has gone through the scandal without implementing any effective punishments of the leadership of VW, without promoting environmental friendly cars and the necessary infrastructure that such cars would need, without any advancement in environmental protection, and without effective protection for employment. The whole scandal resulted in nothing but environmental panics that passed as fast as they had emerged.

As the scandal developed for VW, Mercedes silently called back three million diesel-cars in July 2017 for back fitting.[\[4\]](#) The ‘king of the car’ in Germany, Mercedes Benz, will thus escape further blame and scandals although they probably just cheated as much as VW. But nobody wants to raise a new case and the environment has not enough agency to act, it is just a folk devil and moral challenger.

What is a technical issue in the US, is much more in Germany.

The leading newspaper *Die Zeit* explains “There are feelings that were hurt, a damaged of pride, the loss of innocence, even the feeling of an abrupt break of (economic) prosperity, drowned hope of future. In fact, they do not just affect the automobile industry. For Germany one can say: they concern the nation.”[\[5\]](#) While other affected nations to a certain degree expect the industry to cheat, in Germany people identify with the automobile industry. Many people do not



believe that they cheated to any serious degree (just a bit, as all good citizens do at times). Hence the scandal is like a personal blame, a blow against national pride (“Man hat einen Teil seines Nationalstolzes von ihren Produkten bezogen, und deswegen fühlt man sich auch bei ihrer Entzauberung auf vage Weise mit blamiert, mit enttarnt und mit aufgefliegen.“) The diesel motor is directly compared to the Germans: “Everything that one can say about the German, can also be said about the diesel.”[\[6\]](#)

The environment (and those who defend it) have dared to challenge the golden calf of the German nation, the diesel car. Pollution was not a subject in the emission scandal, only the manipulation of technologies and this way, the unmasking of the innocence of the clean beautiful strong and trusty car. To make a gender comparison, the environmental panics of the diesel affair was the case of a rape in all its dimension: efforts to silence the shame, media that undressed the innocence, the cultural embedding of the raped, an attack on the honour of men, and finally, the unmasking of the beloved beauty.

What about the environment that is the actual victim of this environmental panics? The environmentalist movements used the scandal to mobilize against the diesel, which remains highly polluting even with filters. The government knew about the automobile industry’s cheatings but decided to protect them. The scandal was an opportunity for the environmentalists to pressure politics to act in favour of the environment.

But the media diverted the discussion from the environment to the car as the symbol of German maleness.

The Deutsche Umwelt Hilfe (DUH) went to court in 2016 to fight for a general prohibition of dirty diesel cars in cities. Although the DUH has successfully won the “right for clean air” in 2007, this right is not implemented unless through civil engagement against the state and the automobile industry.

On February 27, 2018 the Federal Administrative Court decided that cities are



allowed to install prohibition for diesel cars in order to protect the air. Hamburg was the first city to implement a prohibition for older diesel cars.[7] Certain streets are now closed to such cars in order to improve the air within those neighbourhoods. Consequently, these diesel cars now use other neighbourhoods where pollution is permissible. This example shows the chaos that the diesel affair has created, the panics that were raised but politicians missed to implement a solid environmental friendly plan. Politics try to please the automobile industry and to appease the angry diesel car owners but the environment itself features as challenge to national identity, the environment is the folk devil that forces so much change in the habits of people. While environmental activists continue to call for stricter measures, the automobile industry finances tests (with monkeys and humans) to prove the diesel car's harmlessness.[8]

[1] Stanley Cohen 2002. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. London: Routledge (third edition, first published 1972)

[2] Notice of Violation, the United States Environmental Protection Agency based in Washington D.C. Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance. November 2, 2015.

[3] For instance, [according to the media in Braunschweig](#) 30 managers are being legally prosecuted, whereas the authorities speak of much less.

[4] <https://www.autozeitung.de/diesel-skandal-test-frontal-21-117580.html>

[5] "Es sind Gefühle von Kränkung, beschädigtem Stolz, verlorener Unschuld, auch von jäh gestopptem Aufstieg, verflogener Zukunftshoffnung. Sie betreffen tatsächlich nicht nur die Automobilindustrie. Für Deutschland kann man sagen: Sie betreffen die Nation."

[6] „Alles, was sich über Deutsche sagen lässt, kann man auch über den Diesel



sagen.“

[7] [„Hamburg führt als erste Stad Fahrverbote von Diesel-Fahrzeugen ein.“](#) Stern, May 23, 2018,

[8] [„Diesel-Skandal: Abgas-Tests mit Affen und Menschen - VW, Daimler und BMW.“](#) FOCUS, January 29, 2018,

Featured image by [David Becker](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Allegralaboratory: Next step

Allegra
October, 2018



Dear Allies, after a ‘magical intellectual carpet ride’ that has already lasted for five years, it is time for a new chapter in the life of our beloved website: [Julie Billaud](#) and [Miia Halme-Tuomisaari](#) will be taking a step back, and we are thrilled to welcome in [Agathe Mora](#) as the new editor-in-chief – or Editor in Sheets, as her Allegra profile states.

Agathe has been a part of the Allegra network for quite a while now. She finished her PhD last year at the University of Edinburgh on post-conflict property restitution in Kosovo. In addition to being a sparkling academic mind, she is also a committed public anthropologist, among others valiantly lobbying for the cause of precarious academics at the EASA.

This is a big change for us as you can imagine: it was in 2013 when Julie and Miia started the website, hardly imagining that it would grow into the extraordinary



'thing' that it is today! Of course we don't envision our shared journey to end as we will continue as Directors of Things & Stuff!

Agathe will be joined in by [Jon Schubert](#) who has already become familiar to you as our Director of Outreach.

In addition we are excited to welcome [Liina Mustonen](#) as our new Director of Books.

We also have another big change coming up: after years of fantastically managing both Things & Stuff, Andrea Klein will be leaving us. We cannot express how grateful we remain for all her hard work over the years!

Yet in the midst of all these changes many things will remain familiar, including the composition of the board of Allegra Lab Association which includes for this year [Judith Beyer](#) as chair, Julie Billaud as vice-chair, Miia Halme-Tuomisaari as treasurer, and [Antonio De Lauri](#), [Felix Girke](#), Agathe Mora and Jon Schubert as board members.

Warm welcome to Agathe, Jon and Liina - we look forward to seeing where our shared future will lead us! And our warmest thanks to our Allies everywhere for making all this happen: for reading us, writing for us and generally embracing the bizarre creative spark known as Allegra!