14 A curatorial methodology for anthropology¹

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Curating to the curatorial

The museum has played a central role within the history and development of anthropology. As a discipline that has had, since its earliest days, the 'collection, preservation, exhibition, study, and interpretation of material objects' at its very core (Stocking 1985: 4), the sacred site of the museum has acted as a critical pivot through which theories and models of the anthropological subject have been both revealed and refined, a location from which distinct understandings of the so-called ethnographic 'other' have come to be materially instantiated through the display of these others material artefacts. Spearheaded by the figure of the curator, not merely a keeper of objects but an overseer of orientations, the museum has utilised particular modes of presentation and particular narrative techniques in order to *re-present* knowledge garnered in the field (or the armchair, see Buchli, Chapter 2). As such, it has not only brought the social and material world of our 'informants' into visible reach but created specific ways of thinking about these interlocutors themselves. The changing conventions of collection and differing practices of exposition can therefore be understood to disclose as much about our discipline as those set under its disciplinary gaze, the vitrine's and storehouses of our museums not only containing, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notably remarked, the 'artifacts of our disciplines,' but in themselves acting as 'exhibits of those who make them, no matter what their ostensible subject' (1998: 78). A space of accumulation and acculturation, of education and investigation, the museum is thus also a space in which institutional paradigms are materially revealed, a depository of objects and ideologies alike.

This dual mode of revelation can be seen throughout anthropology's long and intimate imbrication with the museum. For example, the linear, teleological, typological arrangement of ethnographic artefacts that General Augustus Pitt Rivers' formed in the late nineteenth century, have retrospectively been seen as a mode of display that implicitly conveyed an 'ethnocentric message of conservative evolutionary gradualism' (Stocking 1985: 8). While attempting to counter the paradigm of degenerationism then dominant (see Jones 1998), the exhibits that Pitt Rivers' curated (notably of weaponry such

as sticks or shields) were generated via a method of chronological categorisation paralleling the evolutionary biologism of Darwin – a technique not only placing those from ‘elsewhere’ into a deep historical past, but containing an entrenched racial hierarchy with Caucasians (especially Victorian ones) at the top. On the other hand, Franz Boas’s rejection of this technique as both superficial and ‘deceptive,’ due to their reliance on ‘outward appearance’ rather than ‘immanent qualities’ (1974 [1887]: 66), led to his more contextual, pluralistic, dioramic presentations of tribal life. These scenes, often related to particular practices rather than isolated objects, were an attempt to ‘preserve the multiple functions and inner meanings of a given form’ (Stocking 1988: 8) and consequently act in a manner as meaningful to those from the communities exhibited as the museum audience. Yet while Boas’s work contained a clear ‘message of liberal relativism’ (Ibid.), it could also, as Michel Verdon argues, be seen to have denied any ‘sense of the individual as cultural actor,’ creating a depiction of ‘quasi-automata acting mostly through habit and imitation’ (2007: 447). Moreover, as David Jenkins suggested, Boas’s method of classification suppressed ‘the historical processes of [the artefacts] own development,’ creating a ‘context in which objects exist devoid of their history’ (1994: 269); the circumstances of the often highly dubious acquisition of these artefacts – as Boas’s assistance in the collection of skeletons, brains, and ‘soft parts’ of Filipinos who died at the 1904 World Fair in Saint Louis attests to – were hence left either entirely unaddressed or sadly unrecognised.

In a similar way, within the theatrical, immersive *mise en scènes* constructed by Margaret Mead, we can see not only a perpetuation of her mentor Boas’s famous life-group displays, but an attempt to provide a more multi-sensorial scenography than previously witnessed, a method whereby viewers would engage through an all-encompassing perceptual experience. Yet the balance between distance and immersion that Mead’s curation sought to mediate could itself be seen, as Diane Losche argues, to have disclosed the ‘contradictory desires built into modernist ethnology’ – the antithetical yearning to both panoptically ‘see over – and thereby gain a sense of control over – an area’ (2006: 241), while simultaneously attempting to embed the viewer in place and ‘recuperate authentic experience’ (Ibid.: 224). What’s more, Mead’s displays disregarded, as Losche continues, the innate ‘chasms that separated an actual Pacific environment from words, verbal descriptions, and the overriding minimalist architectural rules of the New York of the 1960s and 1970s’ (Ibid.: 238). It ignored the dangerous inauthenticity that these simulacra created, a constructed ambience that, ironically, generated an increased distance rather than proximity with those depicted. Every attempt to renew thus appears only to reveal a new chasm that the discipline has yet to admit.

As such, just as the principal museological paradigm of the last twenty years, the ‘contact zone’ as engaged in by Anita Herle (2008) and others, has attempted to transcend the technique of similitude that Mead’s work epitomised through a mode in which the *subjects* of the ethnographic museum themselves were increasing able to negotiate the collection and narration of

their own objects, the discourse of ‘consultation’ integral to the approach has been seen by some to have in fact bolstered the institution without truly empowering the communities they were purportedly collaborating with. The contact zone helped to form, as Robin Boast reports, an ‘asymmetric space where the periphery comes to win some small, momentary, and strategic advantage, but where the centre ultimately gains’ an imbalance born from the structure (more than the content) of the museum (2011: 66). The integrally problematic elements of the ‘contact zone’ as a space, as originally underscored by the creator of the concept, Mary Louise Pratt (1991), in which ‘a dominant culture would provide for a ‘negotiated’ space for certain kinds of cultural exchange [...] *necessary to the maintenance of the imperialistic program*’ (Boast 2011: 57, emphasis added), seems to have been perfectly reinforced as the paradigm shifted into the museum. Our current template for best practice can hence be seen as a space in which ‘Others come to perform for us, not with us,’ in which a ‘pragmatic agonism is provided for all, but only to the degree that it returns to, and reinforces, the academy’ (Ibid.: 63–64).

The practice of curation within the history of anthropology must, in this way, be seen as integral to both the past disposition and present status of the subject, a technique through which anthropological norms have been reinforced and broken, underpinned and toppled through a material rather than textual mode. It must be understood, not only as a public way of *revealing* our research, an ‘impactful’ way of displaying ‘results,’ but as a mode via which concepts are opened up and paradigms initiated, a space from which issues are not only concretised but publicly challenged. As such, curation must be seen as a practice crucial to the anthropological project, a site from which a political and ethical relationship to both our subject and our ‘subjects’ has been and can be instantiated.

Of course, many contemporary anthropologists have sought to engage the potential that curating gives the discipline, attempting ‘exhibition experiments,’ as Basu and MacDonald have explored, that ‘unsettle accepted knowledge or the status quo’ (2007: 17). In the work of Wayne Modest, for example, we find not only an attempt to decolonise the ethnographic museum (Basu and Modest 2013), to utilise it as a site in which issues of social justice can be established (Mears and Modest 2013), but also a method of collaborative curation designed to engage, enable, and emancipate its participants (Modest 2013). In her long-term engagement with Maori communities in the UK and New Zealand, Haidy Geismar has employed a series of innovative digital methods to explore how exhibiting alone – seeing, representing, and even hearing artefacts – could in many cases be less important than ‘an understanding of the fields of digital communication as channels for social and spiritual relationships’ (Geismar 2015: 313). There is also the creative response to the region of Five Heads in Mongolia, coordinated by Rebecca Empson and Hermione Spriggs, in which ten artist and anthropologist collaborators deployed an ‘indigenous principle of exchange’ garnered from the field in order to re-imagine the ‘aesthetics and practice of anthropology

from a minoritarian perspective' (Empson and Spriggs 2018: 7) and engage in 'a 'performative fictioning' of other realities' (O'Sullivan 2018: 147). Equally, we can see the *post-ethnological* or *post-ethnographic* technique pioneered (and coined) by Clementine Deliss, a method meant to 'dislodge' the 'ideological apparatus' of the 'museographic genre' (Deliss 2012: 66) and create 'forms of representation that extend beyond the academic appraisal of past histories and enable one to view the objects in the collection as prototypes for different futures' (Deliss 2013). Each of these differing modes of participation, digitisation, remediation, or decolonisation have today come to place the anthropologist-as-curator in a domain moving with and *beyond* the object. It has placed them, and us, in a domain where they are collaborating not simply collecting, enabling not simply exhibiting.²

The curatorial as model

In this chapter, however, I want to explore a particular technique of curating that I have recently explored within my own anthropological practice, a method that can act not merely as exhibit, but that can encompass, research, output, and impact in one. This, framed via the concept of the *curatorial* (as a notion defined in distinction to *curating*), is a position emergent from critical art practice rather than contemporary museology per se, one presenting itself as an expanded mode of *research* rather than exhibitory practice. Developing beyond the form of research typically encountered within traditional exhibition practice, however, through a form of 'research-led curating' or method of preliminary critical exploration that ends up housed within a resultant exhibition (in which research is simply a *precursor* to output), this is a mode of research that endures throughout the entire process of each particular project, a mode functioning in a perpetual not preludial manner.

The curatorial, as a conceptual model, can thus be seen to involve a (half) turn away from objects, away, at least, from their overarching hegemony. Echoing the manner in which artists have questioned the dominance of the artefact within contemporary art, something witnessed not only within the field of conceptual art since the 1960s (in which the idea gained dominance over the object) but so too within the more recent fields of post-Internet art (see Quaranta 2013), relational aesthetics (see Bourriaud 2002), and socially engaged art (see Kester 2011), this turn implicitly places the object as a part of a dynamic sequence of events rather than of a static moment of idiosyncrasy. Designating this as a 'post-autonomous' position, Nestor Garcia Canclini (2014) sees this as a zone in which 'art practices based on objects have increasingly been displaced in favor of practices based on contexts' (Ibid.: xviii), in which art moves beyond the 'autonomy of fields (Bourdieu) or of worlds (Becker)' (Ibid.: 11) and is rather understood to be inextricably embedded within social, economic, and political regimes (cf. Becker 1982 and Bourdieu 1993). The object's status as ultimate element of focus is hence substituted (or better reinforced) by a turn toward a more

open-ended practice of collaboration, discussion, and collective interrogation, by a practice of close research and site-responsive investigation related to conditions not just spaces. The material procedures of exhibition making are thus here subsumed (or augmented) by the regimes of discourse and dialogue, experiment and enquiry traditionally placed at the backstage. The curatorial moves beyond the exhibition site as a space for the ‘unequivocal “utterance” or finalised display’ (O’Neill and Wilson 2014: 18) and towards its usage as a space for ongoing possibilities (rather than unchallengeable ‘results’), a space to engage developing questions (rather than circumscribed answers), a site of knowledge *production* (rather than presentation). It is thus a move, as Irit Rogoff argues, ‘away from illustration, away from exemplification,’ and rather toward ‘that which we do not yet know or that which is not yet a subject in the world,’ towards a practice ‘that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict’ (2006: 3).

Within the curatorial we can thus detect not only a particular emphasis on research, but so too a particular relationship to *time*. The curatorial can be understood as a manner of unfolding rather than concluding, as ‘a way station in a process’ (Rogoff 2012: 27). While the traditional museological condition has always necessitated time’s arrest, freezing the artefact at its moment of collection (DeSilvey 2006), suspending the artwork through ever more complex and potentially dangerous techniques of conservation (Buchli 2008), here the curatorial endeavours to elongate or stretch time, to explore, as Victor Buchli has notably said, ‘what happens before and after the artefact,’ to explore the ‘*terms of materiality* rather than material culture itself’ (2002a: 19). Johannes Fabian’s seminal treatise *Time and the Other* (2014[1983]) can thus, in many ways, provide us with an interesting blueprint shifted from anthropology as text to anthropology as practice. The curatorial can be seen as a method searching for a way beyond what Fabian famously termed ‘allochronism’ (Ibid.: 32), beyond a mode that spatially and temporally distances our research subjects (or their objects), that relegates our ethnographic partners (or their artefacts) to a distant time, a time other than ‘ours,’ a time forever still. The classical museum dynamic can hence be seen to almost exactly replicate what Fabian termed the ‘schizogenic use of Time’ inherent to anthropological discourse (Ibid.: 21). As a space denying any notion of shared temporality, presenting the conditions of knowledge in an abstracted state, functioning through a rhetorical neutrality, the museum, in its archetypal form, embodies the temporal power games and techniques of detachment so trenchantly critiqued by Fabian. True equality in this context can only ever emerge through an emphasis on process, through a focus beyond the moment of display and toward a more ‘open-ended, cumulative processes of engagement, interruption, and possibility’ (O’Neill 2012: 128). The ambition of the curatorial to ‘set a temporal process in motion rather than focussing on the outcome of any final exhibition’ (Ibid.: 104), thus becomes a method

through which to avoid the ‘forces of historical inertia’ that museums are ‘perhaps inescapably, implicated [within]’ (Stocking 1985: 4). More than just engaging themes of contemporaneity or simultaneity, this is about the sharing of *space* with others (cf. Birth 2008), an assertion of the value of ongoing collaboration and cooperation, of process over presentation.

The curatorial in practice

Opening in April 2019 at the University of London’s Brunei Gallery, part of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), *Motions of this Kind: Propositions and Problems of Belatedness*, is a project which, I argue, engages directly with the concept of the curatorial. Emerging out of a three-year British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship (2014–2017) for which I undertook approximately eight months of fieldwork in Metro Manila, the Philippines, the ethnographic focus of my fellowship was the capital’s diverse, highly developed contemporary art scene. Conducting research with artists, gallerists, curators, fabricators, writers, editors, collectors, filmmakers, musicians, producers, coders, designers, publishers, and myriad other individuals connected to the wider art ecosystem, my fieldwork came to centre on the country’s much-vaunted return to the Venice Biennale in 2015 (for the first time in 49 years). Already eager to explore the relationships between the local and the global in a famously transnational site, to examine the way that historical and contemporary relations of power were unpacked in a doubly post-colonial location, I thus set out to explore the tension between the lived situation of my research partners in the Philippines and their wider cosmopolitan presence in the world (via international education, international exhibitions, international residency projects, etc., let alone familial ties to Overseas Foreign Workers who make up over 10 per cent of the country’s population).

Principally, then, it was the relatively new discourse of ‘Global Art’ that was the wider paradigm the project lay within (with Venice as the fulcrum that this worked around), and my research came to focus on the ways in which the practices I witnessed and the particulars I was guided towards came to rub up against this new form of Art World hegemony (Schacter and Balaguer 2017). While this new form of Art World hegemony I had engaged in curating within my general academic output in the past, however,³ producing an exhibition related to this new research project was not an aspiration I took with me to the field (nor one that I discussed with my interlocutors).⁴ Nevertheless, at the midpoint of the project I decided to apply to an open call at Brunei Gallery, in the hope that it could help continue my research further (both temporally and theoretically). Accepted in June of 2016 (just under three years in advance of the exhibition), the initial proposal was quite different from the final exhibition itself. Submitting what was, effectively, a proposal for a ‘survey’ show, a presentation of the latest and most innovative contemporary art from the Philippines (yet one without a conceptual backbone aside from the regional), once the proposal was accepted the real work of determining the project in fact began.

First and foremost, I felt that curating the project by myself, acting as sole ‘impresario’ (in O’Neill’s terms), would be a clearly inappropriate, if not neo-colonial, move. Seeking to collaborate with local cultural workers whose lived knowledge would always exceed my own, I thus approached two of my most engaging interlocutors, the artist/curator Merv Espina and the writer/curator Renan Laru-an; thankfully, both agreed to participate with me as a three-man curatorial team, and an intense period of planning ensued (both online and in person in Manila).

What became clear early on was that the relationship between where we were working and what we were working on had to be pivotal: The project was not happening in a vacuum (the disinterested white cube is of course a myth), and the site-specific nature of the project needed to be entirely evident. Situated at the *Brunei* Gallery (named after the benefactor of the building, the Sultan of Brunei), was hence a first point of interest. The Sultanate had, for hundreds of years, acted as a key trading and political partner of the Philippines, land commonly interchanging between the two nations (both Palawan and Sulu previously having been part of the Empire of Brunei), as well as many key events (and scandals)⁵ occurring between the two neighbours throughout their intertwined historical arcs. Likewise, the location of SOAS and London, where the Brunei Gallery was situated, felt similarly crucial. While a school today famous for its radical left leanings, SOAS was originally founded as ‘an instrument to strengthen Britain’s political, commercial, and military presence in Asia and Africa,’ serving to bolster and support the prolongation of the British Empire through providing ‘instruction to colonial administrators, commercial managers, and military officers, but also to missionaries, doctors, and teachers’ (Brown 2016: 7). SOAS as a site thus had to act as a central pivot. Added to the fact that the school had recently initiated a new hub, the Philippines Centre (under the guidance of Dr Cristina Juan), and had a huge archive of Filipino material yet to be explored – including nearly 150 boxes of letters, photographs, field-notes, and ephemera from the Ifor Ball Powell Archive – it was the historical and contemporary flows that intertwined and knitted together these three key sites, SOAS, Manila, and Brunei, that we wanted to ensure lay within our sight line.

Yet⁶ it was a passage emerging, perhaps unexpectedly, from Sir Isaac Newton’s famous treatise of 1687, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, that helped us to solidify this wider desire, a passage emergent from the observations of voyager and astronomer Edmund Halley, in which ‘Leuconia’ – today known as Luzon, the largest island in the Philippines – is discussed:

There are two inlets to this port and the neighbouring channels [...] one from the seas of China, between the continent and the island of Leuconia; the other from the Indian sea, between the continent and the island of Borneo.

Laying the foundations for modern science in his unparalleled exposition of the three laws of motion, gravity, and planetary movement, the tidal flows witnessed by Halley left Newton stumped, bewildered by the strange currents surrounding these distant equatorial seas. As he continued,

whether there be really two tides propagated through the said channels, one from the Indian sea in the space of 12 hours, and one from the sea of China in the space of 6 hours, which therefore happening at the 3rd and 9th lunar hours, motions of this kind add together; or whether there be any other condition imposed by other seas, I leave to be determined by observations on the neighbouring shores.

Inspired by the curious indeterminacy of Newton's analysis, and by the 'motions of this kind' that exposed the limitations of his scientific expertise, we thus set out to explore, not simply 'the rise and fall of the tides,' but, as Filipino historian Ricardo Manapat suggested, the 'historical ebb and flow of ideas' (2011: 292). Newton's work thus led us on an exploration of the turbulent temporal currents flowing between Europe and Southeast Asia, the undertows that both hasten and delay the circulation of knowledge. Placing the theme of *belatedness* as our principal subject matter – as both a concept, reference, and argument – the project aimed to underscore the various 'propositions and problems' that this temporal state, or its accusation, brings. Our emphasis saw belatedness as that in which traces of the past could not only come back to haunt the present, but could act as a tool of resistance, a rupture rejecting the dynamic of primary and secondary (Bhabha 1994). It engaged with a belatedness that asserted itself as a rich terrain, not a linear judgement, a belatedness refusing the strictures of cause and effect, futurity and historicity (as seen in Pinney, Chapter 12), rejecting fixity of people and places. From this conceptual ground zero, however, came the crucial component of the projects enacted by our artist-collaborators themselves. The exhibition commissioned new works and developing ongoing projects by 11⁷ artists, working either in or on the Philippines, as well as featuring an archival display from the never-before exhibited Ball Powell archive exploring Britain's informal empire in the Philippines.⁸ While each of the nine individual projects produced for *Motions of this Kind* elucidated the key themes and processes brought forth by the exhibition, I want to briefly explore two works – from the artists Cian Dayrit and Mark Salvatus, the artists I collaborated with most closely during the exhibition – whose work can reveal something general about the exhibition through their specificity.

Curating tidal/temporal movements

Like much of his interdisciplinary practice, Dayrit's work – a large embroidered tapestry and a set of archival objects and documents arranged within three museum vitrines – explores notions of authenticity and reproduction,

imperialism and indigeneity, power and memory, and the visual apparatus of colonial power. Entitling his project *Northern Conquests in Oriental Soil and Sea*, his tapestry in particular sets out to literally upturn our normative perception of geographic space. Basing the work on a map from 1744 drawn by the renowned English cartographer Emanuel Bowen, Dayrit's rendering both reverses the original orientation of the image (through rotating the north and south, east and west axes) as well as replaces the colonial names delineated in Bowen's 'new and accurate map of the East India Islands' with the collective names of local indigenous groups. As such, while geographically depicting the precise area described by Newton in the passage from *Principia* discussed in our exhibition text – the seas between Leuconia, South China, and Borneo – Dayrit rejects the naturalised efficiency of colonial cartography, acknowledging yet assimilating its power through rerouting the very premises on which it was made.

Yet the capacity of Dayrit's 'counter cartography' not only emerges through its geographic reversal and eponymic renaming, through its ability to interrogate the medium through the medium itself, but so too through its playful anachronism; the contrast of materials, concepts, and time frames within his piece enabled him to 'talk about the issues of today with the language of yesterday' (personal communication), to interweave the colonial histories of American and Spanish domination in the Philippines with the contemporary battles of land reform and ecological extraction that local indigenous and peasant groups currently face. Moreover, while the main body of the tapestry was produced in Metro Manila, final key elements were hand embroidered at the atelier of Hand & Lock, a London-based embroidery house who have provided embellishment services to the Royal Family and Royal Armed Forces since 1767. Imperial and colonial history thus not only exist representationally and conceptually within Dayrit's map, but are woven into its very fabric. Alongside his three vitrine works – displays juxtaposing key documents from the Ball Powell archive with tourist knick-knacks, gift-shop souvenirs, amulets, and talisman, in order to play with positioning and dominance, ideology and belief, in order to 'create a new gaze upon the gaze' (personal communication) – *Northern Conquests in Oriental Soil and Sea* collectively presents a defiant narrative rubbing against the historical grain, refusing the teleological and embracing chronological inconsistency, a simultaneous denial and appropriation of these powerful material forms.

Salvatus's work also addresses the historical record, but that of the more recent colonial past. His installation, *Blue Moon*, an eight-minute video piece installed adjacent to a large vinyl photograph and set of paper and papier-mâché masks, records a masquerade that occurred on 31 December 1910 in Salvatus's hometown of Lucban, a 'simple experiment,' as the local newspaper then reported, that the townsfolk wished to turn into an annual event. Paying 'tribute to the year that had just ended' and intended to provide 'proof,' as the report continued, of the town's 'exquisite taste and love for riots and expansion,' the Lucban Carnival of 1910 was realised just once, however, vanishing

Figure 14.1 Cian Dayrit. *Northern Conquests in Oriental Soil and Sea*, 2019. Tapestry, 215 cm x 238 cm.

Source: Produced in collaboration with Henry Caceres and Karin Beharrell of Hand and Lock. Commissioned with the support of Gasworks. Image © Agnese Sanvito. Courtesy of *Motions of this Kind*.

Figure 14.2 Mark Salvatus. *Blue Moon*, 2019. Video installation in single channel with masks, vinyl, and LEDs. 8', dimensions variable.

Source: Produced by Salvage Projects. Image © Agnese Sanvito. Courtesy of *Motions of this Kind*.

from social memory and remaining entirely unrecognised for over a hundred years. Upon discovering an image of the carnival and the newspaper article in question in Manila's Lopez Museum archives, however, Salvatus decided to re-enact this historical moment in his hometown, a belated reprisal (just 108 years late) reanimating this uncanny event.

Key questions remained for Salvatus, however: Who in fact introduced the masquerade to Lucban? Who influenced its style? At a key transition period between Spanish and American colonisation, between the religious Catholic pageants brought from Iberia and the more secular parades brought from the States (such as the masked Thanksgiving, or Ragamuffin parades today reformulated within the festival of Halloween), the archival images seem to show an intriguing intermeshing of both. Yet the conquistador-style features depicted on many of the masks also reveal a link toward the carnivalesque culture of Mexico, the site from which the majority of colonial administrators came in the Philippines during the rule of Spain. This very local, seemingly parochial, singular event can hence be seen as an opening from which one can enter much wider global networks. Salvatus not only shows the way that colonialism embeds itself into the specificity of social life, but reveals how the history of his hometown and family become intricately, intimately, intertwined with our all-encompassing metanarratives. The quotidian and taken for

granted is hence here reclaimed to the status of the truly “historical”: the site not of official policy and governmental affairs, but of the citizenship of the everyday.

The work of Dayrit and Salvatus – alongside each of the other nine collaborating artists – intertwined historical and contemporary themes, individual and collective concerns, local and global relations. They took the concept of belatedness as a starting point from which to investigate the relationship between the temporal and the spatial, the colonial, the personal, the political. Yet the focus on the belated so clearly emergent within these works is not, in itself, the only link I want to make toward the curatorial. Instead, it is the project itself as open-ended research method I want to reinstate, the exhibition as a methodological technique, as a space of evolution and unfolding, of speculation over demonstration that I want now to reinforce.

The curatorial as anthropological method

As methodology, the very fact of the exhibition positioned me within the wider political economy of art in a way that pushed me and my research into previously elusive spaces. It gave me access to certain members of the wider art ecosystem (politicians, philanthropists, gallerists),⁹ to certain professional practices (into aspects of patronage, processes of delegation and cooperation)¹⁰ I would have otherwise been excluded from. It gave me access to a level of collaborative intensity with my interlocutors that only a joint enterprise could allow, to a period of condensed yet concentrated fieldwork that could only emerge through the fulcrum of a collaborative and shared project. For example, the days spent together in Manila with my co-curators hammering out an initial concept, were in themselves a period of compressed, accelerated fieldwork entirely enabled by the operational structure of a forthcoming exhibition. And this, of course, is without discussing the months (in fact, years) of continuous correspondence and discourse that persisted as we pushed forward as a collective, without discussing the interpersonal relationships engendered and enriched through the mechanism of the wider project. Rather than simply following my research partners as they went about their everyday and professional lives, then, rather than just chatting at exhibition openings, at artist-run spaces, at studio visits or performances, here we were collaborating and discussing ideas together, thinking through concepts in an intrinsically cooperative manner (something also discussed by Geismar in Chapter 6). Without the grounding of a wider enterprise, none of this would have been possible. It would have been an imposition, not a collaboration, an obtrusive demand I would be unwilling to make and they, more to the point, almost certainly unwilling to accept.

As methodology, then, the curatorial enabled me to impel my work upwards (towards people I would otherwise be unable to reach) as well as to burrow it deeper (towards those who would otherwise be unable to afford the necessary time) – to conduct, in George Marcus’s famous words, ‘ethnography all

the way up and down' (1998: 14). It gave me insights into many of the ways the wider art world as a whole functioned, while also creating its own call and response leading to ever more research opportunities and engagements. The project thus generated more ethnographic knowledge and insight, more ethnographic access and output, before the exhibition itself had even begun. It created a temporal trail that set the physical instantiation of the 'show' itself as simply one part of a much larger process, one incorporating an artist and curatorial residency (at Gasworks and the Delfina Foundation), a symposium (held at SOAS), a series of performances and workshops (held at the Koppel Project), two film screenings (at the ICA), as well as a range of public artist talks, academic conversations, and public tours; a second iteration of the exhibition, in Manila in 2021, is presently in its incipient stages.¹¹ The project, and consequently the ethnographic data, thus extends forward and reaches back far beyond the discrete exhibition moment. It continues as process and open-endedness, to not resolve but remain in continual motion.

Moreover, the very data produced via this technique, due to the long-term relationship and material co-production that the project enabled, meant that the installations and objects produced within the exhibition could be seen to move beyond 'art,' to be understood, in the terms of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, as 'epistemic objects.' These were each artefacts emergent from a 'poetology of research,' objects stressing both the 'materiality of the research process' as well as their 'capacity to surprise the researcher, to defeat his or her expectations, to dwarf his or her powers of anticipation with their own revelatory richness' (2014). Based upon in-depth fieldwork, on close readings, on long-term engagement, the works of the 11 artists featured in *Motions of this Kind* must therefore be encountered as primary data not secondary reflections, as epistemic forms containing arguments and reasoning yet remaining figurally boundless. The reduction of ethnography to the anecdote can here thus be supplanted (or supported) by the material forms co-produced between curator and artist, ethnographer and research partner, by forms that must be understood as ethnographic data in and of themselves.

As outlined above, many contemporary anthropologists/curators – such as Basu, Deliss, Geismar, Spriggs, and Modest, amongst numerous others – have sought to face the challenges at the root of the museum as colonial record. In this shift from curating to the curatorial, however, the anthropologist moves from solely the custodian of artefacts to simultaneously a 'co-producer [...] critic or agent provocateur' (O'Neill and Wilson 2014: 14–15), a role in which the aim is not merely to *explain* the other but to embed them in a collaborative relationship. Projects taking place here are thus ones in which knowledge is *generated* not simply reproduced, in which exhibitions are understood not simply as a 'medium for representation' but, rather, 'a medium for "enactment"' (Basu and MacDonald 2007: 2, 12). Curation becomes a model in which the anthropologist engages in experimental, speculative, long-term processes wherein we can speak together with our interlocutors, mediating not controlling their own ways of seeing.¹² Rather than forming finalities, here

we can create new knowledge (rather than display already confirmed truths); we can engage in an ethnographic process that reveals itself to the world in the midst of the process itself, one that reflexively opens itself up prior to its authorised, constructed result.¹³ Here we thus move toward knowledge production as co-creation, a space in which ethnography stretches beyond the space of the preparatory alone. Here we embrace a post-autonomous practice moving with and beyond objects, with and beyond the traditional conception of the ethnographic itself.

As method, the curatorial can thus enable a level of access and temporal engagement we would otherwise be denied, while simultaneously elevating the entire process of the exhibition to a space of active research: It thus refuses the freeze-framing ‘museum as mausoleum’ first described by Theodor Adorno (1955), the docile museum, in Giorgio Agamben’s terms, that presents the ‘exhibition of an impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experiencing’ (2007: 84): As method, the curatorial can hence eschew the dominance of the autonomous artefact and instead focus on the potential for collaboration and collective practice: This does not mean, of course, that objects are abandoned, but that, as Peter Weibel and Bruno Latour have shown, they become part of a ‘performative turn’ in which the ‘aesthetic product is replaced by an artistic practice that can be object-based or object-free but nevertheless expands the scope for enactment’ (2007: 107). As method, the curatorial can act as a site of the *speculative*, the subjunctive (as seen in Pinney, Chapter 12), as a field of evolution rather than exposition: We can hence engage with works that provide not ‘doctrinaire answers or programs,’ not ‘propositions or conclusions,’ but, rather, enable us to experience ‘the pathways and enigmas of knowledge’ (García Canclini 2014: 16, 28). The curatorial methodology thus moves beyond the idea of exhibition as space of *impact* alone and rather sees it as a space in which research, output and impact are in constant and mutual constitution, in which the project acts as platform for investigation, as site of exposure, as nexus for access. It must therefore be seen a practice holding huge potential for the contemporary anthropological project in itself; not merely a mode of best-practice within the museum, but one in which the relationship to our subjects and their objects is reassessed, one in which the political framing of anthropology as practice can be reformed and reactivated.

Notes

- 1 Thanks to the editors and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on this chapter. Particular thanks to Ludovic Coupaye for his enlightening insights.
- 2 Geismar (2015) has, however, made very clear the potential pitfalls housed within the art/anthropology relationship, in particular when art enters into the ethnographic museum but is not critically unpacked as a discourse with heavy baggage in itself and, instead, simply used “as a vehicle for overriding other categories and values surrounding the objects on display” (ibid.: 184).
- 3 See Schacter 2019 for a discussion of my prior practice of curation in which research-led curating was at the forefront.

- 4 My research collaborators were used to receiving global members of the artworld in Manila, generally on one-week excursions with numerous daily studio visits. These curators and gallerists were there for a distinct purpose, to bring back booty (or artists) from foreign lands and return them to global. While this is of course a touch cynical (and something I could of course be judged to have perpetrated myself), I hoped that the length of fieldwork undertaken would surpass the issues that these short term, helicoptered in trips can (though not always do) engender. Moreover, had I gone to Manila with the aim of curating an exhibition, I believe my research would have been hampered through falling into a potentially instrumental relationship with my interlocutors from the outset. At the least, my positionality in the field would have shifted from “researcher” to “curator”, something that I simply did not want.
- 5 One of the most notorious scandals, known as the “Brunei Beauties” and concerning Filipina sex workers in Brunei, in fact prompted a congressional enquiry in the Philippines (Law 2000).
- 6 It is important to note that the ensuing two paragraphs draw heavily from the general exhibition concept for *Motions of this Kind*, written as a collaboration between Merv Espina, Renan Laruan, and myself.
- 7 These being Yason Banal, Jon Cuyson, Liza May David, and Gabriel Rossell Santillan, Cian Dayrit, Eisa Jocson, Michelle Dizon, Amy Lien and Enzo Camacho, Kat Medina, and Mark Salvatus.
- 8 Curated by Dr Cristina Juan of the Philippines Centre, and the curator of the UCL Ethnography Collection, Delphine Mercier.
- 9 As an independently initiated project, fundraising was part of our remit as ‘curators,’ a role that brought me into contact with numerous organisations that not only helped to bring the project into fruition, but acted as sites for ongoing ethnographic research.
- 10 Färber’s superb critique of the mode of ‘cultural entrepreneurship’ necessary to curate exhibitions today highlights the deep ‘entanglements of experimental reflexivity in the workings of late modern capitalism’ (2007: 219). While I hope to have avoided many of the pitfalls she highlights, it serves as a stark and invaluable warning.
- 11 This return exhibition, due to take place in December 2021, will centre around an exhibition and attendant conference but will also be the start of a wider 3-year series of programming and infrastructural support between the UK and the Philippines. Again, this will not only help to continue my own research in the Philippines, but will act as a material benefit for my interlocutors and the wider art community in the country.
- 12 Here I think its also worth thinking about Coupaye’s (2018) work on analytical and vernacular categories within the museum, and the way in which the play of multiple vernacularities can reveal the inherently vernacular nature of the museum itself.
- 13 Here, Schnedier and Wright’s (2010) discussion about the potential housed within the “incompleteness” of art over the “forcible completion” of anthropology is very pertinent (ibid.: 19–20).