

## SOCIAL THOUGHT & COMMENTARY

# The Invisible Theatre of Ethnography: Performative Principles of Fieldwork

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### The Invisible Theatre of Ethnography: Performative Principles of Fieldwork

I have been arguing for some time now that ethnography is going to change or is changing by the same means that it already has within it—not by obsessing over its political efficacy with the text-cultures it invents—but by opening ethnography to its own performance and performativity.

—Abdel Hernández, September 17, 1997.<sup>1</sup>

I set out to make the case that fieldwork *is*, or should be regarded as, art. I wound up instead making the case that there is an art to fieldwork and art in it, but that does not make Art of it, at least in an everyday sense... We need to introduce or reintroduce a more dramatic contrast between *doing fieldwork* and *gathering data*... The label *fieldwork* ought to be reserved for research circumstances when depth is a reasonable trade-off for breadth... Fieldwork is ideally suited to the study of culture, but one does not have to be committed to the concept of culture to do fieldwork. *There are other*

*terms and ways to conceptualize and study the social contexts in which humans interact.*

—Harry Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork*, pp. 241, 247, 248; emphases added.

This article is a conceptual exploration of what Hernández calls the “performativity” and Wolcott the “doing” of fieldwork. By these two terms I refer to the very actualization, conduct, realization, and corporeal doing of the activities and practices that comprise and constitute ethnographic fieldwork. It has become an increasingly common view among anthropologists that ethnography must move away from the debates of ethnographic representation and theorization of culture. From this position, some anthropologists have sought a return to the more scientific business of ethnography, while others have turned decisively toward the politics of cultural production. Another, however short-lived, response was the emergence of experimental ethnography in anthropology, which remained focused on ethnographic representation (versus turning to fieldwork *per se*) and, specifically, writing/literary representation (versus other media beyond the literary and audio-visual text). Unlike that movement in anthropology, symbolic and interpretive interactionisms in sociology have pushed for new ways of conceiving ethnography as both fieldwork and representation by engaging the performative dimensions of both *doing* fieldwork and the communication of ethnographic *reporting*. This article allies itself with this third set of scholarship. The goal is to analyze the performativity or doing of fieldwork in order to identify basic ontological principles. These in turn may be useful to rethink the very conception and design of ethnographic research.

Wolcott distinguishes between two types ethnography. “Doing fieldwork” are activities and practices that are based in immersion while “gathering data” “in the field” are research activities that rely upon rapid, extensive, and comprehensive investigations of the surface of phenomena on relatively large (or larger) scale with methods such as surveys, questionnaires, sampling, that can be applied without the intensive immersion and *in situ* dwelling of doing fieldwork. In this article, we retain and rename the analytical contrast as a distinction between “being in fieldwork” (Wolcott’s doing fieldwork) and “doing fieldwork” (his “gathering data”) in order to enable an ontological interpretation of the performative nature (or performativity) of fieldwork, whether this research is based in immersion or “surface” methods. To state the obvious, in both of Wolcott’s types of research, the researcher conducts, does or “performs” the research; thus, the distinction between “being in fieldwork” and “doing fieldwork” becomes an analytical distinction that identifies two facets of research

and allows for an analysis of the ontological performativity of fieldwork. The goal of this article, which is, however, primarily concerned with the “doing of fieldwork” in Wolcott’s sense, is to open up a space and a perspective by which to rethink fieldwork through a new understandings of its basic ontological—that is, performative—principles. Having recourse to Augusto Boal’s invisible theatre and Stephen Tyler’s idea of therapy, among other notions, such as emergent audience, trigger, and spect-actor, this exploration departs from Wolcott’s reminder that “*there are other terms and ways to conceptualize and study the social contexts in which humans interact*” (Wolcott, 1995: 248).

### **Being There in the Invisible Theatre of Fieldwork**

Invisible theatre is an activity developed by Augusto Boal (1985, 1992) as the second of the three “moments” that together define his Theatre of the Oppressed. This street theatre is founded on a conception of the Marxist-Hegelian dialectic which develops it as the means to actualize “soft” or non-violent revolutionary social change. This theatre has an agenda: not simply to know and re-present the world in theatre, but to change the world. The first (“image theatre”) and third moments (“forum theatre”) are mostly irrelevant to the present discussion of the ontology of fieldwork, even though both offer valuable practices from which new ethnographic methodologies could be developed.

What is the relationship between invisible theatre and ethnography? In a certain way ethnographic fieldwork can be understood metaphorically as an analogue of invisible theatre, in other words, “as” a kind of interactive performance and art form similar to street theatre. This article asserts a stronger argument: specifically, if Boal’s performance art can be understood as a set of principles, then fieldwork *is* a specific form, mode and manifestation of invisible theatre. It is different than Boal’s performance art, however, precisely because fieldwork is a mode of invisible theatre that is structured, shaped, and conceived within the specific disciplinary, theoretical, and institutional logics of anthropology, sociology, and related cultural studies.

What are these defining principles of invisible theatre? In brief, a troupe of actors devises an improvisational script that will be enacted in the streets or public spaces of a community. The drama is based on a highly polemical social issue that is of immediate concern to this community. The script revolves around creating a provocative and engaging set of interactions with a public in which the different emotions, positions, and ambivalences of the social issue are presented, provoked, revealed, and debated. The performance

is invisible because the actors assume the role of everyday persons and do not announce to the observing public that they are witnessing a scripted drama, which is nonetheless primarily improvisational.

Boal briefly summarizes a few examples that illustrate these basic points. One such example is precisely him giving a lecture to an audience in a theatre in northern Europe about the nature and goals of invisible theatre. During the lecture, children begin to play, run around among the audience, and cause loud and disruptive havoc, as is customarily allowed in that culture. An actor-provocateur begins to shout at the children and to scold the parents for being irresponsible. Another actor makes a loud and aggressive counter-response. Another actor adds more fuel to the issue with additional provocations until other non-actors are triggered into joining in a debate about the status of children, their need for freedom to run wild, cultural norms of parenting, the propriety of public lectures, gender dynamics, and so on. Finally after many have engaged the debate or left the auditorium, Boal, in a move that is not actually a part of the “real” invisible theatre, reveals to the audience that the debate was a staged provocation of the non-actor audience. The actor-provocateurs stand up to acknowledge their roles and actions.

In this case, the lecture explanation of invisible theatre is like the 1970s TV-show “Candid Camera” in which actors provoked unwitting bystanders with inappropriate, often aggressive, and usually humorous behavior. In the TV show, drama and humor resolved to the point where the targeted non-actor was informed that it was all just a joke. The theatre and TV spectacle ends with the agent-provocateur or other hidden accomplices telling the targeted person on the street who has endured aggressive, weird or otherwise inappropriate behavior: “Look over there: You are on Candid Camera!”

The dénouement that what transpired is *just* “theatre” is crucial. This distinguishes staged scenarios (practical jokes, etc.) from Boal’s invisible theatre, but it raises the question of Garfinkel’s breach experiments, which are explicit types of invisible theatre or forms of “invisible research.” For the present purposes, two types of breaching experiments can be distinguished in ethnomethodology. On the one hand, what I am calling research breaching are experiments designed and conducted to learn about some aspect of a wider social reality; they involve extensive staging, that is, preparation of both physical, “non-natural” stages or sets for the experiment and elaborate, strict scripting of roles. On the other hand, what I refer to as pedagogical breaching is designed and conducted primarily as a means for students to learn the basic principles of ethnomethodology; these, therefore, involve minimal staging

except the “everyday presentation of self” that occurs in natural social settings.<sup>2</sup> In some of the pedagogical breaches that students conducted at home with family members, there was an inevitable explanation to unwitting participants that would later justify the peculiar behavior.

In other cases of pedagogical experiments, the ethnomethodological theatre remained invisible. For example, one young college student, upon entering a public bus, requested for no apparent reason the seat of an elder man. This provoked such an overwhelming anxiety, sense of rudeness, and feelings of guilt for the student, that he, the student, began to behave in a manner that might somehow justify to the elder man, the witnesses on the bus, and, more importantly, himself, his otherwise unreasonable, disrespectful, and inappropriate request. The student was compelled to act out his justification to the very end and at no point did he declare, “This is all just an assignment for my sociology class with professor Garfinkel!” In this type of ethnomethodological breach experiment—which are conducted in the natural settings of the social world, focus on interaction itself, and prioritize the learning experience of the student-researcher—the research remains invisible.

The “actions” or performance of Boal’s invisible theatre conducted in the public sphere also remain invisible on principle. The public revelation of the staged artifice would cause the street performance to lose its transformative capacity for participants by becoming theatrical fiction, “only” entertainment or “just” theatre. The exception of the lecture hall presentation of invisible theatre is an exception due to its goal of explaining and promoting the theatre as a street theatre to outsiders; it should also be noted that the first and third types of Boal’s Theatre of Oppressed, image theatre and forum theatre are not invisible. Ethnography, specifically fieldwork, is also an invisible theatre which despite its being revealed as “just” ethnography or research always remains, in a fundamental way, invisible.

The ongoing invisibility of fieldwork has a number of sources, some of which are secondary. Researchers, especially those “doing (immersive) fieldwork,” are always necessarily questioning themselves and their practices. Beyond questions of performing specific methods “correctly” or collecting the “right” data, *being in fieldwork* inherently and endlessly provokes the question about *what is* (or what activities count as) doing fieldwork and *when is* the researcher “doing” or *not* “doing it.” It is not always or usually not at all very clear what doing ethnographic fieldwork really is or when one is doing it, especially when the research is primarily based in participant observation, informal interviewing, and other activities that are rarified and disciplinary versions of

everyday practices—hanging out, talking, listening, remembering, engaging with people, asking questions, sharing stories and information about oneself and others. In other words, the invisibility of fieldwork as ethnography has precisely to do with the relationship of research practices to everyday life. The question of invisibility, whether in theatre or in ethnography, directs us, in a subsequent section, to questions of reality, realism, and fiction.

***Spect-Actors: The Invisibility of Actors and the Agency of Observers***

With this explanation of invisible theatre, it is possible to further explore the idea of the theatre of ethnographic fieldwork. Specifically, what significant similarities and differences can be identified between Boal's performance art and the performativity (or performative basis and essential nature) of fieldwork? Boal defines the actor and spectator in a relation that immediately invokes participation observation. With reference to the audience participant, Boal says that:

At that moment [of the performance] she was at one and the same time, Actor and Spectator. She was Spectator. She was Spec-Actor. In discovering theatre, the being became human. This is theatre—the art of looking at ourselves. The Theatre of the Oppressed is *theatre* in this most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors... Everything that actors do, we do throughout our lives, always and everywhere. Actors talk, move, dress to suit the setting, express ideas, reveal passions—just as we do in our daily lives... Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it. (Boal, 1992: xxx, xxxi).

This quotation is worth re-reading by substituting “ethnography” for “theatre,” “subject of research” for “actor,” and “ethnographer” for “spect-actor.” To do so reiterates the essential relationship not only between theatre and fieldwork, but between “doing fieldwork” and everyday life: “Everything that *fieldworkers* do, we do throughout our lives, always and everywhere. *Ethnographers* talk, move, dress to suit the setting, express ideas, reveal passions—just as we do in our daily lives.” It also points to understanding the quintessential fieldwork methodology of participant observation as a form of theatre: “This is *fieldwork*—the art of looking at ourselves. The Theatre of *Fieldwork* is everyday life in this most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are

*Fieldworkers* (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors.” Which human being? This is not a blurring of the boundary between studied subject and studying subject of research. Rather, before identity, this assertion defines the ontological grounding of differentiated identity in agency: “She was at one and the same time, Actor and Spectator. She was Spectator. In discovering *ethnographic fieldwork*, the being became human.” Which being became human? The fieldworking subject and the subject of fieldwork are both Actors and Spectators: The spectator is Actor. In the mutually implicated participant observation of fieldwork, both, therefore, became human.

Boal says that: “The only difference is that actors [or ethnographers] are conscious that they are using the language of theatre [or ethnography], and are thus better able to turn it to their advantage [in accord with the theatrical script or the research design], whereas the woman and man in the street do not know that they are speaking theatre [or ethnography]...” (Boal, 1992: xxx). The “languages” of theatre, ethnography, and lay ethnomethodologies are intertwined. Emerging from the everyday life-world, theatre and ethnography are doubled or folded back upon the quotidian (i.e., the ordinary and everyday) as its reflection, mirroring, documenting, and mimetic media. This doubling is split again in the guises of disciplinary and institutionalized discourses (professional theatre or academic ethnography) and the lay theatre of the generalized ethnography that already subsists in the life world.

Research practices and theories, as Garfinkel pointed out, are the ethnomethodologies that social scientists deploy to make sense of the world. We can add that they are deployed in the first instance in fieldwork. Participant observation is the ethnographer’s ethnomethodology for making sense of the ethnomethodologies of everyday life. Significantly, disciplinary fieldwork constitute rarified ethnomethodologies that appropriate everyday practices of talking, observation, remembering, recording, dialogue, participation in order to reformulate, distillate, and refocus these into particular kinds of activities—specifically into *scientific ethnomethodologies*. Inverting Garfinkel famous definition, we could also understand that the ethnomethodologies of everyday live are generalized and generic practices of ethnography.

In what does the significant difference between the rarified, disciplinary and the generalized everyday ethnography consist? The logic and agenda of use, I suggest, is the crucial difference regardless of any empirical differences in the technologies of documentation that may exist in any given fieldwork situation. Every actor, who is also a spect-actor, has an idea “in the back of the head”—that is, a logic and agenda, or script in the case of actors—that may

be more or less open-ended and improvisational. The fieldworker, like the lay “person on-the-street” or actor, has a thought in the back of the head; but these are significantly different due precisely to the rarified and disciplinary formulation of action in the case of theatre/performance art and anthropology/ethnography. The “thought in the back of the head” is the research design of the ethnography and the research problem that the fieldworker is investigating. Research problems may on occasion manifest similarities to the individual agendas in the back of the head of subjects of research, but ultimately the former are quite distinct for being formulated at the conjuncture of theoretical imperatives, real-world social issues and contexts, personal interests or personality, and available methodological toolkits.

In both cases of Boal’s and ethnography’s invisible theatre, the spectators—the “audience” or “subjects of research”—also have an agenda that remains mostly invisible. It is this invisible research agenda that makes the difference between everyday life and being there in fieldwork and “gathering data” that marks the doing of professional, disciplinary fieldwork. The research design remains invisible in a fundamental sense no matter how much the ethnographer reveals the ethnography by informing subjects for consent, ostentatiously using technologies of documentation, and just talking freely about the investigation. There are two reasons. First, fieldwork is necessarily improvisational, mobile, fluid, flexible, and transformative; and these performative qualities mean that there is a gap between the doing and the design of fieldwork such that there is always a hidden, or unknown and unknowable, element that breaks from the “definition of the situation” (Goffman 1975) as defined by either or both of the fieldworking subject and the subjects of fieldwork. Second, ethnographic fieldwork is governed by the teleology of the production and dissemination of ethnographic knowledge; thus, the experience and interaction of fieldwork is a potentiality that corresponds not to the right then and there but to the subsequent re-constitution of information and experience as knowledge in writing, text, and representation that circulates for other audiences of readers and viewers detached from the specific time and space of the fieldwork. In many ways, the contemporary moralism of ethnographic writing (see Pels, 1999) is precisely the (im)possibility of rendering, not only ethical dilemmas but this invisibility of fieldwork, into transparency.

Boal—in relation to the history of performance art, happenings, demonstrations, street theatre, installations, conceptualism, and experiments in “theatre anthropology” (see Barba, 1991, 1995; Schechner, 1985, 1988; Turner, 1982, 1988; Kosuth, 1991; Cohen-Cruz, 1998)—created his “invisible



theatre” as a theatre in which the spect-actors construct a drama from the real-life, quotidian issues of the community in which it will be performed. In the case of Boal’s socially conscious agenda these are, for example, substantively local forms of racism, sexism, work relations, classism, and other politicized issues. This drama has a core script, roles, and tensions that will be crucially modified and improvised “according to circumstances, to suit the interventions of the spec-actors” (Boal, 1992: 6). The key is that, “the actors must play their parts as if they were playing in a traditional theatre, for a traditional audience. However, when the play is ready it will be performed in a place which is not a theatre and for an audience which is not an audience” (ibid.). What is an audience that is not an audience? What is the staging of this theatre that makes a stage not a theatre stage?

***Emergent Audience: Where is the Value of Ethnography?***

Invisible theatre involves a staging that does not reveal the enactment as theatrical, nor the place of enactment as theatre stage. This staging still requires more discussion below, but another principle can be drawn from this analysis of the performativity of fieldwork. The audience of fieldwork is not an audience because there is no performance presented to it via the explicit staging of a fieldwork as performance. Rather, there is an enactment that engages an audience, which is also invisible, with the performativity of its own participation in the theatre of everyday life. The audience therefore emerges in the performance without being an audience *of fieldwork per se*; the subjects of research emerge as an audience of participant spect-actors. As in Boal’s invisible theatre, persons involve themselves within the very site and temporality of the performance of ethnography’s invisible theatre as spect-actors engaged in the everyday performances of quotidian activities.

As in Garfinkel’s classic breach experiments, the drama or methodological procedures of research are used to trigger spectactors—who do not know that this triggering breach is theatre or research—into engaging the spectacle (drama, research triggers) in the diverse ways that they (the subjects and spectactors of research) desire. In relation to these proactive responses to the dramatic script of the research methodology, the performing spectactors, actors, and fieldworkers improvise and creatively respond. In this way, the subjects of research self-select themselves to act, to engage, to observe—in other words, to become spectactors. But, they self-select themselves to become spectactors not in a fiction, but in reality: Audiences emerge, in the invisible theatres of everyday life and in ethnographic fieldwork, with the active agency and par-

ticipation of spectators who choose to observe, listen, interact, dialogue, engage, and disengage with the activity in the very moment of its enactment and temporality of performance.

The idea of emergent audience as a principle of ethnographic fieldwork entails self-selection of subjects to participate in research and the fact that fieldwork is intrinsically a collaborative (interactive, dialogical, collusive) endeavor. Fieldworkers do not in any simple sense impose themselves and their projects on people; rather, members of the subject community exercise their agency and control over the extent to which they engage the fieldworker and participate as subjects, distant/disengaged observers, active or occasional participants, collaborators, interpreters, critics, publicly or privately vocal nay-sayers, assistants in or enemies to the research process. These subjects have agendas, interests, and motives that bring them into definitive relationships with the fieldworker. There is no theoretical or classificatory way to account for these as they are given by the pragmatics of situations and may be beyond the knowledge and ability to know of the ethnographer. It is the pragmatics of these persons that create a pervasive micro-level of collaboration, collusion and complicity that is inherently obvious and apparent to all fieldworkers. However, the assumption governing successful grant writing, IRB evaluation, and defense of dissertations is that the researcher determines, controls and imposes not only the definition of the research project but designates who is involved as subjects of research. Thus, the on-the-ground flux and contingency of emergent audience in immersive ethnography tends to be erased from view. Despite the increased number of ethnographers who have written about this indeterminacy of their own research, it is not, however, necessarily nor usually reflected upon as a principle of fieldwork itself that can be productively identified as a tool by which to rethink the logics and agendas of ethnography.

In Boal's invisible theatre spectators are observers triggered into participation through their own volition and agency. Similarly, in the dynamic of participant observation, fieldworkers are spectators who engage purposefully in the quotidian activities and events that constitute the life-world they research. At other times, fieldworkers stage events and encounters with informants constructed as one or another mode of interviewing, data-collecting, dialogue, or elicitation and thus assume the guise of the staging actors of Boalian invisible theatre. In performance of the theatrical action (street art or ethnography), an audience of spectators emerges.

The emergence of audience within fieldwork is quite mundane in that it is constantly occurring in all variety of situations. While talking to an informant,

a friend of his passes by and stops to enter the conversation. While sitting and writing notes on the conversation, one or more curious adults, or children (to invoke a stereotypical fieldwork situation) stop to watch and ask what the fieldworker is doing and why. A conversation, which may or may not become a significant “data-collecting” event, ensues. Participant observation is, I suggest, constituted on the principle of emergent audience, despite our lack of theorization of this aspect or principle of this very complex method.

Emergent audience involves intricate processes of self-selection by which subjects determine the quality, nature, and types of engagements with fieldworkers. Thus, it also includes the principle of (“the researched”) subjects structuring the encounter with fieldworkers: They may pro-actively structure and stage engagements or allow the ethnographer to shape the contexts of interaction. Consider the difference, for example, between Vincent Crapanzano’s interviewing of Tuhami, a Moroccan brick-layer, and Philippe Bourgois’ interviewing of drug users and dealers who were “in search of respect” in New York City. The life history interviewing of Tuhami occurred in a structured and controlled space and time that was mostly staged by the ethnographer, but facilitated by Tuhami himself whose predilection for storytelling found a committed spect-actor, the ethnographer. In contrast, the urban ethnographer had to effect a reformulation of his social being in order participate in the social life of drugs as the condition of interviewing and observation.

The concept of emergent audience however necessarily goes beyond the familiar questions of rapport, entry, and research design as *practical factors* in the conduct of research. Beyond the practical issues of conduct, the concept necessarily points to the fact that the engagement of fieldworkers and subjects is the primary locus of meaning and value of ethnography. This is, of course, a core assumption of many types of phenomenology as well as “meaning and symbols” based anthropologies. But, the idea can be extended: If the teleology of representation is to be circumvented in alternative paradigms of research, then there must be a revalorization of the fieldwork encounter per se, based on the necessary emergence of audiences of spectators, as the privileged locus of the value of ethnography. There is a wide range of theoretically diverse traditions of ethnographic research that prioritize fieldwork and its encounters, but this valorization becomes eclipsed by the higher superordinate project of representation, that is of ethnography not as fieldwork but as the representation and re-circulation of “knowledge” and/or “experience” to audiences outside and beyond the audiences and encounters of fieldwork. Consider, for example, Wolcott’s statement that “fieldwork that does not get written is partial and incomplete; it amounts to

no more than what may have been anything from an intellectually rich to a psychologically devastating personal experience” (1995:66).

Contra this viewpoint, the principle of emergent audience prioritizes fieldwork as an ethical engagement that can and does have value beyond both the completion of the published ethnography and the subjective experience of the fieldworker. Fieldwork has meaning and value for those who have allowed it to happen in their midst. The significance of this needs to be elaborated even though the fieldwork encounter and its ethics are highly valued in an array of anthropologies. While the ethical dilemmas reported in the written ethnography are often about the real, specific dynamics of fieldwork, there is a tendency for the discussion of these dilemmas to be immediately connected to a moral discourse of critique (i.e., the poetic-political analysis of cultural production) that references more encompassing or “global” sociohistorical contexts and trans-local issues. In other words, the quandaries of fieldwork are pushed into another register of discourse and analysis to be resolved in a “textual solution” (to use Stewart’s phrase; see 1996:26) of ethnographic representation that nonetheless reveals itself to be politically, morally, and socially questionable and ethically problematic.

This is the moral of the story of such different ethnographies as, for example, Michael Jackson’s *At Home in the World* where the ethnographer writes a brilliant description of the dilemma of how to describe something that he was granted permission to know on the condition that he never reveal this knowledge or describe it. Ruth Behar’s *Translated Woman*, similarly writes against this limit-point of anguish, angst, and duplexity when the multiply mandated task of representing the subject of research with whom one has forged a profound, personal intimacy is contradicted by the social, discursive, political and cultural violence of representation. Vincent Crapanzano’s *Tuhami* is, again, just as much a fraught confession of an ethnographer struggling to find ways to both personally and professionally involve himself in the life of his subject of research as friend as it is an “ethnographic portrait of a Moroccan” (the subtitle of the book) drawn by a disciplined ethnographer. Philippe Bourgois relates his ongoing, internal conflict with assuming a lifestyle that is not only antithetical to his own but involves illegalities. A very long list of ethnographies can be added; ethnographies that exemplify this tendency to convert the ethics of fieldwork into the moral problem of representation.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this tendency is perhaps unavoidable and inextricable if researchers engage themselves with the ethics of fieldwork.

Thus, in the contemporary moment, the ethnographic representation of fieldwork has tended to produce a moral discourse about ethnography that

converts the ethics of encounter into a question of the morals of representation of alterity and the Other. Peter Pels (1999), in his analysis of the ethical “duplexity” of anthropology, provides a history to this moralization. Ethnography, after the critiques of writing, representation, science, and post-modernism at the end of the 20th century, has become a new kind of “moral science”—to play on the meaning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century German concept. What is clear, however, is that the moral science of ethnography is premised as it were on the initial valorization of fieldwork and its subsequent and necessary eclipse through the problematization of ethnography as representation. It risks, therefore, manifesting as a “false” or “bad faith” valorization of fieldwork and of the real human encounters of fieldwork.

The significance that the concept of emergent audience brings into discussion is a detour away from the “textual solution.” By understanding that the first and primary audience of ethnography is the emergent one in fieldwork, one displaces the representational project as the teleological value of fieldwork. This is not to say that the goal of ethnographic representation is to be discarded; rather, the argument is that the overriding, governing logic of the text and its scriptural economy of knowledge production can be displaced in the face of the human value of fieldwork. There is a value (ethical, moral, political, human, scientific) of ethnography that is the “right here, right now” of fieldwork. Any textual solution will only be the dissolution of that value. This is not an appeal to eliminate the project of representation, but to recognize two substantively different forms of value in these two distinct modes by which anthropologists interact and engage the world. Ultimately, the separation of these values might liberate ethnography from the burden of “moral science” in order to explore alternative and different agendas of representation, communication, and dissemination of knowledge.

One conceptually elaborated discussion of “emergent audience” without direct use of the term is provided by Dennis Tedlock in his discussion of the performativity of story-telling. Tedlock (1983, 1995) seeks to develop both an analytical and a fieldwork methodology for the study of “oral literature” that resuscitates the event, situation, performance, audience, staging, and improvisation of linguistic acts that is otherwise excised from the documented, transcribed and translated text of ethnographic reporting. As an ontological fact of fieldwork, emergent audience is mundane and can therefore entail interactions that range from the totally irrelevant to the surprisingly significant and crucial. Further, the value of an encounter in terms of the research problem under investigation may have a fortuitous relation to the strategic staging of fieldwork interactions. It is

necessary to reiterate that the principle of emergent audience returns us to the idea of staging, that is, the staging and scenography of fieldwork, and, thus, to understand fieldwork as a theatre, specifically an invisible theatre.

### ***The Real Fiction of Science Fiction and the Teleology of Change***

In fieldwork, the invisible theatre that the ethnographer scripts out and stages, as well as constantly revises, modifies, and fine tunes, is indeed invisible as fiction and yet real as “theatre.” Further, it *is* real/reality precisely because of its theatre (staging, spectactors, breaching, triggers) and because it is *invisible* theatre.

Invisible theatre offers scenes of fiction. But without the mitigating effects of the rites of conventional theatre, this fiction becomes reality. *Invisible theatre is not realism; it is reality.* ... the spectator is transformed into a protagonist in the action, a spect-actor without ever being aware of it. [S/]He is the protagonist of the reality [s/]he sees, because [s/]he is unaware of its fictitious origin. (Boal, 1992: 15, 17; original emphasis).

The reality of this fiction is dependent upon the invisibility of the performativity as “merely” performance. The invisibility, to use Goffman’s analytics, prevents or pre-empts the re-keying or re-framing as theatrical; the situation is defined as really real, as reality. In this fictional reality that is not fiction, Boal emphasizes the special import of the spectator who moves from observation to an intervening participating observation in which the agent consciously engages the reality to affect it. While Boal is not explicitly discussing the actors who enact this invisible theatre for emergent audiences of spectactors, the comment clearly pertains, and is applicable, to the actors who stage invisible theatre and thus also to the ethnographic fieldworker: The invisible theatre of ethnography is not realism, it is reality—although fieldworkers might often experience a psychological anxiety by questioning this ontology. Fieldwork is real—it is real fiction. The script of fieldwork is the (more or less) elaborately designed and staged research problem. This script or research problem is an agenda of practical methods, procedures, timetables, and schema by which particular types of information are to be produced, communicated, documented, analyzed, and manipulated in relation to frameworks of descriptive questions, conceptual debates, theoretical rhetorics, analytical emplotments, and philosophical assumptions. Research problems are ideal models of the world that seek to actively intervene in the world to realize itself—that is, to make the fiction of

research agenda into reality. In so actualizing and realizing the script of the research problem fieldworkers can vacillate quite dramatically between a “forgetting” and an extremely aware consciousness of the fictional vision or model and modality of research. The subject positioning of the fieldworker is also spect-actor who alternates between “seeing”/remembering and being blind to the fictional reality that they have installed in the sites of fieldwork. Thus, the fieldworking of research oscillates between the phenomenological experiences of the spect-actor who intervenes in “fiction” with reality and of the staging (spect-)actor of invisible theatre who intervenes in reality with “fiction.”

In Boal’s invisible theatre the objective is to trigger thought, dialogue, and consciousness right then and there in the invisible audience that will in turn provoke action oriented to change the world. This rational logic of instrumentality—i.e. the teleology of change—may only be operative in certain framings of fieldwork (no longer speaking just of the classical breach fieldwork), specifically applied practices of fieldwork in which one must include not only the governmentalist research of policy and applied sciences but any of the “critical theory” modalities of science based in feminist, Marxist, cultural studies, postcolonial critiques. Research from these traditions, like Boals’ theatre, also seek to intervene in the world, not simply to know or describe it, but to change it. However, these social science projects mostly envision the “change” or the goal of change to be a function of ethnography in its mode of representation, not as fieldwork or as something that occurs in and through fieldwork itself. In other words, the sites of fieldwork are locations for the production of knowledge and the sites of ethnographic reporting (texts, ethnographic film, lecture halls) formulated to be the place where change is to be initiated or triggered through the communication of knowledge to a different audience which emerges in relation to the ethnographic texts. Applied anthropologies, especially forms of action research, are an exception as they conceptualize fieldwork, primarily, as well as text, secondarily, as locations in which change is to occur or from which it must be triggered and provoked.

***Trigger: The Provocation of Fieldwork***

Invisible theatre is a strategy of provocation, a dramatic script, by which to deploy a panoply of tactics that trigger responses, engagement and exchange. These tactics and techniques of provocation are triggers. Similarly, fieldwork—whether intensive immersive or extensive surface research—is designed as an idealized model of activities conceived to disclose, produce, and document information that address the questions and issues of the research problem that field-

workers bring to the field and carries about in the back of their head. Ethnographic methods recognizes the work of the trigger in terms of the concept of “elicitation” which is conceived as a minimalist presence and nearly non-interference in the life and culture of the subjects of research. The presupposition of elicitation is that data pre-exists independently of research problems and of the methodologies developed to find, gather and document this data. The idea that research is a non-intrusive, passive intervention that discovers truth without disturbing, modifying or altering the real culture has been critiqued from various theoretical positions, such as feminisms, dialogical anthropologies, culture critique, and poststructuralism. Various frameworks have offered notions of intersubjectivity that push this assumption to the level of the interaction between fieldworker and subject such that there is no authentic, pristine, pure, or untainted pre-existing response to the ethnographers’ queries or presence.

The responses and reactions that research subjects have to researchers are always and can only be a response to the individual and particular fieldworker that asks and engages the subject. It is a response created in-situ in relation to the researchers’ questions, attitudes and presentation of self in the actual socio-historical situation of the interaction. It is impossible to know what a subject of research might have said to the researcher in response to an interview question if the researcher did not ask the question or interact with them. It is impossible primarily because such a response does not exist. Traditional social science only imagines that there is a pre-given response that pre-exists the fieldworker’s interactions. This does not mean that reality does not exist, that it is not knowable, nor that it is fiction of the fieldworker’s construction. Rather, this defines an ontological basis of knowledge and the epistemology of fieldwork.

What is the implication of this philosophical position? Fieldwork is designed to be a strategic deployment of a wide variety of techniques and methods deployed in time and space to trigger and provoke relevant information that would address the research problem with which the fieldworker enters into ethnography. Understanding and information are also given by subjects and emergent spectactors by chance, mistake, or concealed agendas without the fieldworker seeking or even knowing to ask about this information. Triggering is mutual and grounded in intersubjective dynamics. Fieldwork is in itself a strategic trigger comprised of multiple series of tactical and procedural provocations that range from from “passive” observation, asking questions (systematically and otherwise), to providing verbal cues or “probes” that aim to further stimulate speakers. Fieldwork is, therefore, a strategically deployed series of triggers that provoke, not only spect-actors, to engage or disengage with fieldworkers but,



through this dynamic, the “elicitation” of relevant information or data that can be gathered. Trigger, then, is the methodological principle and concept of being in fieldwork in order to accomplish the doing of fieldwork as gathering data.

Research design is a strategy of provocation, on the one hand, that often (and especially from specific theoretical-philosophical frameworks) seeks to be “absent” in order to produce untainted, accurate, true, or somehow more valid data. This is not simply the case in positivist objectivism that desires the elimination of bias and subjectivity, but also present in the project, for example, of revealing the subaltern voice and viewpoint in ethnographic representation. Paradoxically the subaltern “voice” is unrepresentable as such. Yet, on the other hand, the research design of provocation seeks to, and must necessarily, be “present” as the condition of knowledge production. Without the presence of the trigger right then and there in fieldwork there is no production of information, data, analyses, knowledge, and conclusions or results. The epistemological and analytical value of trigger is that it pushes away from any duplicity of fieldwork (or allochronism)<sup>4</sup> in the form of “not being there” when and while there in the space and time of fieldwork. Methodologically, the principle of trigger precludes the possibility of inserting allochronism into the very acts and activities of fieldwork. Trigger is an ontological or performative principle and practice of fieldwork is inhabited by an assumption that Derrida analyzed as iteration and Deleuze in the repetition of difference.

Methodologically, trigger is a double principle, or the articulation of two oppositional theoretical assumptions by which “data” is typically conceived. On the one hand, data is understood as ontologically and empirically already there to be gathered and, on the other hand, data is understood as an emergent phenomenon that is created by the intersubjectivity of research interactions where it did not previously exist. By joining these two assumptions about data, the concept of trigger points simultaneously to the prior “givenness” of data and to the modification of the data that research instigates. There is thus a register of “change” or “change-effect” that the research trigger constitutes in the dynamics of the interaction between fieldworker(s) and subject(s). To use Goffman’s terminology, there is an irreducible change, shift or modification in the definition of the situation and in the object of study. But, what is the ontological status of this “change”?

### ***The Therapy of Fieldwork and the Ontology of Therapy***

Beyond and below these overt and explicit intentions and conceptions of “change” (in the culture, informant’s response, and similar) lies another

modality of change that is neither teleological nor explicit. It is an ontological function of fieldwork that Stephen Tyler has called therapy. In the tradition of humanist anthropology, the first and foremost value of ethnography, is the lived, intersubjective experience of fieldwork itself as an ethical engagement. In his statement on postmodern ethnography, Tyler (1986) defines ethnography as therapy, which is a “restorative harmony” that “departs from the commonsense world only in order to reconfirm it and to return us to it renewed and mindful of our renewal” (1986: 211-12).

Ethnography is a return to the idea of aesthetic integration as therapy once captured in the sense of proto-Indo-European \*ar- (“way of being,” “orderly and harmonious arrangement of the parts of a whole”)...that family of concepts so closely connected with the idea of restorative harmony, of “therapy”...ethnography is an object of meditation which provokes a rupture with the commonsense world and evokes an aesthetic integration whose therapeutic effect is worked out in the restoration of the commonsense world... ethnography captures this mood...for it too does not move toward abstraction, away from life, but back to experience. It aims not to foster the growth of knowledge but to restructure experience, not to understand objective reality, for that is already established by common sense, nor to explain how we understand, for that is impossible, but to reassimilate, to reintegrate the self in society and to restructure the conduct of everyday life.

Two points need to be immediately noted. First, this is, no doubt, a polemical statement about ethnography as writing and as text, which is not the concern of this article. Second, the intention, here, is therefore not to explain it to defend the position, but to interpret the message in terms of the performative ontology of doing fieldwork. Along these lines, read from the perspective of ethnomethodology, frame analysis, intersubjectivity, dialogical theory, the passage suggests that fieldwork has this therapeutic value or function of reintegrating the self in society and restructuring the conduct of everyday life within a conscious restoration of commonsense (pp. 211-213). In this reading, it is crucial to understand “self” and “society,” not in a narrow, limited way, but rather in an open, inclusive sense akin to Goffman’s notion of the ongoing re-definition of the situation. In other words, there is a kind of therapy or therapeutic value to the ongoing re-defining (and reframing) of the everyday interactions in which one lives one’s life. In re-

appropriating this term, it is fundamental to understand that therapy or the therapeutic operation is not a mode of reflexivity. While it may involve or trigger reflexivity of differing types for different spectators, the ongoing reframing of the social moment cannot be reduced to reflexivity and is indeed other than it; reflexivity references a mental process of a subject that takes their subjectivity as the object of thinking and reflection. Therapy is a sociological operation of revalorization of the here and now of a situation. It may or may not involve reflexivity for any given agent or subject participant; regardless, reflexivity does not define therapy.

Therapy is a reiteration or a repetition of the same but with a difference. This difference is change itself, but “change” whose appearance and meaning can range from consolidation of the meaning and pattern of situation to a revolutionary transformation of the structure of the interaction, and anything in between. The therapeutic operation is the rupture and repair of breaching.

Indeed it is precisely in this therapeutic alterity of identity in repetition (or the difference of identity to itself) where much methodological debate has irrevocably entrenched itself. The struggle to attain bias-free, untainted, non-subjective data that simply corresponds to the ethnographic question cannot close the abyss of this difference. For example in questionnaires, a methodological the question shape, taint, change answers. Can a question be asked that does not pre-shape, pre-judge, pre-structure answers? This issue does not merely trouble positivists and objectivists, but also those humanists who long for a pure, pre-given culture with a stable identity to describe. The recognition of this notion of therapy as an ontological dimension of fieldwork allows for the therapeutic operation to become a principle, a method, a strategy, and a tactic of fieldwork and of research design. Indeed, this is the ontological performativity of the breach experiment that ruptures and repairs interaction.

As an example, consider Fernandez and Herzfield’s (1998) search for meaningful methods. Although they do not use this concept of therapy, they (1998: 100) discuss the effect of the methodological use of showing ethnographic video to subjects that were videographed during participant observation of their work activities. The authors describe the way subjects are offered an opportunity to both distance and reconnect to themselves and their life world. It is a dynamic of de- and re-territorialization that provokes commentaries, descriptions, thoughts, feelings—all of which become ethnographic “data” of a meaningful sort. This technique of visual ethnography was first used by Flaherty when he screened his films to the subjects that are in the film. This tactic, which was later consciously developed by Rouche and others,

exemplifies the therapeutic function of ethnography and suggests that the very ontology of fieldwork is premised on the micro-operation and dynamics of this conception of therapy. Therapy, in the etymological sense as described by Tyler, therefore names the ontology of “change” that occurs in fieldwork. But it is not a teleological change: It is an ontological operation that inhabits the doing and “being” of fieldwork. On this basis, both kinds of change—the overt, teleological change of intervention and the ontological difference of therapy—can be used as methodological principles and techniques of fieldwork and as concepts of research design.

Boal’s “revolutionary” project of a socially engaged theatre also entails an unstated notion of therapy. The art and agenda of invisible theatre is its therapeutic operation. From this perspective we can add that Boal’s performance art is an elaborate and extended breach experiment in the ethnomethod of theatre. The therapy of the breach experiment is triggered by the techniques of rupture and effected by repair in two registers. There is the re-definition or re-keying of the situation that is what I have called the work of repairing or restoration of propriety; this in turn is a trigger for a re-envisioning of the everyday. Thus, while Wolcott “wound up [...] making the case that there is an art to fieldwork and art in it” (Wolcott, 1995: 241), I have argued further that this art is the therapeutic operation that inhabits ethnography and that constitutes the doing of and being there in fieldwork.

## **Designing Fieldwork: Staging and Installation**

Fieldwork is a form of inquiry in which one is immersed personally in the ongoing social activities... [it] is characterized by personal involvement to achieve some level of understanding that will be shared with others... [thus] Fieldwork that does not get written [or recorded visually or audio-visually] is partial and incomplete; alone it amounts to no more than what may have been anything from an intellectually rich to a psychologically devastating personal experience. (Wolcott 1995: 66).

The performativity of fieldwork as ontological being there in fieldwork cannot be separated from the doing of fieldwork as the gathering of data.<sup>5</sup> Wolcott’s first point above is certainly correct, i.e., ethnographic fieldwork that does not attain documentation that is reworked into new forms for circulation and consumption by other audiences is rendered ineffective or even “nullified”

as disciplinary and professional ethnography.<sup>6</sup> However, this article has already argued against the second point regarding the minimal value of fieldwork that does not circulate to other non-local audiences for remaining “incomplete.” The point of valorizing fieldwork as distinct from texts is to strive for an ethnography and doing of fieldwork that has meaning and significance beyond the subjective experience of the researcher for those emergent audiences that engage ethnographers and their projects.<sup>7</sup> The lived experience of fieldwork for the subjects of research necessarily articulates to the already present, ongoing, and generalized ethnography of everyday life-worlds.

What makes disciplinary ethnography different than everyday ethnography? Wolcott identifies the resultant ethnography as the crucial difference. But, it is necessary to remember that *not just any writing or representation* and *not just any documentation* of what transpired or was triggered in fieldwork amounts to, or is sufficient to become transformed into, ethnography. The diagnostic difference that I have pointed at in this article is the “thought in the back of the head” of the fieldworker through which the research design indexically functions. As part of design, it is specifically the research problem (or set of questions and issues) that governs the logic, coherence, and substance of the documentation, writing, and representation of ethnography. In the present context, however, the problem of the research problem and the always vexed question of writing/representation are not the central issues of this article.

It is necessary to extract two other methodological principles that relate to the question of design. Throughout the discussion of the invisible theatre of being in fieldwork the focus has been on distinct ontological dimensions of performativity. The discussion has therefore remained silent to this point on the question of staging and installation as the means, method, and modality of being in fieldwork.

Goffman’s analyses of the presentation of self and face-work offers a baseline to understand the staging of fieldwork. This staging, like that of everyday life, is continuous, fluid, seamless and collective. It is the invisible way in which encounters, interactions, and situations are defined and re-defined. In this sense staging is tactical. As a methodological or meta-methodological principle it is a tactic of fieldwork practice. Upon reflection, it is everywhere apparent in the setting up and enactment of even the most minor fieldwork encounter. In practice, this tactical staging is crucial as fieldworkers learn the most appropriate and efficacious way of presenting one-self to both be in fieldwork and to actualize the gathering of data. Tactical staging is involved in figuring out the best way to ask for an interview, to ask to be able to observ-

ingly participate, to conduct interviews, observation, and to successfully as for permission to document and record. Staging as ontological principle is already an idea that inhabits the conceptualization of research methods. As such it is mostly hap-hazardly methodologized as a contingent factor in methods manuals; it is not formulated into a principle of fieldwork.

There is an other register of staging that is here called installation. It is a strategic level of designing the way by which methods and procedures are hierarchically organized and unified in a coherent plan to collect (or, provoke and trigger) information that addresses the research problem. Installation, then, is the very strategy of research design as the way to transpose idealized set of issues and questions from the black and white of the grant proposal into corporeal practice situated and deployed in real space and time. The analyses of the locations of fieldwork offered by Gupta and Ferguson (1999), Clifford (1997), and Marcus (1998) point out that the definition of the spatiality of fieldwork is an analytical-theoretical process. The sites of fieldwork are in the first place imaginary locations that correspond to (if not completely derive from) research problems and design. As Marcus (1998) points out there is an active constructivism that creates the object(s) of study in ethnography (see Abu-Lughod, 2000). The objects are necessarily analytically and epistemologically constructed as spatial entities that can be located in real time and space. This is the bottom line for there to be an ethnographic and fieldwork study of those objects. Thus, in this regard, we must understand that fieldwork is necessarily multi-sited.

The crucial fact, however, is that this multi-sitedness of fieldwork has not been recognized in analytical, epistemological, methodological, and conceptual terms. Marcus, for example, suggests that some traditional ethnographies were multi-sited. The argument here is that all fieldwork is inherently multi-sited and that recognition of this principle can be productively used to reconceptualize the design and doing of fieldwork. The representational teleology of the "village" has mostly worked to block the understanding of the multiplicity of fieldwork spaces from having any dramatic analytical, epistemological, methodological, and conceptual value. The ethnographic motive to study transnational and translocal localities has opened up this awareness. Installation, thus, refers to both the strategy of implementation of design and the constructivism by which the spatiality of objects of study takes location and, therefore, allows for the object to be studied.

The installation of fieldwork occurs in spaces that are analytically and methodologically constructed as places for the performance of fieldwork. Going beyond the idea of the constructivism of locations and objects, the prin-

principle of installation focuses attention on the need to strategically link the constructed locations of our objects of study and devise coherent strategies for entering, leaving, and being in those locations in order to do the gathering of fieldwork data. It is at this strategic level, that installation is the “theatre” of invisible theatre—or the “script” and scenography of the invisible theatre of ethnographic fieldwork.

The principles of installation and staging, as the main elements of this scenography, provide the analytical coherence for the deployment of the other principles of fieldwork performativity. The ontological principles presented in this analysis are: emergent audience, spect-actors, therapy, invisibility (of the fiction of fieldwork), trigger/provocation, and breaching. There are other elements of being in fieldwork that are also implicated in this discussion, but are not discussed here—e.g., transculturation, double sensation, and ethics (Castañeda 2006). Beyond the limited goals of this article, the next step would be to introduce methodological concepts for the doing of fieldwork that articulate to these principles.<sup>8</sup> These together would form the elements of an alternative paradigm of ethnography that is based in the notion of experimentality. This alternative conception would be an experimental ethnography situated in the experimentality of fieldwork ontology. In the conclusion below, the discussion turns out toward the question of the project of ethnography and the contemporary questioning of its Self-Other grounding.

## Perils and Dwelling in Fieldwork

The “new ethnography” that I try to imagine here would take a cue from the tactile, imaginary, nervous, and contested modes of critique of the subjects we study not in order to decide what these interpretive modes “mean” in the end but to begin to deploy them in a cultural politics... It would mean *an effort to dwell in the uncertain space of error or gap* not just to police the errors and crimes of representation but to imagine the ontology and epistemology of precise cultural practices including our own modes of exegesis and explanation. *It would mean displacing the rigid discipline of “subject” and “object” that sets Us apart and leaves Them inert and without agency.* It would mean displacing the premature urge to classify, code, contextualize, and name long enough to imagine something of the texture and density of spaces of desire that proliferate in Othered places. (Stewart, 1996: 26; emphasis added).

There are other terms and ways to conceptualize and study the social contexts in which humans interact. (Wolcott, 1995 248).

In closing, it needs be reasserted that the exploration of the possibility of an experimental fieldwork is not a rejection of other modes and paradigms of fieldwork. Anthropology must value theoretical as much as cultural pluralism and give room within itself for new experiments in and understandings of its processes. The experiment of experimental ethnography understood as fieldwork is based in the putting forth into risk—or what Stewart calls “dwelling in the uncertain space of error.” This risk is not a scandalous danger or the perils of ethical dilemmas that warrant front page headlines. The notion references those mundane even banal “dangers”—the perils—that constitute the presentation of self in everyday life, ongoing breaching, therapeutic operations, emergence of audiences, fieldwork provocations, staging of encounters in fieldwork and the installation of fieldwork in ethnography. What is at risk is the dynamic of human interconnectivity—getting along, we might say. Fieldwork necessarily dwells in uncertain, risky space, no matter how much we assert our certainties in ethnographic texts and representations. Thus, the experimentality suggested here must return to this space and question its own methods, practices, procedures as part of the object of study.

This article has started from the point of the performativity of fieldwork. In other words, this article begins to think about the nature of fieldwork from the corporeal, physical performance of the activities of doing fieldwork. Thus, this argument has consciously bracketed off questions and concepts of subjectivity, identity, reflexivity, research results, methods, procedures, knowledge production, forms of analysis, and the teleology of representation. This point from which to think and theorize fieldwork is an approximation of the ontology of fieldwork; or, to state it differently, the performativity of fieldwork is the ontology of fieldwork. The tracing of the performativity (or performative ontology) of fieldwork has sought to displace the disciplinary assumptions that dichotomize “subjects” and “objects,” “us” and “them,” “here” and “there.” In so doing, it offers a different path to the making of ethnographic projects.

This leads to a consideration of the importance of the theorization versus the methodologization of fieldwork. By methodologization I refer to the way in which the practices, activities, logics, concepts, and philosophical bases of fieldwork are rendered into an unproblematic question of method; fieldwork is thereby reduced to a simple tool, simply a method, that requires no theorization of its basis and only the definition of what to do or how to use “it.”



The proliferation of methods books in anthropology and recently in related fields such as cultural studies, points to unquestioned assumptions about methods as simply the vehicle of disciplinary projects. Clifford (1997: 220, fn. 9) commented on David Schneider views of fieldwork which held not that is something unique to anthropology, but rather that *sociocultural* anthropology has a unique kind of fieldwork that distinguishes it. If this possibility is to be seriously considered, assessed, and debated, then rigorous thinking about fieldwork and about the different modalities of its practices must be sustained. This suggestion, however, contradicts the general anti-theoretical ambience of anthropology. This ambience even pervades disciplinary fields such as cultural studies, as evident, for example, in Becker's (2000) response to Willis and Trondman's (2000) manifesto for a "Theoretically Informed Methodology for Ethnography" (TIME) in which Becker proclaims a lack of trust in theory and theorization. This must be put in the context that the "manifesto for ethnography" (as both practice and a journal) *already* eschews theory and theoretical discussion that is not directly aimed at the explication of and subordinated to data.<sup>9</sup>

No doubt there are studies (belonging to a variety of fields, based in a variety of theories) that lack sufficient evidence to support their analyses. These often become legendary scapegoats for the ills of whole fields of study (e.g., cultural studies) or fields of discourse (e.g., "postmodernism"). However, the view argued here is that there is still some value to thinking and theorizing, especially to think and theorize fieldwork even distant from field data produced first-hand. Consider, for example, Schneider's use of the adjectival qualifier to the discipline, as if the other three subfields of anthropology (i.e., archaeology, biological-physical anthropology, and linguistic anthropology) did not also rely upon fieldwork as well. While I do not necessarily disagree (or agree) with Schneider's concern that "anthropologists do (misguidedly) place a special, defining emphasis on fieldwork" (Clifford's paraphrase, 1997: 220, fn 9), what seems clear is that this topic, fieldwork, does require substantial theorization precisely to understand the significant differences and homologous formulations of this diagnostic aspect of anthropology, its subdisciplines and related disciplinary fields. It is with this understanding that one can begin to ask about how ethnographic fieldwork "in" anthropology is related to the ethnographic projects that have been emerging in related fields, from all the varieties of sociology and feminisms to history, cultural studies, and postcolonial criticism (see Abu-Lughod, 2000; Alasuutari, 1995; Atkinson et al., 2001; Becker, 2000; Denzin, 1999; Marcus, 1998; McGuigan, 1997; Nugent 1997; Scott, 1992; Thomas, 1999; Van Loon, 2001). Such

a thinking through the question of fieldwork would necessarily entail both a recognition of existing and an increase in possible inter- and intra-disciplinarity. Although some might seek to erect less porous boundaries around “their” disciplines, the debate about fieldwork must be opened up to diverse theoretical analyses in multiple disciplinary arenas.

There is, therefore, a certain peril in theorizing fieldwork. Our usual comprehension is that fieldwork is a real-life practice, an action/activity, and not an idea and, thus, given our tendency to radically separate mind from body, talking about the idea of doing something that is based on intimate immersion can often strike many as, and might often even simply be, just so much abstracted word play. Although the present argument must be evaluated in terms of what it sets out, it may be worthwhile to note that this theorization of fieldwork is itself embedded within and derives from a sustained practice of fieldwork conducted in a three year period between 1997 and 2000 (Castañeda, 2004, 2005; Castañeda and Breglia, n.d.; Castañeda et al. 1999; Logan, n.d.). The research materials derived from this long term ethnography, much less the data from the published work of other authors, was not presented and it need not have been. The argument presented is not about the results of research; thus the article neither succeeds nor fails in relation to the “ethnographic” illustration of its points via the citational representation of ethnographic data. To introduce ethnographic data as evidence of thinking about fieldwork would be to methodologize fieldwork. Instead, the argument is a thinking through the question of the ontology of fieldwork via the related dynamics of invisible theatre. The argument is based on and in my own experience of fieldwork and in common-sense and commonly-shared understandings of ethnography as known by reading written ethnographies. To discuss such representations of ethnographic data and fieldwork as data for thinking about fieldwork is to fall into the trap of methodologization of fieldwork.

To anticipate another criticism, I confess that I have not explicitly discussed my own positioning as a researcher or revealed my “location.” This lack might be a weakness for some (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 2000), but for others a weakness of this article might rather be its connection to or location in the discipline of anthropology. To clarify, my “location” is precisely this politics of anthropology just noted and this thinking about ethnography is a therapeutic thinking of this uncertain space that often operates with such certainty, especially with regard to ethnography and fieldwork.

A guiding assumption of this article is that we need to refuse, for a moment at least, the methodologization of fieldwork. By pressing pause in this com-

pulsion, it is possible to theorize the very nature of fieldwork and thus take a step toward the questions posed at the beginning of this article, but now from an alternative angle. It may be the case that from such thinking and theorizing, it will be possible to re-constitute and re-formulate alternative (or “new”) paradigms and projects of ethnography. Such projects and paradigms may or may not derive from any particular institutional structures, disciplinary modalities, or interdisciplinary motivations. This possible alternative vision would be an experimental ethnography.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hernández is an Cuban art critic, ethnographer, artist; his commentary was made as a panelist at a screening of *Incidents of Travel in Chichén Itzá* (Himpele and Castañeda 1997), University of Houston, September 17, 1997.

<sup>2</sup>Besides this difference in focus, there are other significant contrasts in these methods. At least in Garfinkel’s work, the latter rely upon highly and explicitly structured environments in which the research subjects enter into a controlled and scripted dynamic. In the former, it is the student or researcher themselves that become the primary subject of research and they go forth into an environment that is primarily structured by others. Thus, the research breaching have a greater family resemblance to experiments in clinical psychology whereas the pedagogical breaching is essentially the same as the ethnographic fieldwork of cultural anthropology.

<sup>3</sup>See Bauman (1993) and Castañeda (2006) on distinctions between ethics and morals.

<sup>4</sup>Allochronism is a term coined by Fabian (2002) to refer to the way in which ethnographic description positions the subjects of research, as individuals or as cultural group, in a “past” time of history and civilization.

<sup>5</sup>While the performativity of fieldwork in anthropology has been a consistent issue in anthropology it has mostly been formulated as a question of entry or an ethical issue versus a theoretical-conceptual of practice and ontological issue. The traditions of feminist, phenomenological, and dialogical anthropologies have been longstanding leaders in this area; as a random sample consider the work of Kirsten Hastrup, Lila Abu-Lughod, Ruth Behar, Michael Jackson, Dennis Tedlock, and Elenore Bowen). There has also been a longstanding concern in sociology with the performativity of fieldwork; there is currently a variety of new or alternative approaches based on a bricolage of Garfinkel, Goffmann, Mead, Blumer, feminisms, and newer theoretical framings; consider, for example, Denzin’s (2001) interpretive interactionism.

<sup>6</sup>By professional I refer not simply to academic ethnography but the practice and discourse as used by non-academic anthropologists/ies. Disciplinary ethnography is not an activity nor practice restricted to anthropology.

<sup>7</sup>See Behar (1997) for a related argument about research that matters.

<sup>8</sup>For presentations of research practices and projects carried out within this “paradigm” of fieldwork see Author (2004, 2005), Author and Co-Author (n.d.).

<sup>9</sup>See Flaherty et al. (2002) on US sociology’s recent concern for and debate about the implications of the (anthropological) “crisis of representation.” A subtext of a few of the contributors is a rejection of “excessive” theorization of methods, data and fieldwork.

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