

## Participatory Research and Visual Methods

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This special issue seeks to examine the role of participation in visual methodologies. It is a collection of essays from members of the Visual Scholarship Initiative at Emory University in which practitioners reflect upon their uses of photography, film, and video as a form of practice-based research. Though the use of visual methods and technologies are integral to all of the projects here, our focus is in the range of participation between photographer, filmmaker, or curator and subject or audience and how this impacts what we understand as scholarship. The photograph, film, or video, then, is a means by which we enter into the social and cultural negotiations of and reflections upon meaning making. In this introduction, we attempt to clarify what we mean by participatory research. Such practices often result in crossing disciplinary boundaries, as we discuss below. Further, morphing the use of visual media into a category of research method that generates scholarship with others means we are also exploring various connections and intersections between public scholarship and socially engaged art. Instead of resolving or precisely pinning down the concept of participatory research, we intend to explore the ways participation can be activated by artistic research and visual methods and the various types of relationships that emerge within this process.

We want to clarify briefly our use of the term participatory and the relationship of participatory to collaboration. Both words have gained increased traction in academic and art discourses. Although their definitions are quite similar, the two terms can evoke different sets of practices depending on the context in which they are used. Participation tends to connote the entry of subjects or audience members into the process of a research or art project. In some cases, the term has been used to reference a set of common techniques or ideologies, such as Participatory Action Research, or Participatory Video. While both of these serve as umbrella terms for a still diverse set of methods, they cull together similar practices that attempt to break down the barrier between researchers and subjects and create projects with social relevance for the communities in which they take place. Although in some contexts the word participatory connotes an invitation to an already established project, others have aligned it with radical and ephemeral formulations of mutuality. Similarly, collaboration can reference projects in which all parties involved have a shared investment and benefit, but can also at times be a joint undertaking of an already designed project. We ask our readers anchored in specific disciplines to allow for some flexibility around vocabularies, as terms inevitably shift meanings across various disciplinary bodies of literature and expanded art practices.

We mostly use the term participatory to define the methodological approaches we are examining. Alternatively, we use the term collaborative at times to match our references. But we have a specific meaning in mind when we use this word. By participatory research, we mean there is an explicit recognition that both subjects and researchers are co-creators in an experimental process of knowledge generation. While there are yields and limits to both words, participation and collaboration, the significance around what is being described here surrounds a deliberately non-prescriptive horizon, one led by practice that is open to what working together might expose.

In 1997, anthropologist Christopher Pinney published *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*, a study of contemporary, popular Indian photographic portraiture. In part of the book, Pinney describes the predilection of studio proprietors for images composed using strong contrasts between light and shadow, even though new peasant access to photography had created a demand for different, less stylized forms of representation. A hand painted photograph that illustrates the proprietors' preference for the "art photo" accompanies the text (Pinney, 1997). It is not until a few pages later that we realize the art photo was an image of the author himself, the researching anthropologist. There is neither apology nor introduction prior to his visual entry into the narrative. If his presence had remained only textual, there would be little expectation for this. His style of writing would have naturalized his presence, voice, and perspective. The photograph of Pinney makes explicit that our understanding of this particular instance of representation is an effect of his participation. That is, his participation and the knowledge it produces cannot be disassociated, an idea that is underscored by photographic practice.

A focus on participation is not simply a matter of disclosing or clarifying authorship. Academic and research texts have for years included introductions with pages that confess to biases and subjectivities and call for future studies to address or fill in their gaps.<sup>1</sup> Though these kinds of efforts generally disclose pertinent information, they can also mark subjectivity as an obstacle to knowledge and, in a sense, attempt to neutralize the participatory. Rather, we are interested in research practice as an epistemological category, an engagement without which there is no knowing. If methods substantiate knowledge claims, then practice is where knowledge lives. We suggest that participatory research underscores the researcher's presence and, further, creates opportunities to make meaning with others.

Participation has gained currency within academia and is proliferating in discourse about research.<sup>2</sup> One common meaning of participation in research is the active inclusion of research subjects' production of information. While conventional research seeks to understand subjects' actions, behaviors, or thoughts as they exist independent of the research project, here researchers ask subjects to help produce information. At times, the phrase *participatory research* indicates the transition of subjects from data sources to data generators. As anthropologists Douglas Holmes and George Marcus point out, research subjects are already engaged in ethnographic and analytical practices upon which the researcher can draw (Holmes and Marcus, 2008). This form of participation is sometimes seen as more empowering, equitable, and better able to address the subjectivities involved in the research process.

Another form of participation has long been a standard of anthropology in the form of participant observation. This term often refers to the process by which the researcher engages in the common, daily activities of the research subjects in order to learn about the community, culture, and social orders. Such an engagement is necessary for the production of ethnographic knowledge. Johannes Fabian has further theorized this form of participation through the idea of

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<sup>1</sup> The word "confess" here, in relation to academic disciplines, is meant to conjure ideas of discipline explored by Michel Foucault.

<sup>2</sup> These references are as far reaching as Ted Schatzki's philosophical inquiries into practice theory, Johannes Sjöberg's "Ethnofiction" (*Journal of Media Practice*, 2008), and Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt's *Practice as Research* (I.B. Taurus, 2007) or the *Journal for Artistic Research*.

coevalness, a shared time and space between researchers and subjects that forms the epistemological basis of anthropological knowledge (Fabian, 1983). This framework pushes against positivist notions as well as purely subjective or interpretative approaches to knowledge production. Instead, Fabian emphasizes the intersubjective process as the cornerstone of providing objectivity in the ethnographic process (Fabian, 2001). We are interested in a variation or synthesis of these forms of participation, a combined participatory approach in which both researchers and subjects engage in a practice or visual project, thus jointly creating scholarship and knowledge.

Participation is often promoted as an ethical or political amendment to academic scholarship, and anthropology in particular. The nature of participation within anthropological knowledge has become a point of discussion in response to, and in conversation with, postmodern critiques of the hegemonic nature of scholarship and knowledge, in general. Participation has been identified as a key solution to problems of representation, political relevance, and ethical and moral roles for anthropology. Luke Eric Lassiter, a prominent proponent for a morally relevant and political approach to scholarship, lays out not only a historic and theoretical foundation for collaborative ethnography, but also a set of guidelines for the practice of such. Lassiter sets out four commitments upon which a collaborative ethnography is founded. First, researchers must have an ethical and moral responsibility to consultants (people in the field). These interlocutors are not informants, but co-intellectuals and collaborators. This ethical and moral commitment extends beyond ethical guidelines set by various disciplines. It requires a shifting negotiation in response to the flux of the social situation within which research takes place. Furthermore, ethical and moral commitments are inevitably also political decisions. Second, ethnographers committed to collaboration must be honest and humble. The challenge for ethnographers is to find ways to draw on personal experiences not for affirming authority, but as a means by which to reveal vulnerability within the research process. Third, collaborative ethnographies should reflect the dialogical process in the field, and thus result in accessible writings. And fourth, this accessible writing should not be considered the final deliverable, but an opening for continued co-interpretation between researchers and consultants (Lassiter, 2005).

While these efforts create much needed correctives, they are also at risk of reinforcing the assumed unequal power relations between researchers and subjects. Kiven Strohm, in discussing his ethnographic work with Palestinian artists, states that all ethnography is collaborative. The turn towards concerns over the ethics of collaboration have focused too much on the role of representation in the academic outputs. While this is an important concern, Strohm advocates for ways to allow politics a role within the ethnographic process (Strohm, 2012). As Strohm points out, collaborative scholarship often positions the ethical obligations on an assumption of inequality between the researcher and the participant. Strohm, on the other hand, argues that in order to achieve intersubjective moments of communication, equality must be assumed; both researchers and subjects are equal speaking subjects. This assumption of equality is not just an ethical move; it opens space for ethnography as political. By political, we mean that research itself engages in we/they negotiations that produce and are produced by power. Furthermore, this assumed equality is often what is insisted upon by participants who demand voice and representation within ethnographic accounts. As Strohm points out, the claim on the part of the

subject, to be an equal speaking body, is not a moral request to the anthropologist, it is a political move (Strohm, 2012).

While the literature on the crisis of representation drew attention to the neglect of shared voice in academic products, it is within the field, not only the academic product produced afterwards, that politics and ethics matter the most (White and Strohm, 2014). Participation in the field also offers more than a means for ethical and political commitments – it expands the process of knowledge production itself. In *Between Art and Anthropology*, Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright outline a form of experimental knowledge production, citing experimentation as an open-ended process of knowledge-generation in which experience becomes the space through which knowledge emerges (Schneider and Wright, 2010). Similarly, participation in the field can lead to experimentation through which new ways of seeing and new practices offer different types of knowledge-generating experiences, as well as alternative forms of representation. The focus on participation then is, on the one hand, an epistemological framing, a certain construction of knowledge production through which the research is designed. But it is also a space in which ethical and political discussions occur. Epistemological considerations are, therefore, only one set of parameters by which to consider the degree and nature of this participation. Ethics and power are other dimensions used to evaluate the nature and degree of participation, and these dimensions always interact.

Knowledge is not simply produced through the categorical accumulation of data by the researcher. Nor is it simply relying on endogenous sets of categorical frameworks. It is potentially something that neither the researcher nor the subjects would have fully articulated or necessarily understood before their interaction. It is an engagement that leads to new understandings through the process of the meeting of different perceptive frameworks. The researcher and the subjects engage each other (practice), and through this process, both are transformed. This type of engagement relies on dialogue and interaction for the production of knowledge.

Johannes Fabian (1999) considers this form of transformational knowledge in his discussion of recognition within ethnographic engagements. Recognition, as Fabian outlines, can be a form of acknowledgement, memory, or cognition. These qualities intertwine facilitate communicative exchanges between researcher and subject (participant), but such an exchange is also inherently a struggle, or a negotiation. This type of knowledge production requires both sides to transcend the confines of their own cultures; it is knowledge that inevitably changes the knower (Fabian, 1999). The research categories, therefore, must be open and expandable to account for the flows of activity that come to bear on the project. In other words, the activity generated by inquiry with others becomes the generative space of scholarly production.

Visual techniques and projects have been one form of engagement, or production of such scholarship. This is similar to the idea of ethnographic cinema developed by Jean Rouch. For Rouch, any film project would inevitably be a cultural disruption (Rouch, 2003). Yet, the goal of the anthropologist/filmmaker was to understand this disruption as it occurred within the flow of action and culture. As a trained anthropologist, the ethnographer/filmmaker could remain attuned to this flow of action and adjust and focus the camera to the movement (Rouch, 2003). By engaging a project in this way, the researcher is able to occupy her position in the reality being negotiated, rather than leaving it to unroll itself in front of the observer.

When we shift the emphasis to participation, navigating the unfolding logic of experience

at times necessarily takes precedence over disciplinary dictates. As visual culture scholar Irit Rogoff has succinctly stated it: “The diverting of attention away from that which is meant to compel it...can at times free up a recognition that other manifestations are taking place that are often difficult to read, and which may be as significant as the designated objects...” (Rogoff, 2005; 119). The disciplinarily peripheral may, therefore, be quite productive.

Within any given discipline there is a universe of discourse that determines the nature of knowledge and provides scaffolding by which to evaluate new knowledge. Knowledge that does not conform to this discourse may remain opaque and therefore outside the frame of evaluation. Participatory research generally has the potential to be interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinary work puts different discourses into conversation with each other, therefore expanding, redefining, or transforming the categories used to evaluate the reality or evolving knowledge. It is not the abandonment of theoretical, epistemological, or analytical forms that have emerged through disciplinary specializations. In fact, both interdisciplinary and participatory research frequently begin with and draw on such frameworks for the foundation of a research project. While interdisciplinary research puts these frameworks into dialogue with other possible theoretical, epistemological, and/or analytical categories, participatory research contextualizes its claims by foregrounding the very social and cultural transactions that produce it as an integral part of the research itself.

Participatory research is also necessarily public in ways that other forms of research are not. The term *public* here connotes the situation of its production. In other words, participatory research also traffics knowledges across professional and vernacular languages and cultures. The late anthropologist Ivan Karp, co-founder of Emory University’s Center for the Study of Public Scholarship (1995-2009), has stated that “producing and disseminating knowledge across a cultural and social boundary” is one of the defining characteristics of public scholarship (Karp, 2001; 77). In his essay “The Making of a Public Intellectual,” Howard Zinn describes the conditions under which he understands himself to have moved from an intellectual to a public intellectual. During his time at Spelman College in Atlanta, he published an article to that effect in *Harper’s* stating that the U.S. South was ready for a change. The publication of the article coincided with being naturally embedded in the community, participating with students in demonstrations, and simultaneously working in the classroom and in the scholarly world (Zinn, 2008; 139). He concludes his essay by describing the public intellectual as someone “who does not want to be isolated in the library or the classroom while the cities burn and people go homeless and the violence of war ravages whole continents” (ibid; 141). His is a radically activist perspective on scholarship, perhaps, but no less committed than that of Edward Said. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, he famously calls for the intellectual to “speak truth to power” (Said, 1996; 97). For Said, the goal of speaking this truth is underwritten by a “set of moral principles—peace, reconciliation, abatement of suffering” (ibid; 99-100). Zinn and Said’s perspectives illustrate a political face for public scholarship. They are also deeply activist at heart.

This type of activist engagement, as a form of public scholarship, reflects Michael Burawoy’s idea of organic public scholarship. Burawoy, in his 2004 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association, made a call for public sociology as a key component of the four integrated aspects of sociology, professional, policy, and critical being the others.

Traditional public sociology denotes the effort of scholars to produce work for audiences outside of academia. Organic public sociology, on the other hand, is an ongoing engagement between the researcher and a visible public (Burawoy, 2005).

A more recent articulation of public scholarship is the notion of *militant research*. New York University's *Militant Research Handbook* describes it thus:

Let's begin by saying that it's the place where academia and activism meet in the search for new ways of acting that lead to new ways of thinking. Native American activist Andrea Smith quotes her mentor Judy Vaughn to this effect: "You don't think your way into a different way of acting; you act your way into a different way of thinking." (Bookchin et al, 2013; 4)

There is a sense in which the researcher is not simply embedded in the context under investigation, but is a necessary part of the object of research. Therefore, active public scholarship is not necessarily a preference for activist agendas over intellectual pursuits, as much as an acknowledgement that politics are embedded in all intellectual pursuits. Intellectual pursuits can themselves, therefore, also be the site of an explicit activist agenda.

The production and presentation of the visual forms of photography, film, and video also mean research can share a porous border with visual art. In the mid to late 1990s, social relations themselves were articulated as the basis for some contemporary art practices, notably by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud (relational aesthetics) and U.S. artist Suzanne Lacy (new genre public art). At this writing, however, terms like *aesthetics* and *art* are sometimes seen as privileged and restrictive even to contemporary art curators, and so *public* or *social practice* has become more common nomenclature.<sup>3</sup> And interestingly, "participatory art" in an art context can be seen as not pushing social cooperation far enough.<sup>4</sup>

Just as artistic practices may incorporate social relations, existing social relations may be interpreted as aesthetic practices. The terms *art* and *aesthetics*, however, have also faced scrutiny in anthropology. When applied cross-culturally, the terms risk imposing a Eurocentric paradigm upon other societies' practices, along with their dualistic and elitist connotations, and yet restricting these terms denies the co-presence and engagement of similar forms of production and expression. Some scholars have opted to expand the notion of aesthetics to a range of practices and productions, beyond the art/non-art divide. Aesthetics, then, can be a means to explore sensory experiences, the role of non-verbal formal qualities, the relationship between forms, and the value of these perceptual experiences as they convey and create cultural meaning and social order or change (Coote, 1992; Hardin, 1993; Morphy, 1992). In this way aesthetics is deeply tied to embodied cultural experiences (Shotwell, 2011) The embodied and sensory form of aesthetics

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<sup>3</sup> Curator Nato Thompson states: "...the term 'contemporary art' is problematically exclusive." "Exhausted? It Might Be Democracy in America" in *A Guide to Democracy in America*. Ed. Nato Thompson (New York: Creative Time Books, 2008), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Many artists, critics, educators, and curators have addressed the spectrum of participation in socially engaged art. For a helpful mapping of this spectrum, see Pablo Helguera's chapter on Conversation in *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), 39-49. Tom Finkelpearl examines the cooperative over the participatory precisely because it blurs "issues of authorship, crossing social boundaries, and engaging participants for durations that stretch from days to months to years." *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 6.

is not only a way of understanding cultural manifestations, but serves as a space of imagination and possibility for political transformation.

Articulated as “social aesthetics,” David MacDougall explored this idea by creating a series of non-narrative filmic observations of the Doon School, an all boys boarding school in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India. One of the challenges for MacDougall was how to film that which he saw as social aesthetics separate from the symbolic or ideological constructions of the school environment in his Doon School series of films. Any given element, such as school uniforms, simultaneously revealed part of the aesthetic environment and yet risked becoming over-essentialized in meaning. MacDougall concluded that aesthetics, as both backdrop and product of everyday life, must be approached obliquely. His resultant films reflect this approach, offering neither a complete interpretation nor narrative structure of the school (MacDougall, 1999).

Such challenges in exploring the sensory and experiential aspects of social life have pushed a growing number of social researchers to turn to artistic techniques. The use of visual techniques, such as filmmaking or photography, is one way of engaging within these borders between the artistic and ethnographic sensibilities. As film scholar Catherine Russell points out, the space of overlap between the broadest conceptualization of ethnographic and avant-garde filmmaking is a space of experimentation, in which form and aesthetics can be put in service of cultural practice (Russell, 1999). This ties to our conception of participatory knowledge as an experiential production. Knowledge emerges through experimentation with participating in and creating cultural forms, sometimes through artistic productions such as film, photography, or performance.

Similarly, in their book *Observational Cinema*, Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz describe observational cinema as a form of skilled practice. The aim of this practice is not the creation of an explanatory model, but rather a mode of communicating across boundaries. They suggest: “In place of certainty, observational practitioners provoke the intelligence, curiosity, and imagination of their audience, thereby opening up an active space of reflection” (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2009; 124). Through exploring the nature of observational cinema, Grimshaw and Ravetz propose the more expansive concept of observational sensibility as a way to describe a broader set of projects that produce knowledge through skilled practices and produce open ended products designed to engage, instead of explain to, audiences. Such objects are shaped in the creative tension between social experience (participation) and reflexive communication (observation) (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2009).

If research sometimes looks or feels like art, art practice can now appear in the guise of research, social cooperation, and even activism. In *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, artist and educator, Pablo Helguera, discusses the overlap of art and fields like sociology and anthropology, claiming that attaching art “to subjects and problems that normally belong to other disciplines” moves them “temporarily into a space of ambiguity” (Helguera, 2011; 5). He continues: “It is this temporary snatching away of subjects into the realm of art-making that brings new insights to a particular problem or condition and in turn makes it visible to other disciplines” (ibid; 5). This kind of radical interdisciplinary exchange takes advantage of its border crossings. Indeed, Helguera believes the tension between art and other disciplines is productive. Tom Finkelpearl and Mary Jane Jacob are among a wave of critics and curators exploring John Dewey and U.S. pragmatism as a root for the social and cooperative in art

practice, linking it to notions of expanded democracy and the inseparable activities of thinking and doing. Concluding his book *What We Made*, Finkelppearl states: “The artistic product is not secluded within the academy or the art world or ‘set apart from common experience,’ but rather is integrated into and in many cases consists of common experience...” (Finkelppearl, 2013; 361). We suggest the same for practice-based participatory research, which embeds knowledge not in the artistic product, but in the process and dialogue of production. Instead of drawing rigid boundaries between practices that straddle traditional categories, we may think of them as constituting a spectrum of activity that accomplishes the work of varying fields.

Our conception of participatory visual techniques is one of experimentation and transgression of existing borders. Such methods do more than just crossover, or draw from different disciplines, they question and challenge the boundaries between disciplines, between art and the academy, between institutions, and between publics. These practices require an openness to finding new and unexpected results without guarantees. Such transgression makes these practices vulnerable to institutional sanction or formal co-optation. The rising popularity of interdisciplinarity, visual methods, and participatory research seems to signal growing support for experimentation. But such popularity may also lead to a set of codified techniques. Our intention in this outline is to define and defend our ideas around a set of practices that have motivated our academic and artistic work. This is not to elevate this form of research above other methodologies, but to claim the relevance and necessity of these practices for continuing to expand our social knowledge.

The following articles, films, and dialogues are all produced by members of a group at Emory University called the Visual Scholarship Initiative (VSI). While each contribution presents its own methods, the existence and support of the VSI has given rise to more substantive reflections on the nature of practice-based and participatory research. The group itself serves as a generative forum, engaging members in cross-disciplinary conversation, critique, and development in order to further individual projects. But what conditions allow such a group to emerge? One of our goals in producing this special issue is to ask readers/viewers/publics to consider where, institutionally, these kinds of inquiries can happen. More traditional, discipline-based academic departments and programs of study often foreclose the very kinds of boundary crossing required for participatory inquiry.

The VSI emerged from Emory University's Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts (ILA), one of the oldest graduate interdisciplinary programs in the US. Recently, this university, considered an R1 under that set of designations, closed the current configuration of the department and suspended graduate admissions to the ILA, eliminating the very place designated for such hybrid, interdisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary scholarship. With the Visual Scholarship Initiative as a kind of case study, we must then posit that experimental scholarship and hybrid methods produce not only intellectual provocations, but institutional challenges, as well.

The VSI was formed by graduate students who were utilizing practice-based scholarship, extending beyond the traditional forms of textual and disciplinary writing. The idea for the group originated from interdisciplinary courses offered in the Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts, particularly the courses *Ethnographic Cinema*, taught by Anna Grimshaw, and *Experimental Texts*, co-taught by Grimshaw and Angelika Bammer. Two sections of *Ethnographic Cinema*

covered history and theory, as well as the practice of creating a multi-media project as part of scholarship. The practice-based semester attracted graduate students from a broad range of disciplines and departments who sought alternative forms of scholarship for pursuing particular scholarly problems. The course required that students create projects throughout the semester, culminating in a final video project that was screened for a cross-disciplinary audience. The screenings brought in respondents from different departments and disciplines who were not necessarily experts in the visual form, but had interest or knowledge about the scholarly topic being pursued by the presenter. These dialogues revealed the relevance and efficacy of practice-based approaches. Students in the course wanted to expand these types of dialogues and work with others who were also using visual methods to form an interdisciplinary base for discussing and supporting practice-based scholarship. In 2010, VSI was formed. Although VSI retained the term *visual*, harkening to its origins from students who were visual practitioners, it includes non-visual media practices, performances, and engagements, as well. It has become a space of exchange for those thinking about the role of the visual, media, or practice in general as a mode of knowledge production. The articles included reflect the type of work supported and generated through this collaborative space.

In her contribution, "Pictures and Politics," Aubrey Graham discusses her methods for creating portraits in Mugunga III Internally Displaced Peoples camp in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Pushed into critical reflection by participation in an artistic project, she explicates her method of co-creative portraits in which the photographer acknowledges her role in image construction, but simultaneously engages the subjects of the photographs in the decision about how they will be imaged. The process navigates local photographic tropes, from vernacular portraiture to humanitarian ideas of witnessing. By establishing a space of its own, these practices reflect on the political contexts of image making. Further, they resuscitate the photographic from the static status of research supplement, claiming the practice of photography as valuable anthropological inquiry that produces and explores knowledge.

Kwame Phillips considers his role as a Black visual anthropologist in his article "A Third Vision: Advocating Radical Scholarship." He considers the personal, historic, and institutional structures that give rise to interpersonal experiences of race, identity, and privilege within and outside of the academe. Phillips draws on Du Bois's idea of double consciousness to articulate his sense of dual identities and dual obligations, one to academic pursuits and the other to social justice. For Phillips, these two pulls can possibly merge into a radical responsibility. Phillips considers the work of Third Cinema as way to reflect his own practice as a visual anthropologist. Third Cinema is a revolutionary and educational form of film, and for Phillips can be a site for manifesting his radical responsibility. Phillips's film projects aim first and foremost to educate and radicalize, speak about current social issues, and be at "*the front line with my people where it can make a difference.*" In his article, Phillips claims that documentarians, and by relation academics, cannot occupy a politically neutral position. And similarly he tasks himself, through both his style and topic of writing and filmmaking, to become not just an academic, but an advocate.

Mael Vizcarra begins her paper, "*Fronteras que revuelven: A Filmic Study of "La Línea" in Tijuana,*" with a reflection on the concept of "revolver," to mix, which refers to her position as "a friend, a researcher, and an image-maker." This term helps Vizcarra better understand and

explain the phenomenon of *la linea*, or the boarder between Mexico and the United States. Through a focus on the vendors that remain on the Mexico side of the boarder, Vizcarra offers a complicated exploration of mobility and stagnation, and the way boarders shape and construct lives and identities. For Vizcarra, understanding *la linea* involves participating in the creation of the multiple lines that give this place its shape by becoming a space-maker herself. Along with the vendors and boarder crossers, Vizcarra's camera is another line of movement and stability. She both manifests and transgresses the various borders between herself and the people with whom she interacts. While the boarder is the focus of Vizcarra's research, what she brings to the fore in her article is the role of herself and the implications of her practice and involvement as a researcher and filmmaker. She considers both the lines of movement, lines of regulation, and lines of filmmaking that together construct her experience and research. These inter-weaving lines converge into the film she presents, offering viewers a reflection on the existing and emergent possibilities at the boarder.

Jay Hughes's 'Cotton Hills Farm' is a filmic essay that engages agricultural production on a family owned farm in a small South Carolina town in the wake of an evaporating mill presence. Quiet behind the camera, Hughes's articulate eye participates in the flow of activity around the labor, at times intimate, at times open-eared from a slight distance. What at first may seem like a work in which the researcher has no presence, we come to inhabit his sensitive tactical maneuvers as he engages in the movement created by work on the farm.

In "Embodied Curation," film curator, Andy Ditzler, and anthropologist, Sydney M. Silverstein, offer a form that flows between dialogue and co-authored text. The subject is a dynamic and performative screening from 2014 of some of Andy Warhol's early films anchored by his 1966 film, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*. While Ditzler seeks to explore the coextension of curatorial practice with the performance of screening and other forms of mixing, Silverstein offers evidence of how an understanding of historically fixed objects can be opened to new interpretations. Their unorthodox notion of the 'alchemist' strangely names the possibility of changing the properties of the thing observed through more open-ended and audience-engaged methods. The text also suggests that Warhol's production of celebrity from the banal, and its own subsequent reproducibility, may be meaningful in our understanding of the dialectical relationship between aura destruction and reproduction.

We invite readers/viewers/audiences to engage the media in this special issues with the same level of attention they engage the written text. Now documents of moments of participation, their afterlives are stand-ins for an engaged practice in which, as we have posited here, the knowing associated with these projects was collaboratively produced. We ask you to consider, as a body of practices collected in this issue, what these methods offer our consideration of knowledges and the visual methods that produce them. Further, and perhaps more urgently, what institutions will support the exploration, critique, and expansion of such experimental forms?

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