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# Collaboration Today and the Re-Imagination of the Classic Scene of Fieldwork Encounter

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*Refunctioned ethnography has a more complicated cast of characters than the conversations traditional between the ethnographer and native subjects or informants. In contrast to the bilateral encounter over a camp table, ethnography for present situations is normally if not invariably constituted by the ethnographer, multiple subjects in some relation to one another (what relation may be self-evident, or may have to be discovered by the anthropologist) and liaisons. The contours of ethnographic fieldwork are determined by the relations the ethnographer establishes with the liaisons and the subjects who provide the material critical to the construction of her project. Rather than a sequence of interviews, refunctioned ethnography is much more like what in theater would be an ensemble production, which works through synchronization, or perhaps better, a film montage, in which relations among disparate and apparently disconnected items are established.*

—David A. Westbrook, *Navigators of the Contemporary: Why Ethnography Matters*

For us “collaboration” represents not some new or revamped practice to be added to the repertoire of methodological tools available to an ethnographer; rather we view collaboration as central to what we have termed a refunctioning of ethnography (Holmes and Marcus 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Some will see this as merely an argument for the collaborative relations long embedded in the conditions of fieldwork. This view would not be entirely incorrect, but it would also miss the profoundly altered conditions in which relations of fieldwork today must be negotiated and the more dynamic role that a still under-normed col-

laboration plays in the concepts, analytics, and imaginary of ethnography. Key to this refunctioning is drawing on the analytical acumen and existential insights of our subjects to recast the intellectual imperatives of our own methodological practices, in short, the para-ethnographic practices of our subjects.

Working amid and on collaborations significantly shifts the purposes of ethnography from description and analysis, inevitably distanced practices for which it has settled, to a deferral to subjects' modes of knowing, a function to which ethnography has long aspired. This act of deferral, as a distinctive methodological premise that we have derived from our relationship with David "Bert" Westbrook, a legal scholar who has written a book on this relationship (Westbrook 2008), is thus generative of different collaborative configurations by which, we believe, the architecture of a refunctioned ethnography gains coherence.

Most contemporary ethnographic projects face in their formative moments a distinctive conundrum. The long-established anthropological archive does little in the way of providing access and, in fact, may frustrate entry to the kind of ethnographic settings that many of us now seek to explore: epistemic communities—in which "research," broadly conceived, is integral to the function of these communities. The science lab serves as the paradigmatic example, but we think that an experimental ethos is now built into the structure of the contemporary and manifest in countless settings, ranging from alternative art spaces to central banks, from communities of climate scientists to communities of Catholic political activists. The expert, and the culture of expertise that he or she inhabits, is a preferred subject and milieu of contemporary ethnographic inquiry, because within them emergent social and cultural forms are being devised and enacted.

In such compelling settings, the methodological preoccupations and theoretical conceits that have both legitimated and enabled the powerfully imagined scene of fieldwork exchange between anthropologist and subject in the past tend to be of diminished value and may even be useless. Yet, at precisely the moment that we find ourselves bereft of a long-established and even beloved professional research apparatus, we learn that within these milieus of contemporary fieldwork operate reflexive subjects whose intellectual practices assume real or figurative interlocutors. We can find a preexisting ethnographic consciousness or curiosity, which we term para-ethnography, nested in alternative art

space in Tokyo or São Paulo, at an environmental nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Costa Rica, the central bank of Chile and the headquarters of the major pharmaceutical firm in Zurich or Mumbai. This kind of communicative relationship is anticipated within the Russian Academy of Sciences and a mine engineering department in a university in Johannesburg. Among junior officers of the Australian Armed Forces just back from a tour in Afghanistan we can encounter a robust critical consciousness and novel registers of politics and experience as well as a taste for Afghan cuisine, all of which can sustain ethnographic collaborations. In the haunts of youth culture in Shanghai or a police headquarters in Caracas, traveling with an itinerate folk opera troupe in northern China or with human rights activists in Chiapas or Darfur, the figure of the para-ethnographer comes into view. If one ventures into the back offices of a French investment bank to converse with the mathematicians who engineer financial instruments, or talks with climate modelers in Boulder or meets with Catholic activists serving the elderly in Milan or Warsaw, one encounters actors experimenting with various narratives of their personal circumstances and the ambiguous conditions framing their expectations and sentiments. Then there are the physicians interpreting new imaging technologies or the televangelists mediating the spiritual lives of a globally connected charismatic community, both practitioners implicated in technological changes that neither fully understands.

In all of these settings we find figures involved in creative practices that assume intellectual partners, interlocutors with whom a critical conversation can unfold thus anticipating a collaborative engagement. To define conditions of fieldwork in these settings so as to pursue our agendas, we must first meet expectations that anticipate what ethnography might mean for them and for us. Fitting in so as to be able to do ethnography (nothing new in this!) means doing a kind of conceptual work with partners in fieldwork that both revises preconceived research frames to their core and remains legible in and constitutive of whatever ethnography claims for itself as a product of research.

Constituting scenes of fieldwork out of real life, so to speak, is experienced by many of us today whose fieldwork gains compass and scale by the conceptual work that we do with latter-day “key informants,” who as epistemic partners, instead, define the imaginary and plot of our own inquiries. Hence ethnographic projects emerge out of a series

of in-fieldwork collaborative articulations of orienting questions and concepts that the research situation is felt, if not understood, to present to its partners.

First, “our methods,” that is the practices of ethnography, have been assimilated as key intellectual modalities of our time. Inside bureaucracies and policy-making circles of various kinds are contests over interpretations of emerging realities. Regardless of winners or losers, perspectives are in play that parallel the curiosities of ethnographers in particularities, the conditions of lived ordinary experience, and a sensitivity to the rules of informal culture that dominate governing rationalities and formalisms. Therefore, there is little demand for ethnography itself to duplicate, or to operate independently of these para-ethnographic tendencies and desires, at least little demand within the scenes of fieldwork, which is not to say that there is nothing left for it to do. Ethnography advances today by deferring to, absorbing, and being altered by found reflexive subjects—by risking collaborative encounters of uncertain outcomes for the production of ethnographic knowledge in the forms that have been regulated by the disciplinary communities that propel anthropologists into fieldwork.

Second, within the epistemic communities that we seek to explore, our subjects are fully capable of doing superb ethnography in their own idioms. Within their own situated discourses, the basic descriptive function of ethnography is very likely to be already exercised. Artfactually, books and memoirs emerge every day now from within, so to speak, that explain, with a strong edge of critique, how the most complex and strategic contemporary processes, institutions, and organizations operate and have their own cultures. Anthropologists are not needed to add “critique,” moral injunction, or higher meaning to these accounts.

Third, we must therefore relearn our method from our subjects as epistemic partners, from a careful assessment of how they engage our world and our time intellectually. This presumes motivation, intent, purpose, curiosity, and therefore, intellectual appropriation, on the part of subjects who agree to become part of, or cooperate with, ethnographic inquiry.

Fourth, against the prevailing theoretical tides of the last two decades, the ethnographic subject has returned forcefully and persuasively. Put indelicately, the subject is back and fully in our post-structuralist faces. We want this subject to perform an intellectual operation for us that

we cannot do under the established imaginary of the ethnographer's relation to subject as informant. This renegotiation of the rules of engagement with the dialogic, epistemic subject in ethnographic research opens the intellectual space for a rethinking of collaboration beyond the older understanding of it as the subject responding to, cooperating with, and tolerating the ethnographer's more or less overt agendas.

There are two common senses of "collaboration" to which we take exception in developing ours in this essay. One is the sense of collaboration long implicitly embedded in anthropological fieldwork, concerning the anthropologist in relation to a less powerful and formally silent subject in traditional ethnography. This sense has been the source of much critique since the 1980s, and is the basis today of restating the ethics of research by recognizing as norm of research practice these long-embedded collaborative relations. In our rethinking of fieldwork relationships, we have a sense of the dynamics of power and the intellectual standing of the reflexive subject. For us, collaboration is overt, epistemic, and mutually invested in.

The other sense of "collaboration" that we do not intend is a heightened contemporary ideology of collective practice, in which all projects of fieldwork define themselves. This is collaboration that defines the pervasive condition of the contemporary social that the (still usually lone) ethnographer wants to work within. Both ideologically and tangibly, it is the collaboratory of the information age and the operating ethos of the organizations (corporations, universities, NGOs, etc.), institutions, and arrangements that define the processes that anthropologists study worldwide. It is the "ether" of spaces of fieldwork today. Of course ethnographers must blend into this ideological order as the condition of doing fieldwork research, but in so doing, they cannot quite avoid the once deprofessionalizing move of "going native." This is the problem of not just appearing to go along with the collaborative milieu in order to do ethnography but also responding to the environmental imperatives to work collaboratively, all the while functioning with a reimagined yet fundamentally classic, Malinowskian conception of fieldwork. But being marginal natives or strangers in a world that constitutes itself as collaborations all the way down just won't do. Ethnographers need to construct models of fieldwork as collaboration *for themselves*, models that let them operate with their own research agendas inside the pervasive collaboratories that define social spaces today.

As against these two senses of collaboration—atonement for the past sin of not recognizing collaboration in traditional fieldwork, and going along with “collaborations” as the environment of research, so as to be in control of one’s research as the still lone ethnographer—we want to distinguish a third understanding of collaboration, that remakes classic fieldwork.

For us, the figure of the para-ethnographer changes fundamentally the rules of the game for collaboration, and the mediation of ideas and sensibilities encompassed by and within the ethnographic exchange. We have no interest in collaboration as a “division of labor” among the investigators who control the design of a project, or as the basis for blending academic expertise, or as a gesture to a canonical interdisciplinarity. The point is, again, to integrate fully our subjects’ analytical acumen and insights to define the issues at stake in our projects as well as the means by which we explore them.

Experimental discourses found in scenes of fieldwork everywhere today, and at least in part impelled by the ideological push for new arrangements and paradigms in established organizations as “being collaborative,” presume a “master interlocutor” to whom these reflexive stories are addressed. The interlocutor can be “real”—a family member, colleague, patient, client, and so forth—or “figurative”—the market, public, and so on—but our point is that there is an emphatic presumption of audiences. Such audiences constitute positions into which ethnographers can easily insinuate themselves. Thus, the space of collaboration is created incidentally for the ethnographer prior to his or her arrival on the scene; the ethnographer is a figure whose presence is anticipated.

### A Short History of Our Thinking Together into an Era of Collaborative Imperatives

The Late Editions project of the 1990s, produced under George’s editorship at Rice University (see Marcus 1993–2000), was a decade-long experiment and response to the then current intense critique in the academy of realist and documentary representation (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986), yet at a time—the *fin de siècle*—when there was an equally intense intellectual and public interest precisely in documentary accounts of the century’s legacy and new (even millennial) futures

emerging. Through collective and interdisciplinary editorial deliberations—a collaborative project indeed, although collaboration at that time was not the pervasive ideological figure that it is now—under agreed topical frames, participants were asked to develop conversations with selected, cooperating subjects throughout the world, and to produce dialogical writings, representations of conversations rather than realities, *entretiens*, in the French genre, for a series of eight annuals until the year 2000. The conversational, dialogical (and not simply interview) format of the series, produced documentation of a heightened sense of global transformations, hedged against the then current and powerful critiques of realist documentary representation characteristic of fin-de-siècle ideology.

Whatever the successes and failures of this collaborative experiment, for us (Doug was a participant in the project over the years) Late Editions drew critical attention to the present conditions and classic ideology of fieldwork relationships in anthropological ethnography, as the compass and scale of such research was changing markedly through the 1990s. Such questions were a by-product, really, of the specific intentions of the series. While the Late Editions project, because of its origins among anthropologists, asked its various contributors and reporters from outside of anthropology to exercise something like an ethnographic sensibility, we never thought that we were producing a paradigm for the rethinking of ethnographic fieldwork itself. Instead, we were responding to theoretical critiques and documentary urges of the times.

One legacy of the Late Editions project was the emergence of the scene of fieldwork as a problem for the respective disciplinary projects that we were pursuing at the time. For George, the problem was how to rethink the dynamics of fieldwork relationships in the context of a paradigm of multi-sited ethnography, which he was trying to articulate (Marcus [1995] 1998). Having grown up in anthropology on the study of elites, George thought through a revised scene of fieldwork in terms of a trope of “complicity” (Marcus [1997] 1998) in which the ethnographer allied with the subject as intellectual partner in coming to terms with the understanding of a shared common object of curiosity “elsewhere.” George’s conceptual work was fed by the co-evolving research of Doug on shifting political trends in Europe, work that required him to think differently about the dynamics of fieldwork than he had in his



earlier research in northern Italy. Doug's fieldwork at the European Parliament led to scenes of fieldwork elsewhere that coalesced as an account of the social and cultural strength of neofascism in contemporary Europe (see Holmes 2000). The key point here is that this latter shift in his research developed because of his rethinking of the dynamics of the fieldwork encounter, reported on in the Late Editions series as a conversation with Bruno Gollnisch of Jean-Marie Le Pen's movement (see Holmes 1993).

George and Doug's shared efforts of the 1990s have led them to further develop after 2000 a reimagination of the scene of fieldwork encounter as collaboration, according to this explicit topical fashion and ideological imperative of the present. Since 2000, the project vehicles for our joint reimagining of the scene of fieldwork have been increasingly posed in terms of collaboration in which the first section of this essay has been couched. George completed a work, *Ocasião*, with a Portuguese aristocrat, Fernando Mascarenhas, that on the face of it looked like another in the genre of reflexive, coproduced and even dialogic ethnography so popular after the critiques of the 1980s (Marcus and Mascarenhas 2005). But for George there were additional principles at work in his epistolary exchanges with Mascarenhas. While much is learned in *Ocasião* about the world of the contemporary Portuguese aristocracy, the roles of anthropologist and subject in this text are never settled. Instead of ethnographer and subject, we are presented with a game of mutual deferral and appropriation. *Ocasião* uses this game to explore inchoate norms of collaboration implicit in an ethnography in which the fiction of the ethnographer's authority is mutually acknowledged but is variously interpreted by anthropologist and subject. Elements of this relationship were later to be more fully explored when Bert Westbrook arrived in the realm of George and Doug's longstanding thinking together. And these are the elements that seem characteristic of ethnography as collaboration today.

### Along Came Bert: The Appearance of a Third Makes Two, Us and Him—What Happens to the Fiction of Fieldwork Encounter

Over the past four years, George and Doug have had regular and sustained conversations with Professor David "Bert" Westbrook, formerly a corporate lawyer and now a scholar of corporations (see, for example,

Westbrook and Lemert 2007) and many other subjects at the University at Buffalo Law School, perhaps the last to sustain the ethos of the Critical Legal Studies movement at its peak in the 1980s. Bert came to George and Doug's attention in a way quite conventional for many academic associations: his remarkable work of social and philosophical critique of capitalism and its post-World War II evolution, *City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent* (2004) informed their own projects, and especially Doug's on central banking, in its very early stages. But they also found operating within the text something that looked like para-ethnographic sensibilities and, more importantly, they found the outlines of an argument or arguments that might begin to explain the emergence of these intellectual practices that anticipate collaboration. From his own curiosity, Bert perceived that the practice of anthropological ethnography, sensitized and stimulated by its auto-critiques of the 1980s, as intellectual form and distinctive technology of inquiry, could support his growing critique of scholarly work in law schools and intellectual life in the contemporary United States generally. The three of them began mutually beneficial conversations (see for example, Holmes, Marcus, and Westbrook 2006) that are characteristic of academic life at its most fulfilling.

As these conversations developed, Doug and George began to construct their relationship with Bert fancifully and fictively "as if" he were the anthropologist's classic other. Their relationship to him, though collegial and intellectually satisfying, also seemed to be deeply relevant to the kinds of fieldwork situations and relationships that they were trying to understand in their own projects (e.g., the politics of European union, central banking, *Ocasião*) and in those of their students (e.g., the para-site interventions of the Center for Ethnography, to be discussed shortly), and of many other ethnographic inquiries played out on multi-sited scales. The fact that a similar sort of curiosity seemed to be reciprocal on Bert's part, and that indeed his areas of expertise and experience were those of the reflexive subjects, the "counterparts," of so many current ethnographic projects, made this fiction of the scene of fieldwork for George and Doug irresistible.

Yet, this is as far as this fanciful imaginary would have gone had not Bert pushed his inquiry into the culture of anthropology through George and Doug with much more intellectual power than they pushed their fictive inquiry into his space. His aggressive move to understand

and eventually write about ethnography, with George and Doug as informants, and its possible uses as a form of critical discourse and intellectual work generally, stimulated them to think about their relationship to Bert more seriously, as a vehicle to think systematically and experimentally about the changing nature of fieldwork projects in their own and others' projects of anthropological research.

So, George and Doug's relationship to Bert became something akin to a prototype, a simulacrum for thinking through a new schematics of fieldwork alongside or parallel to ongoing projects of ethnographic research with the analogous relations to reflexive subjects mutually recognized as para-ethnographers. George and Doug's relationship to Bert—call it a collaboration—thus gave them a context to work though certain characteristics of the collaborative norms and forms developing in many projects of ethnographic research today.

A critical turn in this relationship occurred when its reciprocal nature became clear, and especially when, with extraordinary rapidity in late 2006 and early 2007, Bert produced a book, *Navigators of the Contemporary: Why Ethnography Matters* (2008). This clearly and materially represented an appropriation of George and Doug's thinking about anthropology for the purposes of Bert's own intellectual projects in his space. While up to that point only fancifully playing with their relationship to Bert as one of anthropologist to subject, contemplating him as (after, Levi-Strauss's famous quip on totemism) "good to think about their own parallel concerns with," what were they now to do with being appropriated by Bert's brilliant act of (counter) para-ethnography? What kind of conceptual work had Bert done for them in producing this text? What did this turn in their relationship to Bert correspond to in the changing dynamics of fieldwork research that they had been trying to come to terms with in their own research?

Here it might be useful to attend briefly to what Bert claimed he was doing in providing his account of the contemporary predicament of anthropological ethnography as understood through his relationship to his informants, George and Doug. It should be clear that Bert was not appropriating ethnography from them so that he could literally become an ethnographer in his own space. Rather he perceived a profound problem of intellectual form and critical acuity of thought in his own milieu, that of legal scholarship and education leading into legal practice, and ultimately of the understanding of politics within the over-

arching frame of markets, corporations, and governance of contemporary (Western) society. Through his relationship to George and Doug, and probably before that, he came to reflect on the power of “mere” conversations and the chains of association that they create—call them collaborations—as the contemporary form in which important collective intellectual work could be done. It is the example, ideology—past and present—and the actual practices of ethnography, that have so defined George and Doug’s mutual interest that inspired Bert to investigate them in order to understand the value of their thinking about a disciplinary practice for his own scholarly projects. Bert thus brilliantly appropriates their thought about the refunctioning of ethnography and restates it in terms of his own agenda—that is, new ways to have conversations in “bureaucracies” (like universities and law schools) and against false dreams of intellectual “celebrity.” According to Bert, ethnography provides collaborations with subjects who provide their own accounts for their own purposes but who in so doing can get at what he calls “present situations” that in turn have broader linked trajectories to other situations and problems in the world (not a bad restatement of George and Doug’s frame, and at the same time the situation of his own relation to them—call it collaboration upon collaboration about collaboration).

So, Bert has performed a kind of tutored appropriation of anthropology. It wasn’t George and Doug whom he appropriated but an understanding of their disciplinary culture and practice. This is reverse anthropology in the finest Malinowskian legacy. Collaboration for Bert has been about discussing the dynamics of relationships, and this is of key conceptual importance to him in thinking about the relationship of the (academic) intellectual in the United States to politics. What energized George and Doug’s thinking together over the years was seized upon by an unanticipated interlocutor who energized himself by appropriating them as subjects, so to speak, and restating their discourse in a different terrain, that in turn has produced a surge in their own longstanding conversations about the refunctioning of ethnographic research since the 1980s (this metaphorical language of energy flow to characterize these intellectual exchanges may seem extravagant, but it does capture a sense of the breakthrough satisfaction in the relationship after the moment of Bert’s decisive materialization of it in the production of *Navigators*).

Now, after Bert has so decisively declared himself about what this relationship has meant to him and his projects, let us come back to the question of what this relationship to Bert means for our (George and Doug's) joint thinking about the changing character of ethnography. Returning to the fiction that our relationship to Bert has been "like fieldwork," and taking it seriously as a prototypical parallel space of simulacrum, what have we learned about the principles or changing schematics of fieldwork relationships—call them collaborations—that are currently developing alongside our own and others' projects of research? Clearly the relationship to Bert has moved us ethnographically into domains in which we are interested—the law, markets, corporations—in far more profound ways than had the relationship been familiarly collegial, more formal, or not gone beyond talking to Bert about his book *City of Gold*, which stands for him. By the contest of mutual appropriation, which Bert won, so to speak, because he was perhaps more motivated (the language of contest, though perhaps foreign and uncomfortable in speaking about fieldwork relationships is apt, in this case), we were transported more profoundly into a world that we ethnographically wanted to be in than would otherwise have been likely. Bert has provided us with a compass to construct research in a variety of domains in which our students and we are interested (central banks, NGOs, legal documents and judgments, international regimes of governance, politics). It is for us to move on from here, but the point of this essay has been to say something about the contemporary dynamics of situating ethnography, the prime purpose of which in the classic era would have been couched in something like working with the "native's point of view." The contemporary equivalent of this is something much more complicated and collaborative than our relationships to Bert as a simulacrum has given us the opportunity to explore.

At its most schematic, the relationship with Bert represents a fieldwork situation where an appropriation by a subject or set of subjects (instead of a "Bert," perhaps an ongoing collective project in the scene[s] of fieldwork) with what we have termed para-ethnographic curiosity has trumped the authority, or comfortable self-definition, of the ethnographer as the one who conducts the inquiry and shapes the conceptual agenda. The ethnographer, to work "inside" a conceptual space, is now brought into it by an unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable re-negotiation of his or her own framework, which he or she holds

dear. For all of the traditional inclinations in anthropology to be open, to probe native points of view, etc., conceptual work of an altogether different order is going on when the categories that inform the ethnographer's frame are being appropriated.

For fieldwork to prosper, the ethnographer must defer to this appropriation before his or her own pursuits can move ahead. This act of deferral, requires a different sort of imaginary of collaboration in fieldwork to achieve the core desideratum of ethnography in many research projects today. To fail to reproduce something like working within "native points of view" amid today's para-ethnographically inclined subjects is to lose the historic distinctiveness of ethnographic accounts, which we want to sustain in these terms. Despite the openness of ethnography to subjects in the past, we think that the "deferral to appropriation" as one schematic of conceptual work that defines the heart of de facto fieldwork collaborations today is the "raw material" that the turns in our relationship to Bert provides the project of reimagining the scene of fieldwork today. To be sure, we have focused here only on the collaborative conditions that produce a different sort of terrain and function for fieldwork; how a found collaboratively conceived conceptual apparatus plays out in the course of a project is another, more elaborate story. The fact that fieldwork gains traction with something akin to our simulacrum with Bert—the set direction for an ensemble production, as Bert himself characterizes it—is as far as we want to go in this essay.

A final and fair question is how rare is a "Bert" or "Berts" in routine creations of scenes of fieldwork today? Are we drawing too much from an extreme case of serendipitous advantage and fanciful construction? That is, how valid is it, or how far can the relationship with Bert be used as a simulacrum to think about the schematics and dynamics of changing fieldwork situations, especially in relation to para-ethnographically inclined reflexive subjects and counterparts? At stake are de facto norms in play in many current fieldwork projects about relationships that can be called collaborative and that badly need articulation, discussion, and debate. While there are perhaps several genres or schematics at play, we believe that the dynamics of collaboration that we have described in our relationship to Bert gives us a working imaginary for refunctioning ethnography.

## Post–2000 Projects

Since 2000 we have each developed a project or vehicle in which to probe more systematically the changing scene of fieldwork, themed as collaboration that we had been reimagining together previously. In Doug’s case, it is an ethnography of central banking that demonstrates among other things that “Bert” is, by no means, an oddity or an exception but representative of interlocutors who can be recruited to the refunctioning effort and to turning the tables provocatively in diverse settings. In George’s case, it is a reconsideration of the pedagogy of graduate dissertation projects that strategically bring students into careers of ethnographic research. These projects have been deeply informed by the schematics of their co-occurring and parallel relationship to “Bert.”

## Central Banking

Doug has examined the collaborative scene that has emerged around an experiment, orchestrated in a group of central banks, by which these institutions recruited the public to confer value on our currencies. The experiment—initially designed and formalized as policy by the Reserve Bank of New Zealand—seeks to influence future sensibilities—not just sensibilities about the future but also sensibilities in the future—to shape expectations that impel the most fundamental dynamic of market economies: the evolution of prices.

The logic guiding the experiment, which has come to be known prosaically as “inflation targeting,” goes like this: If the behavior of prices is “expectational,” then a policy that projects central bank action across an explicit time horizon can serve as a means to shape sentiments. As “economic agents”—that is, you and I—assimilate policy intentions as our own personal expectations, we do the work of the central bank. As our expectations about prices become “anchored” by virtue of this kind of communicative action, we confer a continuing value on currencies by restraining inflationary pressures that would devalue them. The creation and perpetuation of this regime of value is predicated, in part, on carefully calibrated communications—“econometric allegories”—informed by a keen technical acumen and formulated by a small group of individuals working within these institutions.

Doug’s project is framed not as an ethnography of a central bank or central banking per se but as an ethnography of an experiment, broadly

conceived, that persuaded these famously secretive institutions—institutions that were in some notable cases committed well into the 1990s to a mystique of secrecy as vital to their function—to adopt far-reaching communicative practices under the aegis of transparency. The point here is that “our” ethnography can be nested within this kind of experimental scene and yet operate independent of it.

Experimentation here is not merely about a formal testing of a particular proposition or hypothesis; rather it is about the continuous evolution of a set of social practices and the critical labor by which the personnel of central banks bring to bear new insights and knowledge to modify and refine the assumptions that inform their practices. Within the inflation target framework, there is the possibility for errors of analysis and judgment, infelicitous timing, and imprecise communications that can yield a range of “suboptimal” outcomes and even overt failures. In other words, it is precisely the possibility that this framework can “fail” that underwrites the experimental ethos in these settings and introduces a creative tension within the collaborative scene.

Actors in these institutions are fully aware of the unstable nature of the economic phenomena they are charged with guiding as well as the limitations of their analytical tools to measure, if not predict, its performance. They understand that they must continually create agile theoretical accounts in order to capture the dynamic character of this global system, and they do this with candor and reflexive acuity. The critical discourse that pervades these institutions thus anticipates an interlocutor: a real or figurative interlocutor to whom these practices are explained and justified, and it is this role that an ethnographer is, incidentally, suited to personify. Under the aegis of “transparency” that currently pervades these institutions, the ethnographer has something like an ideological legitimization, if not a full intellectual remit to pursue collaborative exchanges.

Doug’s inquiry is about the creation and articulations of value by means of econometric allegories, allegories that constitute far more than mere commentaries, reflections, or analyses of economic phenomena: rather, they are themselves economic mechanisms instrumental for the operation of the global economy. Hence, the creation of these allegories serve as a strategic means for intermediating between micro- and macro-level phenomena as a handful of reflexive subjects create narratives designed to influence financial markets globally. In



the dynamic epistemic scenes of Doug's project there is an "overlapping academic/fieldwork space," in which practice and critical scholarship are inseparable and where an experimental ethos is cultivated across what George has termed "para-sites."

### A Center for Ethnography and Para-site Interventions in Dissertation Research

Upon inaugurating the Center for Ethnography at the University of California, Irvine, in 2006, George with others defined one of its key themes, "The Ethnography of/as Collaboration" (see the link at <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~ethnog/>). Under this theme, they sponsor "para-site" events: intervention into the appropriate phases of credential-defining first fieldwork projects of anthropologists-in-the-making.<sup>1</sup> One of the center's board members, the anthropologist Justin Richland, expressed the function of the para-site interventions in introducing the center's second such event:

Ethnography as both theory and method has escaped the disciplinary borders of its anthropological origins, and even beyond academia. The notions and practices typically associated with "classical" ethnography—detailed observation of *in situ* human action, coupled with a deep(er) engagement with their subjects—are today a regular feature of the labor of diversely situated actors. The range of persons and activities engaging in such para-ethnography is vast, from "brand" capitalists to ethno-indigenous culture-brokers, and equally recognizable as modes of state surveillance and certain types of performance art. Moreover, as the subjects of anthropological investigation become ever more attenuated from the classical "native on the beach," ethnographers increasingly find themselves confronted with people whose everyday theories and practices appear strikingly familiar to their own. The time has come for ethnographers to come to grips with the ways in which some mode of para-ethnography, undertaken by actors who are collaborators in (rather than subjects of) our investigations, is always already a part of sites where our research alights. In so doing, we begin to take measure of ethnography's leakages, and particularly the ways in which they affect our investigations as they are taking place.

The purpose of para-site experiments is to perform just such an intervention. It is to both ask for and perform a kind of shared

conceptual labor with our collaborator-subjects at key moments in ongoing projects of ethnographic research. The seminar or workshop—modalities of the academic setting—becomes a kind of theater to which non-academic subjects are invited for a temporary moment of complicity. As theater, the para-site is orchestrated by the ethnographer with subjects in order to derive a conceptual apparatus for the ethnographer's particular work, in ways specific to the project's thematic material.

The para-site event is thus a carefully designed intervention into research projects that are still individually conceived, conducted, and written up. At the same time, it compels researchers and their collaborator-subjects to reflect more explicitly upon the intellectual partnerships at stake in their research relationships. Para-site events enact a space for a kind of conceptual work that is not derivable from theory, academic literatures, or interviews. Rather it pursues those moments of ethnographic investigation that embody its most thoroughly collaborative norms, serving to operationalize the conceptual work that these norms always entail and on which the originality of the ethnographic work depends.

. . . No two para-site experiments are alike. Each presents different design problems and opportunities in shaping academic contexts of the seminar or workshop for conceptual work that is both inside fieldwork and the arenas where it is ultimately received and judged. (<http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~ethnog/>)

So, by 2000, both George and Doug were confronted by new dimensions and qualities to the dialogic properties of fieldwork in the context of ethnographic research projects of nontraditional compass and scale. These were very clearly issues about collaborative research norms in fieldwork of a different character than had been critiqued and exposed in various earlier critiques of Malinowskian fieldwork (see Lassiter 2005). The articulation of what these proto-norms at play in contemporary (now routine) multi-sited research are, and to discern what their implications for the future of anthropology's distinctive and signature mode of inquiry might be, are only now being addressed in what we consider to be an explicitly ideological era (or perhaps just fashion?) of pervasive collaborative knowledge-making endeavors of all kinds. Certainly, contemporary ethnography presumes collaboration as a pervasive social condition in the problems and sites where anthropologists

have the ambition to develop their research (it permeates, for example the sites of fieldwork in the range of examples that we offered previously), but to what extent is it necessary to conceive ethnography itself, in its framing and doing, as collaboration. Does “collaboration” now mean more than the trope that has been buried in its humanistic professional culture and methodological craft of the past?

## Envoi

As we finish this essay we are embarking on participation—call it collaboration—in an ethnographic research project that reflects this era’s pervasive imperatives to collaborate, both in the way that institutional processes of all kinds are organized, and in the way such imperatives arise from within the ethnographic method itself. As perhaps a special irony, Bert Westbrook will be moving along with us into the growing collaborative space of the ethnographers who are undertaking this project.

Pascal Lamy, general secretary of the World Trade Organization (WTO), invited Professor Marc Abélès of the *École des Hautes Études en Science Sociales*, who is known for his many studies of French and European political organization, to undertake an ethnographic study of the WTO, with access to its internal operations at a highly sensitive time in this relatively new organization’s history. Lamy insisted on a team of researchers of broad multicultural makeup. Abélès has invited George to join this team, and George has invited the participation of Doug and Bert, given their past and present experience in studying elite bureaucracies.

The WTO invitation and the underlying expectation of ethnography, we think, is not at all exceptional today. There are emerging institutional arrangements that make ethnographic expertise attractive in technocratic settings, like the WTO. Rather than merely recruiting the ethnographer (in collaborative or consultative mode) to provide an objective and, preferably favorable, representation of these institutional milieus, sponsors and patrons are asking for the participation of ethnographers in internal efforts to refunction key aspects of institutional “cultures.” Under the complex and still poorly understood aegis of transparency, information, knowledge, and the work of negotiation produced at the WTO have acquired new currency as part of the public discourse on some of the most vexatious aspects of globalization. We suspect that

it is for the furtherance of this agenda—essentially the creation of reflexive knowledge practices inside the WTO that can continually shape public opinion (if not consciousness)—that ethnographers have been invited to participate.

Thus, from the perspective of George and Doug’s earlier projects, they (along with Bert), and the other members of the project, are being asked to participate within the ramifying imperatives of organizational experiments that seek to create an idiom through which a global regime of liberal trade gains articulation, a patois, so to speak, by which capitalism can speak reflexively. Call it collaboration within the pervasive fashion and imperative of the moment, and call it collaboration as an emerging mode within the ethnographic tradition of inquiry, of the sort presaged in the schematics performed by George, Doug, and Bert.

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GEORGE E. MARCUS was for twenty-five years chair of the anthropology department at Rice University. During that period, he coedited (with James Clifford) *Writing Culture*, coauthored (with Michael Fischer) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, inaugurated the journal *Cultural Anthropology*, published *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, and through the 1990s, created and edited a series of annuals, *Late Editions*, published by the University of Chicago Press and intended to document the century’s end by innovations in representing the ethnographic encounter. His most recent books are *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (with Paul Rabinow, James Faubion, and Tobias Rees, Duke University Press, 2008) and *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be* (edited with James Faubion, Cornell University Press, forthcoming). Since 2005, he has been Chancellor’s Professor at the University of California, Irvine, where he founded the Center for Ethnography, dedicated to examining the vulnerabilities and possibilities of this venerable technology of knowledge making.

## Note

1. Here, from its Web site, is the informing rationale for the Center for Ethnography’s para-site experiments. Note that the use of “para-site” is inspired by the concept for the eighth volume of *Late Editions*, the *fin de siècle* series of annuals edited by George E. Marcus through the 1990s: *Para-Sites: A Casebook against Cynical Reason*, *Late Editions* 8, *Cultural Studies for the End of the Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

While the design and conduct of ethnographic research in anthropology is still largely individualistic, especially in the way that research is presented in the academy, many projects depend on complex relationships of partnership and collaboration, at several sites, and not just those narrowly conceived of as fieldwork. The binary here and there-ness of fieldwork is preserved in anthropology departments, despite the reality of fieldwork as movement in complex, unpredictable spatial and temporal frames. This is especially the case where ethnographers work at sites of knowledge production with others, who are patrons, partners, and subjects of research at the same time.

In the absence of formal norms of method covering these de facto and intellectually substantive relations of partnership and collaboration in many contemporary projects of fieldwork, we would like to encourage, where feasible, events in the Center that would blur the boundaries between the field site and the academic conference or seminar room. Might the seminar, conference, or workshop under the auspices of a Center event or program also be an integral, designed part of the fieldwork?—a hybrid between a research report, or reflection on research, and ethnographic research itself, in which events would be attended by a mix of participants from the academic community and from the community or network defined by fieldwork projects. We are terming this overlapping academic/fieldwork space in contemporary ethnographic projects a para-site. It creates the space outside conventional notions of the field in fieldwork to enact and further certain relations of research essential to the intellectual or conceptual work that goes on inside such projects. It might focus on developing those relationships, which in our experience have always informally existed in many fieldwork projects, whereby the ethnographers finds subjects with whom he or she can test and develop ideas (these subjects have not been the classic key informants as such, but the found and often uncredited mentors or muses who correct mistakes, give advice, and pass on interpretations as they emerge). (<http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~ethnog/>)

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