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George Marcus

- 1 My paper is the final supplement from the space of anthropology and the conditions of the production of interpretation and research in anthropology, particularly in the American context. As a kind of communicative device I had to think of a metaphor that you could keep in mind whether or not to follow it. Originally, what I was going to do was a very complex notion of translation which is what reducibly I still think is expected of anthropology as a science. Not translation of languages but cultural translation is a very complex subject theoretically. The metaphor is the "Green Room" derived from theatre art.
- 2 In the villa on Lake Geneva, which is the home of: the World Trade Organization, there is a Green Room in the Director General's suite. Here nations come to terms, make deals, and sometimes fail to make them; but more importantly, and paraethnographically they define the distinctive terms of their relationships, which are then played out on other more public stages. This room and the politics of the WTO process have been an object of fascination for me and others currently involved in an ethnographic team of the WTO directed by Marc Abelès of the EHESS in Paris. The example of the Green Room at the WTO is a key scene of: ethnographic interest because it serves as a metaphor for the links between the tradecraft of a changing and refunctioned ethnographic fieldwork as a mode of inquiry today and that of performance and site-specific installation art from the '90s forward. There is an affinity between ethnography in its post-1980s predicaments (not so much textual as indeed: performative) and the relational aesthetics of: the 1990s and the still current performance art. But while performance art by the late 1990s had gotten over, or rather defined, its attraction for ethnography (Foster 1995 : « is art ethnography , »); ethnography, in trying to reconceive fieldwork in its anthropological tradition, still has much to learn from performance art about how to give form to its inquiry in the

multiplicity of worlds and publics in which any such project moves and in which it is still expected to articulate something distinctive and specific about its subjects (Marcus 1998). Performance art delivers spectacle; ethnography now delivers descriptions as concepts about contemporary life as a scene of emergence, of social change toward an anticipated or definable near future. To do so, both need to engage actors as collaborators, to create designs out of natural settings, to show care for audience as dynamic, as a public, and to be aware of the ethics of staging.

- 3 After the 1980s “Writing Culture” critiques of: ethnography and anthropological representations of the cultural practices of their subjects (Clifford and Marcus: 1986), the interesting theoretical problems of anthropology have not continued to dwell on its textual representations, but rather have focused on its forms of ‘doing,’ its designs of fieldwork. So as one who continues to be interested in anthropology’s powers of interpretation, explanation, and capacity to participate in and inspire public dialogues, I have become something of a technologist of- -perhaps an experimenter with-- its habitual forms of: inquiry (Rabinow and Marcus 2008, Faubion and Marcus 2009), and in this effort, the modes of producing performance art have been a fertile place to look for inspiration, after its own brief romance with ethnography.
- 4 The Green Room is such a valuable linking metaphor since, while being an institution of theatre, it suggests the considerable debt to the making of theatre that performance art owes and can transfer to ethnography through its own tradecraft. Indeed in the refunctioned ethnography that I and others have: been imagining in a myriad of current schemes and conceptual registers, it is clear that imaginaries of staging, workshop, a space or ground of conceptual aesthetics needs to emerge within every fieldwork project today. And the Green Room, as seized upon literally and symbolically, by the WTO for its purposes is not a bad metaphor for such a space of collaboration and negotiation of coming to terms for what are experiments, be it in the WTO, performance art, or ethnography.
- 5 The Green Room is the place of extreme reflexive specificity and anticipation —the last bit of staging, where the singularity of each performance is negotiated, so to speak, by actors—it is not rehearsal, it is not dramaturgy, but the mediating space between those exercises and performance. Analogously, contemporary ethnographic fieldwork needs a Green Room built into its process, and what might go on within this space both materially and symbolically is suggested by the research that goes into projects of performance art and site-specific installation. I want to engage the link between the fieldwork that contemporary ethnographers do and the research that performance artists do in their projects further here. While I am personally beguiled by the theatrics and theatrical contexts of the Green Room, as the moment, in its place of reflexivity before singular performance, the last stage of staging, I find its metaphorical transference suggestive of the function in both performance art projects and those of: ethnography of spaces of distinctive conceptual control and interpretation, either on the subtle edges of spectacle or fieldwork, or as embedded in this process of each as giving form to process. As with the WTO, which has seized upon the Green Room, for its own paraethnographic and reflexive purposes, it is the materialization of the imaginary of the space of negotiation, of coming to terms, of the distinctive concept work – the radical nominalism of contemporary ethnography - that it does amid high stakes politics, genocide, disease, the messiness of the world. Every performance art project must materialize such a space of practice as does every project of contemporary

ethnography. In some way to signify ethnography in this conference for interesting reasons have presumed that space was defined by professional authority but I think it was ruptured fundamentally not so much here in France but in the United States after 1980s. The Green Room might be thought of as a site of fieldwork and a site of performance. How is it staged, realized, designed is part of the trade craft of both, under conditions where ethnography can learn more from performance arts than vice versa. If I had to extend the metaphor it wouldn't be at least in the ethnographic projects in the anthropology as the Malinowskian scene of encounter between self and the other, but it would actually be the conditions of the "Green room"; as a more accurate sense of what the contestation of the contemporary anthropology is like.

- 6 I was trying to make clear with this case the construction of the field at least in the North American context of anthropology at how certain performance projects that I have seen show that the process is a construction. I just make some references, generalizations and many of the discussions we had they depend upon the stages of the historical culture concept behind it. I believe in the French context the concept of anthropology is more secure because the French idea of culture is a more secure concept types to the notion of civilization. But in American anthropology, involve American anthropology, that concept of culture has always been based in its German origins. These German origins were more related to the "Volk" and its relation to the nation. I believe that when the relationship of American anthropology to the cultural concept was ruptured in the 1980s it created a problem of constructing the object in anthropology in the USA. That has not happened as much in French anthropology. As a result the problem not just of representation but the problem of constructing the field in the anthropology has become a problem much like that - and that's the connection - the problem of constructing a field for work of performance art, site installation, conceptual art in which I am interested in. So some differences in our discussion depend on different histories of cultural concepts and how it has bolstered the project of anthropology in France and in that say the United States. Located myself in the United States I see this possibility more in this strange relationship for users of anthropology, shall we say ethnography by performance artists, which as I said was fundamentally ruptured it in the mid-90s, not in an unfriendly way: performance artists told themselves fundamentally that what they do is not ethnography. That was very productive for them to say that.
- 7 The metaphor of the Green room was in some ways to further this relationship. The final point I want to make is that we do not need to stimulate the controversy now but it is really the question, a critical question, and its relationship, let's say in the Northern American context, between performance art and ethnography after "writing culture" is really a case where ethical concern and discipline are located. I believe that in art there is a primary interest, sensitivity to audience, a primary interest in producing spectacle, in being seen. I don't think there is any of this concern in the work of anthropological ethnography which has in its own realm of production. In this exchange I had at this conference at the Tate modern with these performance artists who were saying "we are not ethnographers", "we do not have this ethical discipline". In other words the problem of ethics in constructing the art could be a personal matter, or a matter of great concern. In general performance art in ethical discipline is not in the relationship to the subject but in the relationship to the work of art and its public, and being seen. Why is this of interests for those of us who produce anthropology and ethnography in North America? It is because of the problem of what some might call

the scalability. That's the actual object of study is not local culture, it is not situated live in community even though that is the experimental contexts of ethnography, it is actually elsewhere. It is actually connected with cultural formations and ideas that are both local and beyond. The ethnographic project is focused on local projects in its tradition and the problem leaves the North American anthropology where it is not underwritten by the idea of the cultural context anymore. As anchoring the site of the field, the problem concerns the scale, the idea of intense local study and how to make it broader. This "broader" is made actually with your subjects in creating first audiences and publics.

- 8 I would argue ethically and we know very little about that in anthropology, we know a lot because of our colonial background, our postcolonial background, about the relationship, our ethical relationship, to traditional subjects. You could argue that after the '80s much of the reflexive theory in anthropology was about this problem of ethics, i.e. this internal problem of ethics in relation to the subject, but almost no concern for the problem of spectacle in the arts. The introduction of relational aesthetic performance art in anthropology is exactly this expansion of a kind of incorporation of publics within the can of ethnography itself. In the final point I believe that many of our discussions it appears that anthropology is a deeply visual media now but after the '80s the methodological metaphors were in terms of dialogue rather than participant observation. I would argue that even in the production of works of visual anthropology that I have seen in North America the sensibility is dialogic more than it is a visual; I mean the production of film. So, I would like to raise this as an important distinction for the assimilation of the modes of investigation embedded within performance art project as something that is transferable actually to the current way in which the ethnographic project emerged in the United States and that is the connection finally with the idea of the "Green Room".

Discussion

- 9 **Public:** Can you explain more about what you mean by "ethics of being seen" on the side of the artists, as a difference with the anthropologist. I was wondering if winners beat of these ethics of being seen you are not already applying a kind of cultural organization. From my little point of view this is a bit reducing concerning the art experience; maybe this is creating a boundary between art and ethnography. I do believe in the link between art and ethnography.
- 10 **George Marcus:** Well, I also believe in that link, but on what terms? Very important for me in the '90s was the work of the group of Cuban artists who actually worked in Cuba and were under the influence of "Writing culture". What was fascinating about their work was actually that they went to two villages, urban areas studying, they did earnest ethnography, "earnest" in the sense of not two weeks or something like that but 46 months of ethnography in order to produce their work what they were actually doing was conditioning to audiences in each case. The purpose of what I considered being anthropological ethnography was to care of their audience it was unethical for them to arrive in these scenes of daily life. In other words this was their "Green Room" for the production of what will be eventually performed in each case. That's actually the best example that occurred in the '90s in Cuba. Nevertheless, in the North American tradition the cultural is still important but it does not bound the idea of the field;

ethnography is always being produced in the realm of unconceived publics and the field has to be designed. A concept for that is derived from the actual ethnography. The WTO case is really the inside work of ethnography based on negotiating this metaphor actually of the “Green Room”. Otherwise we exoticize.

- 11 **Public:** Orlan, quel est pour vous le lien entre art et anthropology? George, in anthropology there has been a parallel movement with “writing culture”, and I wanted to know your position, what do you think, how do people go about constructing the field, the actors they collaborate with. So where is the place of the non-humans, non-livings, of the non cultural?
- 12 **George Marcus:** The concept of the “actant” or the non-human has entered the scene of the field. But I do believe in intense humanism in the field of anthropology itself. So what it requires is a kind of concept work in the field where the actant and its agency is defined, but I don't think you escape the human, actually.
- 13 **Orlan :** Pour ce qui de votre question, j'ai l'impression d'être une anthropologue sociale de terrain. Chaque jour dans le domaine que je traverse, que ce soit le domaine de l'art, le domaine des sciences, soit un autre pays ou quand je vais chez ma voisine, souvent je me sens ici beaucoup plus étrangère que loin. Mais l'anthropologie c'est effectivement l'être humain qu'on analyse.
- 14 **George Marcus:** There is the power relation both in the anthropology and in the performance art in the process of constructing someone as subject. The discussion of the power relationship has been missing but I think the ultimate commentary is based upon the dialogic, I believe this seems to 80. I believe this is not a front stage performance at the performance of staging ground I am interested in those kind of questions.
- 15 **Mette Bovin :** Y a-t-il un rapport entre anthropologie et archéologie, et comment avez-vous choisi vos exemples exotiques de l'Asie, d'Afrique, d'Amérique et je pense aussi aux masques précolombiens dont vous semblez vous inspirer?
- 16 **Orlan :** concernant l'art précolombien, j'ai lu sur les mayas, les olmèques, les aztèques et j'ai été très remise en question leur rapport au corps, au sang qui remettait en question notre statut du corps actuel, etc. Je suis allée au musée magnifique de Mexico-city pour travailler avec des chercheurs et pour voir des choses qui étaient dans les réserves et pour poser des questions. J'ai fait quatre voyages au Mexique. Et puis je suis rentrée avec cette moisson et j'ai essayé de faire quelque chose. J'ai aussi beaucoup voyagé en Afrique. L'Afrique m'a beaucoup appris, les Africains m'ont beaucoup appris. J'ai toujours pensé que j'allais travailler avec l'Afrique. Quand j'ai vu les premières photographies où justement on allait photographier l'« autre »....
- 17 **Bernard Müller :** Je voulais juste revenir sur le mot de « dialogue » qui fait apparaître que la construction de l'objet de recherche pour anthropologue est plus du côté de la construction que de l'observation, c'est un processus qui ne peut se réduire à une collecte d'informations. Alors la raison d'être de ce colloque est peut-être un doute sur la nature de la démarche anthropologique, que fait-on quand on fait de l'anthropologie ? L'apparente liberté de l'artiste interpelle alors l'anthropologue qui tente de retrouver une sorte d'esprit d'aventure, un exotisme, mais dans sa méthode cette fois-ci, un chemin sur lequel l'artiste performer peut nous les anthropologues aider à avancer.

- 18 **Caterina Pasqualino** : C'est un pari risqué de faire se rencontrer les artistes et les anthropologues. Ainsi, même si les façons de faire, les cheminements sont différents et les langages aussi, parfois on a l'impression de ne pas se comprendre du tout. Je trouve qu'une rencontre de ce genre est intéressante. Je pense que les artistes en sont en général davantage convaincus que les anthropologues. Cela ne fait pas longtemps que les anthropologues s'intéressent aux artistes contemporains et ils commencent à comprendre que méthodologiquement il y a peut-être des choses à prendre.
- 19 **Arnd Schneider**: In my opening remarks I invoked the *genius locias* a nomadic. Nomads are not people who just leave and wander off; nomads return often following those transhumant animals. So do we really return? The places where we return to – as the nomads do - have changed in the meantime and they always change. So do we change? This could be a metaphor for what ever discipline comes from, between performance, art and anthropology.
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ABSTRACTS

In recent years, the author has extended his concerns with the remaking of classic anthropological expectations and practices of ethnography through a series of discussions and collaborations (as reflected in *Navigators of the Contemporary: Why Ethnography Matters*, by David Westbrook, 2008, and *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*, 2008, and in projects of the Centre for Ethnography at the University of California, Irvine at <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~ethnog/>) that concern 'design studio thinking' for producing ethnography, and what he calls 'parasite' experiments emerging in the heart of fieldwork today. This work depends on rethinking the imaginaries for 'scenes of encounter' and what is transacted in ethnographic fieldwork. These imaginaries have been richly reconceived in standard ethnographic writing, transformed by the license, even requirement, since the 1980s, to be 'reflexive.' The subjects and objects of recent ethnography have caught up with, and challenged, reflexive thinking such that the very project of innovative ethnography is shifting toward what is labelled (at least in U.S. anthropology) as 'activist' or 'public,' rather than being merely critical. The author has found the ethnographic kinds of inquiry or consideration embedded in the productions of theatre and certain projects of conceptual/performance art to be inspirational in conceiving of a 'refunctioned' anthropological ethnography. While anthropology is unlikely to recognize its own poetics more, or in a different form than it traditionally has, its commitment to 'activist' and 'public' purposes connects it both pragmatically and in terms of craft to certain projects of theatre and art. Georges Marcus wants to use his talk to continue to draw and encourage these connections.

Ces dernières années, George Marcus a exposé ses propositions pour un renouvellement de l'anthropologie et des méthodes de l'ethnographie dans diverses discussions et collaborations (*Navigators of the Contemporary : Why Ethnography Matters*, par David Westbrook, 2008 ; *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*, 2008 ; Centre d'Ethnographie de l'Université de Californie, Irvine – <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~ethnog>). Son travail consiste à repenser l'imaginaire à partir « des scènes de rencontres » et des transactions effectuées sur le terrain. Amplement reconnu dans la littérature ethnographique, depuis 1980, cet imaginaire est devenu de plus en plus

« réflexif ». Cependant, les sujets et les objets ethnographiques contestent cette pensée réflexive. Aux Etats-Unis, l'innovation tend à délaisser l'anthropologie critique pour se tourner vers une anthropologie « active » ou « participative ». Dans cette perspective, les enquêtes ethnographiques sur les productions théâtrales, sur les projets d'art conceptuel et sur les performances, deviennent une source d'inspiration pour une anthropologie ethnographique revisitée. Tandis que l'anthropologie reste généralement incapable de reconnaître ses présupposés poétiques, son engagement « actif » et « participatif » la conduit à se rapprocher de certaines pièces théâtrales et artistiques. L'intervention de Georges Marcus vise à encourager ces connections.

AUTHOR

GEORGE MARCUS

George Marcus a puissamment contribué à la critique de l'anthropologie des années 1980 et a formulé les célèbres *Writing Culture* (Clifford et Marcus, 1986). Son projet est explicitement collaboratif. Il participe à la ré-articulation et à la ré-invention des normes et des formes classiques de la recherche en anthropologie sociale et culturelle. Récemment, ses travaux ont porté sur la noblesse portugaise, les hommes politiques européens, les artistes sud-américains, les banquiers nord-américains et les intellectuels brésiliens. Parmi ses très nombreuses publications : *The Late Editions series of annuals*, 1993-2000, University of Chicago Press; *Lives in Trust: The Fortunes of Dynastic Families in Late Twentieth Century America*, Westview Press (1992); *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Movement in the Human Sciences*, University of Chicago Press (1986) with M. Fischer; *Writing Culture*, University of Chicago Press (1986) with J. Clifford; and *Elites: Ethnographic Issues*, University of New Mexico Press (1983).