

EthnoScripts

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR AKTUELLE
ETHNOLOGISCHE STUDIEN

Anthropology and Art

Jahrgang 17 Heft 1 | 2015

Linda Weintraub

Curator – Anthropologist / Ethnographer – Artist

Ethnoscripts 2015 17 (1): 198-217

eISSN 2199-7942

Herausgeber:

Universität Hamburg
Institut für Ethnologie
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)
D-20146 Hamburg
Tel.: 040 42838 4182
E-Mail: lfE@uni-hamburg.de
<http://www.ethnologie.uni-hamburg.de>

eISSN: 2199-7942



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Curator – Anthropologist / Ethnographer – Artist

Katherine Carl and Natalie Jeremijenko
interviewed by Linda Weintraub

Interviewer's Introduction

Three voices were recorded, transcribed, and edited to reveal the multiple disciplinary perspectives that are explored in the following text. This convergence was initiated by an invitation from the editors of *Ethnoscripts* to contribute an essay exploring the intersection between four of these disciplines: art, ecology, anthropology, and ethnography. Only two reflected my professional proficiency – art and ecology. My search for an anthropology/ethnography partner coincided with the opening of an exhibition entitled “World of Matter” at the James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center, New York. The exhibition incorporated all four disciplines. It utilized the methodologies of the social and natural sciences to examine instances of geopolitical-ecological upheaval. Although the venue was an art gallery, issues of migration, energy production, and mining were not presented as painted or sculpted representations. They took the form of photographic documentation, video, text, and film. Its anthropological/ethnographic content was expanded by the inclusion of historical narratives, scientific laboratory research, community initiatives, and indigenous technologies initiatives that are unique to each locale that was represented. The curator was Katherine Carl.

My initial visit to this exhibition was made more momentous because I was accompanied by an artist whose practice stretches the definition of fine art beyond its traditional borders by introducing issues, processes, aesthetics, functions, and materials that are anachronistic to the history of art. Her extensive output breached many discipline divisions. Some veered in the direction of anthropology and ethnography. This artist was Natalie Jeremijenko.

In remarkably distinctive manners, both Carl and Jeremijenko have pursued experiments that dismantle well-worn patterns of representation by embracing a plethora of aesthetic, conceptual and interventionist engagements, which explains why the following interview reflects neither anthropological research on art, nor an analysis of art from the perspective of anthropology. Nor does it explore the ‘artistic’ zone of operations in which boundaries between ethno-graphic fact and fiction mingle. Nor will it retrace an example of recent art where art explicitly converges with ethnography/anthropology. Groups such as *Artpologist* make such connections explicit in their stated

missions. Formed in 2007, this collective explicitly activates the dual perspective of artists (utilizing visual means) and social scientists (conducting ethnographic fieldwork). In this instance, both art practice and anthropological inquiries assume the perspectives of their subjects. “Voices of Taraz”, for example, is a creative project by Artpologist that invites Taraz residents to elicit their childhood encounters and memories of the city. <http://voicesoftaraz.blogspot.se/p/the-idea.html>. Likewise, Моя Америка (My America) is based on ethnographic field research with Russian-speaking residents of New York City that gathered stories of how immigrants transformed their adopted city.

Instead, this interview features two representatives of vanguard art explorations in which disciplines, categories, and definitions are not neatly formulated. Natalie Jeremijenko is an artist, engineer and inventor with a speciality in environmental and urban issues, whose methods and themes are timely and instructive. Nonetheless, the art-viewing population might be perplexed because her approach to artistry does not conform to popular definitions of art. Resistance is not confined to the public. Even critics can be at a loss to ascertain the standards of merit by which her experimental projects might be judged and art historians might have difficulty determining a historic context within which to situate them.

Likewise, Katherine Carl is an art curator, but not in the conventional sense because she does not assert her expertise by organizing exhibitions in which interaction between the artist, the artwork, the audience, and the environment is suppressed to accord with the sterilized austerity of museum protocols and the determinates of curatorial authority.

Both Jeremijenko and Carl dispense with such separatist tactics by circumventing mute audiences and neutral sites. Instead, they approach the art audience as an opportunity for dynamic engagements that are complex, collaborative, and adaptive. Thus, their professional vantages incorporate interactive principles that are non-controllable, non-predictable, and non-immediate. As a curator, Carl participates in social exchanges that examine curative aspects of our social and non-human environments by accessing the creativity of the audience as well as the artist. As an artist, Jeremijenko purges the ‘art-ificiality’ of her profession’s history. Both represent cultural frontiers that require major overhauls of their profession’s standard protocols.

Nonetheless, neither has abandoned the defining characteristics of their respective professions. Carl maintains the curator’s conventional job description that includes research, management, and working with artists to optimize their work for the public. These responsibilities entail constructing and interpreting relationships between works of art and elucidating their significance. As a curator, she determines if the audience will be coddled or provoked, perplexed or instructed. Natalie Jeremijenko’s departure from conventions of art production can be

encapsulated by her rejection of values associated with ‘anthropocentrism’, the practice of interpreting reality exclusively in terms of human values and human experience. By directing awareness away from her personal tastes and feelings and toward ecological relationships, her work epitomizes the inclusiveness of ‘ecocentrism’. This entails eliminating the prefix ‘ego’ (self), and replacing it with the prefix ‘eco’ (home or habitat). Jeremijenko’s eco art practice is habitat-centered and habitat-serving. She cultivates behaviors that align human and nonhuman forms of life with long-term environmental directives.

Carl and Jeremijenko welcomed the opportunity to articulate the relationship between their respective art practices with anthropological and ethnographic studies. Each selected one project to serve as her narrative focus: “Lost Highway Expedition” for Carl and “Salamander Superhighway” for Jeremijenko. Because both projects entail travel, they invite comparisons regarding such timely themes as native/alien, risk/opportunity, immigration/migration, etic/emic methodologies, political/physical obstacles, etc.

Introducing the Interviewees

Katherine Carl is an art curator and a member of The School of Missing Studies (SMS), a collaborative group that scouts for missing knowledge in the midst of abrupt urban transition. SMS is international and multi-disciplinary (www.schoolofmissingstudies.net). The founders are Liesbeth Bik (artist, Rotterdam), Ana Dzokic (architect, Rotterdam), Ivan Kucina (architect, Belgrade), Marc Neelen (architect, Rotterdam), Jos van der Pol (artist, Rotterdam), Milica Topalovic (architect, Rotterdam), Sabine von Fischer (architect, Zurich), Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss (architect, New York who gave SMS its name), Stevan Vukovic (writer/curator, Belgrade), and Katherine Carl (writer/curator, New York). Carl contributes the perspective and training of a North American art historian and curator.

Natalie Jeremijenko is an artist who applies her extensive training as an engineer and inventor to environmental and urban issues. She manifests this training and this mission by inventing the means and constructing infrastructures for non-human urban species, providing them with the shelter, food, waste management, and opportunities for social organization they require to thrive.

OOZ, for example, is a series of art interfaces that facilitate interaction between humans and nonhumans. Like a traditional zoo, *OOZ* is a place where animals and humans interact. However, the reversal of the normal spelling of ‘zoo’ indicates that this project reverses typical zoo protocols. Animals are not confined in cages; they are free to choose their own habitation. Furthermore,

This diversity exists alongside the advanced critical thinking skills and shared commitment to excavating ubiquitous yet missing knowledge. Each location initiates new research because each intervention explores a cultural topic that is unique to that locale. The programs of lectures, workshops, seminars, master-classes, and research studios that constitute the ‘school’ ultimately generate cultural projects such as artworks, performances, exhibitions, architecture interventions, critical writing, etc. These diverse activities are undertaken to open unexpected paths of dialogue among individuals who would not otherwise work together toward a common goal. In this manner they transform a cultural disturbance into an opportunity for creative research and cultural production. SMS’s strategies are designed to generate independent initiatives that elaborate upon the original project and have an enduring impact on the community. These efforts are optimized because they come from regions that have multifaceted unwritten histories and are undergoing transition. They include the nine new capitals of the Western Balkans (Zagreb, Croatia; Ljubljana, Slovenia; Novi Sad and Belgrade, Serbia; Skopje, Macedonia; Prishtina, Kosova; Podgorica, Montenegro; Tirana, Albania; Sarajevo, Bosnia and Hercegovina), as well as Munich, Rotterdam, Zurich, and New York.

Thus the notion of ‘school’ focuses on thematic material, structural approaches, and critical meth-

humans are not restricted to passive observation; they are granted opportunities to participate in reciprocal interfaces with animals. Both schemes break the barrier between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that is ingrained in Western attitudes toward animals.

The series introduces astute remedies, presented as works of art, to situations that endanger both human and animal populations. These remedies take the form of humorous and accessible schemes for public facilitation. *OOZ* serves animal populations by applying considerations of progress, technological development, and the quality of life to non-humans. Such projects address dwindling animal populations by facilitating immigration, encouraging reproduction, and improving habitat. At the same time, *OOZ* serves human populations by inviting the public to contribute to the generation of scientific knowledge, thereby expanding the notion of ‘participatory democracy’.

Jeremijenko has initiated *OOZ* projects on behalf of birds, geese, fish, mussels, and bats. For this interview, she focused on *Salamander Superhighway, 2012*. The ‘highway’ is actually an enclosed tunnel made of cast iron pipe, a material chosen because it is strong enough to withstand the weight of cars, trucks, and buses. It is laid in an orientation that matches the treacherous path of migrating salamanders as they cross a road. This occurs each year in early spring, on a rainy night, when they emerge from hibernation and assemble to search for the moist,

ods that are missing from standard academic institutions. Through the auspices of SMS, education is deployed, not centralized. It transpires through dynamic exchanges, not rhetoric. It is multi-directional, not hierarchical. It is undertaken to facilitate societal change, by gaining investment of individual students. It cultivates interdisciplinary exchanges, not separate disciplines. In all these ways SMS strives to be as dynamic and fluid as the topics it addresses. Participants in this 'school' develop the tools and methods to shape the cities they inhabit as they transition from 'no longer' to 'not yet', transforming 'missing' into 'mission'.

Bio – Katherine Carl is Curator of the James Gallery and Deputy Director of the Center for the Humanities at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. She was Curator of Contemporary Exhibitions at The Drawing Center (2005-2007); was on the senior staff at Dia Art Foundation (1999-2003); manager of the international artists exchange program ArtsLink (1996-1997); and program specialist at the National Endowment for the Arts (1991-1995). She has taught art history, theory, and criticism and curatorial methods at Tyler School of Art (2010), Parsons (2009), Moore College of Art (2009) and New York University (2002-2003). Carl received an American Council of Learned Societies fellowship in 2007 for completion of her dissertation (*Aoristic Avant-Garde: Experimental Art in*

wooded habitats they require for spawning. Because roads fragment forest habitats and interrupt their migration pathways, mortality rates are staggering.

Jeremijenko's benevolent impulses are not only undertaken on behalf of salamanders. She notes that some salamanders have an amazing adaptation called 'autotomy'; they can make their tails fall off if a predator snags it and then they can grow new ones. Jeremijenko proposes that salamander (cock) tails offer a cheap, efficient, non-polluting, recyclable, wild, healthful, tasty source of protein that mercifully avoids the need to slaughter a living animal. In all these ways, OOO combines wildlife care-taking with resource-acquisition to demonstrate that human food systems can have a positive impact on the environment.

Bio – Natalie Jeremijenko pursued graduate studies in Mechanical Engineering at Stanford University and in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne. She obtained her Ph.D. from the Department of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering at the University of Queensland. She is also affiliated with the Media Research Lab/Center for Advanced Technology in the Computer Science Department, New York University. Other research positions include Xerox PARC (Palo Alto, California) and the Advanced Computer Graphics Lab of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

1960s and '70s Yugoslavia) as well as numerous grants from The Trust for Mutual Understanding for her research and projects. Her co-edited books are *Lost Highway Expedition Photobook* (2007) and *Evasions of Power* (2011). Carl holds a PhD in Art History and Criticism from State University of New York, Stony Brook, and a B.A. from Oberlin College.

She has taught at the School Of Visual Arts, New York; San Francisco Art Institute; University of California, San Diego; Royal College of Art, London; Michigan State University. Jeremijenko was included in the 1997 and the 2006 Whitney Biennials of American Art. In 2010 Neuberger Museum mounted a major survey of her recent work.

The Interview, conducted by Linda Weintraub

Interviewer: How does your engagement with anthropology/ethnography impact your creative process?

KC: The School of Missing Studies is a project that I've been involved with for twelve years. It took shape as a collaborative network. From the very beginning it was a platform that explores abrupt transition in cities and the missing knowledge of histories. But it is also a school of sorts. It has a very strong mandate to study, not things that are missing, but things that are actually ubiquitous but have never been scouted and brought together for many reasons. They may have been obscured for political reasons or for because traditional disciplines could not get at that knowledge because of the bounds of the disciplines. We scout for the knowledge between disciplines, among networks of people that may not have worked together before. My role as a curator isn't traditional, and in SMS I am a participant among others.

With LHE (*Lost Highway Expedition*) we raised such questions as: Is the process of travel, interacting with specific places and people

NJ: I will focus on OOOZ, 'zoo' backwards and without cages. This is about creating urban habitat for non-humans. It comes out of the observations of non-humans who are there and who leave traces in some way. They are the other 'other', not the conventional anthropological 'other'. It is critical to understand how much we depend on biodiversity for healthy ecosystems. So OOOZ, as an example, draws attention to organisms that are critical to the ecosystem.

One concrete example of the OOOZ project, the *Salamander Superhighway*. Salamanders are the base of the food network. The biomass of frogs and amphibians and salamanders is almost twice the size of all things warm in the Northeast, including all the deer and squirrels, which is a lot of flesh to hide in the leafy undergrowth and puddles. But it demonstrates the reason why every migrating bird and all those small mammals love salamanders. They all depend on salamanders for

and organizations on the ground, a political act? Is that an artistic act? In order to be art, was output needed? Or was the process of moving with the material of the questions and the places enough?

Interviewer: Were these questions raised prior to the event?

KC: Prior to the event it was quite structured and everybody came with a research project, so it was not a tourist situation. We set up an itinerary and agenda ahead of time at a symposium in Ljubljana supported by the Slovenian Ministry of Culture, which brought participants from the Western Balkans to decide what topics the conversations would focus on in each city. But we also agreed that when we made that trip, it could be completely different. Thus, these questions emerged as it went on. Actually, questions about the transition in different countries changed along this route because they were shifting even in the month that we were travelling. There was new building happening and infrastructure like highways. There were new places opening for business. There were new routes opening and others closing with the new EU borders. Some were monitored strictly while other routes were less heavily monitored and things could flow more easily. So all of that was shifting at the moment. There were “parallel,” “hybrid,” “solidified,” “pixelated” worlds all going on simultaneously in ex-Yugoslavia in 2006.

energy transfer. Of course, we’re in the middle of a species extinction crisis, the scale of which we haven’t seen since the disappearance of the dinosaurs. Acknowledging the very presence of salamanders is an important thing. And figuring out how we might co-habit with them is also very important.

Salamanders are critical keystone organisms, particularly in the verdant North-eastern USA. Yet we continue to cut off their migration corridors. How can we adapt our urban infrastructure to support the organisms upon whom our healthy systems depend? The Salamander Superhighway provides a safe migration route. We keep filling the aquatic ecosystem for development and water that recharges aquifers and protects the terrestrial and the aquatic ecosystem is being harmed by industrial contaminants. We need to concretely reorganize. The ecosystem needs more than ways to digest carbon. It’d be lovely to sit by the wetland and watch the dragonflies and finish your dissertation. But we have to rescue the animals from the swamps of the cultural imagination and put them back in their place. We have to imagine an infrastructure of distributed wetlands integrated back into our urban fabric, to imagine cohabiting with non-humans.

Interviewer: Do you speak on behalf of the salamanders?

NJ: I translate their points of view into English. As the salamanders

So we took up these city topics that had been formulated by the person who was living, long term, in the place. In the end, around 300 people made the excursion, and with this project and others SMS overall has made many things: a photo book and lexicon from what was learned on the expedition, also films including “Looking For October”. There is more that we still need to make!

go through this a PIR sensor¹, they can tweet, “Hey honey. I’m coming home.” These Socratic² salamanders can say profound things like, “What comes first, the salamander or the migration route?” By giving a voice to these non-humans in the ‘OOZ’ project and acknowledging their presence, we start to see a larger system which I would argue is critical. ‘OOZ’ says something about institutional framings and re-inventing.

1 A passive infrared sensor (PIR sensor) is an electronic sensor that measures infrared light from objects in its field. They are most often used in motion detectors.

2 ‘Socratic’ is a reference to Socrates Park where this work was originally installed as well as the ‘Socratic Method’, the use of systematic doubt and questioning to elicit a truth that Socrates developed in the 4th century BC in Greece.

Interviewer: Please explain your work’s relation to institutional framing.

KC: That comes up in a number of ways in The School of Missing Studies. Specifically, we are a collaborative that changes. The question of individual initiative was important to us. The idea was to *not* be an institution. We were very conscious about being something that was generative and research-driven. That research was field work-driven. So this relates to ethnography and anthropology. Maybe going out and interviewing people and getting people’s stories is stereotypical from an artist’s or a curator’s point of view. But our interest is rather in exploring what can we make together. For example, in Halle, Germany, massive modernist housing blocks became vacant. People were moving out to find work

NJ: Well, this requires a little background for the non-art reader. The greatest intellectual contribution of the 20th century in the conceptual art movement is institutional critique. That it is something that other fields have not necessarily recognized. It was generalized into a strategy of developing alternative institutions that go beyond the intervention of an experiment, into something that has durability. Ooz is an example of taking a legacy institution, the Victorian zoological garden, to demonstrate the extent of the human empire. It allows one to see that to display exotic animals and arrange them in categorical boxes is a radically inappropriate way to interface with non-human or-

elsewhere, and suddenly the space is taken over by wildlife. We noticed that a few retired people who are left living there gather each night at 7 pm, but they don't have anywhere to sit. So our small project might be to drag an old piece of concrete and make it into a bench for people to sit on.

Interviewer: Can you define the relationship between you who are visitors to a city and those who are citizens?

KC: Basically, we raised the problem of expedition at the time when neo-liberalism was encroaching on Eastern Europe. Our projects, however, were based on mutual invitation and exchange. For example, Filip Jovanovski, a student from Skopje, traveled on his own to Belgrade for the "Looking For October" workshop in 2003 with artists and architects from New York, Zurich, and Belgrade. The project was to find urban traces of the liberation in 1944, which affected his city as well as Belgrade, even though it was now across a national border. Then he hosted SMS travelers from Lisbon, Vienna, Basel, Barcelona and other parts of ex-Yugoslavia in Skopje for "Lost Highway Expedition" in 2006.

Interviewer: Did they associate you with conquistadors?

KC: No, David Harvey proposed that SMS may have a new reading of territory. We are concerned with a living study of living knowledge; what is more important is how we make projects together. For LHE

ganisms. This is important because the number of people who go to zoos and aquariums in the U.S. exceeds all professional sports combined. The Zoological and Aquariums Association publishes this data. So this work addresses a very present cultural legacy. The animals incarcerated in the zoos, of course, cannot manage their own territory or choose their own mate. And they are on anti-depressants. So the idea that we can radically reinvent an institution with close interaction with animals is something that's desirable and compelling and fascinating. The biologists could care less. I mean they've just started to study the beaver that moved in to the park by themselves. It's a strange thing. The concerns of the local chapter of the World Wildlife Foundation is really about saving the golden frog in Costa Rica, as opposed to what the Foundation can do about the coyotes that live right around it. They ignore urban ecosystems. It's a radical misrepresentation. What we need to understand is being able to have animals share our water. The watering hole is a great metaphor for how settlements share territorial resources.

Interviewer: Can you define the institutions that are implicated in this mismanagement of our animal neighbors, besides zoos. Are there others?

NJ: The list is extraordinary. It begins with the idea that nature is 'out there'. It is in those boxes that we call parks where we keep nature. Nature is not in the air quality in

everybody chose their own research project. Some looked at the typologies of kiosks throughout the region. Others focused on migration. Some questions that are ideal in one region may not be relevant in others. There might be a particular moment when something changed in this place because of a political decision or because of a cultural movement or a lot of black market activity.

Interviewer: Regarding institutions, it seems like the very concept that motivates School of Missing Studies is to occupy the fringe of institutions or invent something that institutions, especially institutions of education, are not presenting. But, at the same time, you talk about formalizing your research and discoveries. Do you conceive of that as an alternative institution or is it different from an institution?

KC: There have been SMS collaborations with educational institutions including Pratt and MIT.¹ Now the Sandberg in the Netherlands offers a two-year masters course of study in SMS. The word ‘alternative’ is not attractive on the ground in ex-Yugoslavia because most everything is alternative there. When something is an experiment – there and gone – change is not activated. We’re not alternative, rather cooperative, working for a span of years.

Interviewer: The word ‘institutionalize’ means establishing a solid foundation that is going to endure.

this room, or the food systems we depend on, or the water that we use every day. Why don’t zoos integrate the systems and substances that affect our human health? Institutional arthritis is built up from an understanding that this is a manageable technocratic city. They don’t think of how we can optimize it although it is irreducibly complex and messy; that’s what makes it work. The list of institutions includes all those that follow from this assumption about management, particularly in an urban space. They don’t recognize that non-humans are not only here; they are a critical part of this.

So this topic enters my work through a series of signs, road signs, and other official looking signs that address feeding the animals. The signs question why humans assume we should monopolize all the nutritional resources. They counter, for example, the extraordinary genocide, or ‘cleansing’, that is exercised around pigeons or other non-humans that cohabit in our environment.

I suppose it’s a huge cultural shift, but I think it’s tremendously challenging to understand that our ‘selves’ are more non-human than human, and that our internal health depends on the jungle of biodiversity that lives in our elbow creases! These living, dynamic, irreducibly complex systems aren’t served by these legacy Victorian institutions. It is a radically new concept.

¹ At Belgrade Architecture Faculty SMS hosted Susan Buck-Morss, Eyal Weizman, Yehuda Safran.

KC: The idea was that each project contributed to a guide for the next person doing research. *Lost Highway Expedition* was a snapshot at a specific time of infrastructure and institutions in the Western Balkans. Now we see it is a generative history.

Interviewer: Could you discuss whether you would identify your work with any art theory or any anthropological theory? How do you contextualize your own work within those two disciplines?

KC: Looking back ten years, you might say that this is Social Art Practice—specifically one in which artists not only work with the social context as material, they actively interact with social meaning, particularly in public spaces or as spatial practices.

Interviewer: Your definition of Social Practice is a lot like my definition of anthropology, especially with regard to fieldwork. How do you feel about this relationship?

KC: Here at the Graduate Center, it is easy for me, as a curator, to work with anthropologists. It seems totally natural because they also have a field site and they are also talking with people across the world. The process is potentially the same, but the output is different. Artists are making something. For instance, they could be making a sculpture instead of writing a dissertation about their anthropological findings. Or they could make a feature film of their interviews, as happened with School of Missing Studies. It is just the methods of the disciplines that are different.

I was actually trained by some wonderful ethnographers to whom I owe a tremendous intellectual debt. They include Helen Verran¹ who attacked the idea that Westerners had the monopoly on logic and aboriginal people had the monopoly on spirituality. She did this by demonstrating that aboriginals have a counting template that is as rigorous as ours. Their natural template has a base of two which is based on family relations. Our natural template uses the base ten which is based on fingers. Their logic system has parity with ours. She played an extraordinary role in establishing aboriginal land rights in Australia. I watched her work closely. I try to translate this approach in my work.

Secondly, I worked with Lucy Suchman² who worked on the pho-

1 Verran is an adjunct professor at Charles Darwin University. She was awarded US [Ludwig Fleck Prize](#) of the US [Society for Social Studies of Science](#) in 2003 for her book, *Science and an African Logic*.

2 Lucy Suchman is an anthropologist and a pioneer in usability and accessibility. She played a significant role in the introduction of anthropology to tech r&d through her tenure at Xerox PARC from 1979 to 2000. Her research centers on relations of ethnographies of everyday practice to new technology design.

Interviewer: Can you explain the process, the creative part? The thing about your definition is that the artist is conducting the research, not only commenting on it or responding emotionally to it.

KC: Right, those of us engaged in Missing Studies are not standing back and saying, "I'm going to be critical of this." Instead, I see the approach as the participant acknowledging that there is an issue and the need to conduct research in accord with his or her living experience with others. This includes aesthetic and spatial and political lines of questioning that in turn unearths knowledge for the next inquirer. The process involves figuring out how the lived reality imposes the limits and what images and design will facilitate new better realities. Our work involves the situation that is being changed and the product that is being made from that critical stance, not just documentation or interviews.

Interviewer: Your curatorial role involves serving as the instigator of the images, providing an opportunity for someone to fulfill this intention. Is that correct?

KC: My involvement was facilitation and research. I don't create art objects, but I mobilize resources that make art objects and generative discourses. I think about putting people in dialogue together. I see how work needs to be together in space and whether this could be an exhibition or should take another form.

tocopier at PARC Xerox³ when it was first designed. She demonstrated that the massive, artificial intelligence, decision theory system that was designed to support photocopy machine repair didn't work. She noted that photocopy repairmen actually solved problems only when they were given walkie-talkies to coordinate with dispatch and so they would ask, "Have you ever come across this problem before?" She based her recommendations on the ethnographic observation of actual behavior.

In both of these cases, giants in anthropological world used ethnography in very politically astute ways. Their commitment involved immersion in the research that came out of their ethnographic training. They didn't go in with pre-designed ideas. Solutions emerged from what they observed. Methodologically, this is really important in my conceptualized version of Critical Realism. It takes a kind of observation immersion in a phenomenon of interest that exists without the coding and empirical analysis. I use my own life as the medium. My work is about lived experiences. Ethnographic fieldwork methodology is extremely important.

3 Suchman focused on the labor that was needed to become familiar with new machines and technologies, designing systems to allow them to be effectively used. In *Anthropology as 'Brand': Reflections on corporate anthropology* (Lancaster Univers., 2007, Pg. 3) she argued that the "more generally the imperative to market new technologies as if they can be incorporated into working practices without any upfront investment in resources for learning is a false economy, one for which front line workers usually bear the cost."

Interviewer: How does this apply to the Salamander Superhighway or another part of OOZ?

NJ: Very simply, by observing the socio-ecological system to the extent that you observe the people and the animals, and try to make sense of the animals as well. For example, there are three sparrows that hang out on Broadway in Houston in a little tree. It's a little struggling tree. I keep asking, "What are they thinking? Why is a bird there when it can go anywhere?" That reflects the general question, "Should we be improving the quality of the green spaces we have?"

A secondary thing that comes out of the ethnographic kind of work is 'organism centric design'. If you look at the world from the point of view of a salamander and really navigate that you realize that if they can't migrate, they can't reproduce.

Interviewer: Please explain your involvement with Critical Realism.

KC: Yes, Missing Studies is similar to Critical Realism in the active participation of imagining and creating new realities from the research of lived experience, in particular, the changes in Eastern Europe in the 90s and into the 2000s. There is a rise in art practices dealing with fictional histories on one hand and with the experience of realism on the other. The presence of living with parallel calendars defined the life then.

NJ: Critical realism is the fundamental form of literacy. I am in no way trying to do objective journalistic documentary. This deadening didactic approach is more related to visual anthropology. What is really important is the mental or emotional position adopted with respect to the evidence, which is why ethnography reins as the king of social science.

Interviewer: Can you explain the difference between art and anthropology?

KC: Artists and architects invent forms, make things. It is very inter-relational. An artist makes a self-reflective process as it relates to other things. It involves mobilizing the research and has a social ethical purpose.

The good thing about anthropology at this moment is that this discipline is cracking open in exciting ways. It is important to have artists in this dialogue. Things are happening in the margins, like the personal field notes that don't end up in the finished journal article but are then food for a poem. As a curator, I can place this material into the world. The public aspect is important. Art, as you know, is made to be shown, and not only inside an art world.

NJ: There is a difference between art and anthropology even if there is a mash up of strategies: visual strategies, analytic strategies, research strategies, and fieldwork. The artist is accountable to the exhibition, which is a proxy for the public; whereas an anthropologist is accountable to their community of experts. Anthropologists have, of course, done a lot of work to be accountable to the subjects of their writings as well, but as professional anthropologists, their work is intended to contribute to the field of anthropology. I think the real demanding difference is the language you must use if the public is going to see this in an exhibition. You also need different representational strategies than what you would use in talking to a community of experts. What remains the defining feature is that, as an artist, you don't get any automatic credits for being right or intelligent or thorough.

Interviewer: Is there an ethical component to your work?

KC: Yes, and let me say something about the ethics of being immersed and of producing visual evidence of that immersion. There is a difference between the process and the output. I think the work that is most ethical is the most activist. When artists who are interested in change are doing research, they are not only providing more evidence or statistics. Instead, they are making work that is pragmatic to find a point of connection with the other person. It's not in things. They speak for things.

NJ: Actually, I'm really against ethics. I would have them done away with, and I'm saying the same thing you are, Katherine. But in the fractious popular world, it is on the Right that the so-called 'ethical' meets. For instance, Google funded the \$360,000 burger that I would call the "Google Goon". It was grown in a laboratory. I would pose that the salamanders offer a more ethical alternative for producing meat protein because salamanders have a monopoly on limb regeneration technology.

That is the forensic in the project. Their art says, “I was in the situation that I was exploring. I was learning from it, and at the same time producing the reality I experienced.” SMS finds that point of connection. It is more of a conversation after being immersed in the situation.

Interviewer: Where do your ethics originate? Are they religious, or biological, or sociological?

KC: It comes from my social and political value system. I want to acknowledge the politics of any situation. It’s from having a level of awareness, all the time, of things that are in operation that are unseen. Ideology runs through everything. I try constantly to step back from the framework I am inside and think of it from another perspective. Things don’t have to be the way they are. I think of what needs to happen to make change. I’m not sure exactly where that came from, but I began this approach when I was an undergraduate.

Interviewer: Improving conditions or criminalizing those who are at fault?

KC: Just making small changes that are in my control. Change is an ongoing struggle. There is no existential problem. It’s really a matter of saying, “Well, we are here because we need to make life better.” There it is. Something about that motivation really rings true for me. It’s problem-solving. If an artist offers a new way of problem solving, it brings a new set of tools to the issue, and passion.

This is a sound way to manage predatory pressure. The ‘early bird’ is one species of salamander that can just drop its tail, half its body mass and leave it wiggling. Harvesting salamander tails is like milking a cow. You know, it is salamander cock-tails for dinner.

Interviewer: Don’t you think that’s an ethical stance?

NJ: By creating urban infrastructure that facilitates the lifestyle and sex life of the salamanders, we are benefiting in other ways too. This approach could be critically important for our own health. But it’s a radically different model than imposing some form of ethics. Like Peter Singer¹, I want to optimize the happiness of other organisms. I’m figuring out this ethical equation by thinking of food as the interface between natural systems that encapsulates ethical guidelines.

Just do the systems’ comparison between what it takes to grow meat in a culture in a lab and all the energy and externalities this takes, and what it takes to foster healthy bio diverse ecosystems. This one is self-maintaining, radically inexpensive, and socially and economically self-generative. Since these systems are always changing, they don’t comply with the idea of an ethics board. This is different from things that are

¹ Peter Singer is a professor of bioethics at Princeton University. His controversial writings apply moral philosophy to poverty, charity, and euthanasia, and is a founder of the modern animal rights movement.

Interviewer: Passion may be the missing ingredient in most contemporary disciplines.

done by institutions. The modesty of the artist's hand allows small scale actions that can aggregate in a social movement. Limited resource makes the response of an artist viral. If an artist can do it, anyone can do it. There's a simplistic ethical rule about behavior that defies the very idea that we have a creative agency. It states that designing the desirable future involves lessening your damage. Yes, it's a good rule of thumb, but that doesn't excuse you from the real need to design your relationship to natural systems.

Interviewer: Please rate your own project from 1 to 10, with 10 being max. Okay? Question number one: Empirical rigor.

KC: I feel this is an unfinished project, but to date, I give it an eight.

NJ: I'm going to go with nine.

Interviewer: Regarding the public's response, do you achieve the emotive responses you intend in producing these events?

NJ: The primary emotion that I'm after is wonder. I see wonder as different from happy, or sad, or amused, or compelled, or engaged. Yeah, I think it works. Engage with people, I'll give it another nine.

KC: I imagine curiosity and the interest to ask further questions can be an emotional response. If so, then 10.

Interviewer: Is your intention to undermine a normative attitude or behavior?

NJ: Yeah, I'll put it as ten.

KC: Yeah. I'll go with ten.

Interviewer: Is your intention to generate a new attitude or behavior?

KC: Yes, let's say nine.

NJ: It's certainly ten. It is the certainty of intention to do that, whether it does that or not.

Interviewer: Is your intention to popularize an existing attitude or behavior that you find worthwhile and may not be in full use?

KC: Yes, I'd say ten there.

NJ: Yeah, nine.

Interviewer: To what degree do you rely on collaboration or the contribution of other experts from different fields?

NJ: Ten.

KC: Ten.

Interviewer: To what degree do aesthetics factor into your work?

NJ: Seven.

KC: Yeah seven. It should be 10, but artistic freedom is the freedom not to be aesthetic if you don't want to.

Interviewer: Please rate the degree to which the following items factor into your creative process. The first is, developing a strategy to achieve your goals.

KC: Nine.

NJ: I have an allergy to people saying, "It's about the process." All these design consultancies want to sell you a process. So I'm very much me. Anything goes, whatever works. It probably won't work again if it works once. I don't take away processes from my projects or work at all.

Interviewer: Is problem solving your goal?

KC: Yes. I think it's at nine.

NJ: And I would say nine but I also called it problem forming. It's problem-forming and problem-solving.

Interviewer: Is your creative contribution identifying or recognizing a problem?

KC: Yes, it's nine.

NJ: I'd put ten on that.

Interviewer: Is your creative contribution in terms of selecting examples that manifests this problem?

KC: Yes ten, because that's an important aspect of a curator's work.

NJ: Yes, I suppose nine.

Interviewer: Is your creative contribution in terms of interpreting the problem?

KC: I'd say ten as well.

NJ: Right. The way of interpreting it is the same as problem-forming. So I'd put nine on it.

Interviewer: Is your creative contribution in terms of research?

KC: Yeah ten.

Artist: Yeah ten for me.

Interviewer: Is your creative contribution in terms of advocacy?

KC: Yes nine, which takes a lot of my attention.

NJ: I'd put seven for me because advocacy is hard to do. I don't do it to the extent that I could or I feel like I should and I think there are people who are better at doing it.

Interviewer: Is there anything I have not asked you that you would identify as your creative contribution?

NJ: I'll say one more. In our practice areas, does citation exist? A lot of work has to go into crediting. I wish someone had told me that professionally a long time ago. Credit has to be widely shared and blame tightly focused. Making sure that people who have contributed in any way feel like their contribution has been acknowledged.

KC: The whole notion of individual authorship is absolutely not part of the School of Missing Studies.

Interviewer to KC: Does your creative contribution consist of redefining the nature of authorship?

KC: I don't think so, it's not about redefining authorship or even redefining collaboration. Our platform is about creating more entry points, redefining what are the points of access to certain discourses.

Interviewer: Can you manage a few more questions?

NJ: Can I go pipi?

Interviewer: We'll be done in one minute. Are you okay? Here are the final questions.

Would you consider the following a compliment or an insult? The first is, your work belongs in an ethnographic museum.

NJ: That would be a compliment.

KC: Oh yes definitely.

Interviewer: Your work belongs in a technology manual.

KC: Oh yes, that is very generous.

NJ: I suppose so.

Interviewer: Last one. Your work belongs in a congressional panel.

KC: Yes, a compliment, not that I put too much esteem in Congress, particularly in relation to their views on art and culture, but the notion that political change could happen, yes.

NJ: Sure, yeah.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Thank you for providing such an informative interview. Now, go pee!



Figure 1: Lost Highway Expedition (LHE)¹; photo by Marjetica Potrč



Figure 2: Lost Highway; photo by Ana Dzokić

1 <http://www.europelostandfound.net>



Figure 3: Salamander Superhighway; photo by Natalie Jeremijenko

Linda Weintraub is a curator, educator, artist, and author of several popular books about contemporary art. *TO LIFE! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (University of California Press, 2012) was preceded by the series, *Avant-Guardians: Textlets in Art and Ecology* (Artnow Publications, 2006-2007). Other books include *In the Making: Creative Options for Contemporary Art* (co-published by D.A.P. New York and Thames & Hudson, UK, 2003-2014); *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning In Contemporary Society, 1970s-1990s* (Art Insights Publications 1996 – 2014), along with *ANIMAL. ANIMA. ANIMUS*. Co-author/editor Marketa Sepala (Pori Museum of Art, 1999); *Painted Bodies of the Americas*, Harry N. Abrams Publisher, 1999. She was director of the Art Institute at Bard College; Henry Luce Professor of Emerging Arts at Oberlin College; and is lecturer at the New School in Manhattan. Weintraub received her MFA degree from Rutgers University. She practices permaculture on her homestead in upstate New York.