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Author

Maurer, Bill

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THE REAL ECONOMY - PART II
COLLOQUIUM

The method of the real

What do we intend with ethnographic infrastructure?

Bill MAURER, *University of California–Irvine*

What is the source of ethnographic truth? One might just as well ask what is the real economy, for neither has a clear-cut empirical referent. Critical efforts to counter economic abstractions or finance's fictions often seek a grounding truth in something "real." In anthropology, this has meant variously the household (*oikos*) or kinship, or the lived experiences that ethnography supposedly evokes. But none of these concepts are innocent. This essay considers efforts like this special colloquium in HAU and allied projects like the Gens Manifesto, by way of a detour through method acting and the history of other anthropological attempts to theorize the connections among different economic formations. The focus on the real economy falters wherever there are seams or articulations among diverse or plural practices delimited as economic. Ethnography falters when we see it as a representation of a reality rather than as a bridge permitting conversions from one form of action to others. The question, Does capitalism depend on noncapitalist forms, is analogous to the question, Does ethnography depend on an underlying lived experience? This essay suggests that these are the wrong questions. Asking the right ones might mean taking a page from the scripts of the players in ethnographic stories who are always engaged in different games, simultaneously or sequentially, and permitting ourselves the same allowance.

Keywords: economic anthropology, ethnography, empiricism, feminism, history of anthropological theory

Yes, words are useless! Gobble-gobble-gobble-gobble! Too much of it, darling, too much! That is why I show you my work! That is why you are here!

—Edna E. Mode, *The incredibles*

The false use of passions, or of types, or the mere use of conventional gestures,—these are all frequent faults in our profession. But you must keep away from these unrealities. You must not copy passions or copy types. You must live in the passions and in the types. Your acting of them must grow out of your living in them.

—Constantin Stanislavski, *An actor prepares*

When I took my very first anthropology class in college, the professor, Walter Fairservis, assigned the bible of method acting, Constantin Stanislavski's *An actor prepares*. It was a class called Peoples and Cultures of the Soviet Union. It was the weirdest thing I'd ever experienced in a classroom setting at that point in my fledgling academic career. The book is written from

the point of view of an acting student named Kostya who chronicles his lessons with "The Director," Tortsov, who is the fictional embodiment of Stanislavski himself. The reader is just thrown right into it. If you miss this at the outset, you will soon be lost. If you are not an actor, if you don't know anything about the theater, and especially if you have no experience





with Russian theater or much else besides a little Shakespeare and Masterpiece Theater on television—my situation in 1986—it is rough going.

What kept my interest, however, and pushed me to slog through it, was Professor Fairservis's insistence on what he believed Stanislavski's mission really was. I just had to take his word for it, but I was game. That real mission, he told us, was to help teach Russians how to act on stage in order to convincingly portray Russians. He said, "He's trying to teach Russians how to act Russian." He said it over and over again, through the several class sessions where we read *An actor prepares* and then Chekhov's *Three sisters*. Somehow this was supposed to help us get at "the Russian national character." I still didn't quite get it, but I liked the problem posed and I liked that it was posed as an anthropological problem, a problem of the ethnographic method—even if I didn't really know what that was yet, either.

This experience came back to me while reading the papers from the Real Economy conference that generated the cluster of essays in HAU in this and the previous issue. What could be more "method" than the instructor's explanation in the workshop on the case method in business instruction quoted by Fabian Muniesa (2017: 349): "The more the case is lived, . . . the more it is understood"? The business case is not a set of empirical facts from which to test hypotheses and draw conclusions but something to be "lived." In other words, the business case is not supposed to be incorporated in a student's preparation for the business world as a set of facts, but rather as a lived experience. This is the essence of method acting or of preparing the actor for the role on the stage. There is resonance with ethnography. As Keith Hart said at the conference in Rio de Janeiro where these papers were first presented, a difficulty for ethnography is that although it had "sold itself to the academy as a science," it cannot trace its truths to a "source."

This article uses the essays from the Real Economy conference to stage a series of questions about the sources of ethnographic truths. I am interested in the homology between what ethnography does or can do—as I will discuss below, I am particularly interested in how anthropologists can discover new things in old ethnographies—and how anthropologists grapple with the relationship between plural economic formations and that thing we call "capitalism." The Real Economy project grapples with both the question of ethnographic representation and the sources of ethnographic truths, and the question of economic plurality. Even the designation

of the "real" economy suggests there is something others are missing when they look at economic relations and forms. Anthropologists think we have specific insights to offer based on our attachment to certain kinds of methods. But I think we often miss possibilities for method in the impulse to be more revelatory than experiential, delighting in the reveal rather than in the doing. I will specify this "doing" in what follows.

How we understand economic plurality and how we do ethnography are intertwined, too, not just homologues. As ethnographers we live both problems: we live in plural economic worlds every day (and I do not mean "in the field" but "at home"); and we put ourselves in others' shoes during fieldwork and in the reading of others' ethnographic texts.

I am also interested in the family affinity between the Gens Manifesto (Bear et al. 2015) and the Real Economy project conveyed in these pages of HAU. Both are concerned with multiplicity and plurality, and the need to "challenge the boundedness of the domain of 'the economic'" (Bear et al. 2015: §2). Both strain against, even as they try to analyze, the kinds of standardization and formalization particular to, or ideologically enforced by, totalizing dreams of the thing we call capitalism. Both want to grasp how diverse life forces get enrolled in value projects. Although I am interested in the relations and conversions that make this enrollment (sometimes) possible, if (always) conflicted, I am more concerned here in what these twinned efforts illuminate about the ethnographic project. If the Gens project draws attention to the bridges or infrastructures between noncapitalist and capitalist economic forms that facilitate the conversion and appropriation of value from the former to the latter, I use the Real Economy essays to put forward the notion of ethnography as a similar kind of bridge. It has other intentions, however.

Method ethnography

Method acting tries not to represent or mimic the intention of the character one is portraying but to place the actor in a situation where he or she will embody it. At one point in *An actor prepares*, The Director asks a pupil named Maria to enact a simple scene of sitting on a chair. "Not knowing where to look, or what to do, she began to change, to sit first one way and then another" (1948: 32), awkwardly going through a variety of poses before the curtain fell. Others repeated the experiment; "their helplessness and desire to please were



ridiculous” (33). Then, he asks Maria to come back up on stage, to the same chair she previously occupied, while he looks for something. She sits. “Her pose was life-like, natural” (33). Then the curtain fell. “How do you feel?” the Director asked. “I? Why? Did we act?” “Of course” was his reply. “Why, I didn’t act anything,” she protested. “That was the best part of it,” he replied. “You sat and waited, and did not act anything” (34). Her intention was simply to sit. And she did. And it was marvelous.

In Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra’s account of fraudulent orders to buy or sell securities (presented at the conference on the Real Economy but not part of this HAU collection), what comes across is the centrality of “intent” to the determination of what is or is not a “real” trade. There is nothing that materially differentiates a true trade from a spoof. “Like a forgery,” Pardo-Guerra writes, “a spoof is physically real” and is “materially identical to the other orders in the system” (2016: 13). This is why the discovery of intentionality matters so much to the identification of the spoof. Had Maria been intending to act as if sitting, and had done as well as she did when she did not realize she was “acting,” then that would have been acting indeed.

Conceptions of the “real economy,” as Jane Guyer (2016) outlines, wend their way through various Western political economic traditions. Yet “the potential for slippage, or for insistent precision, across the range of terms to which ‘real’ belongs is profound” (Guyer 2016: 245). Even in the field of economics, the real economy is a contested term. Prominent economists across the ideological and methodological spectrum appear to agree that the field has largely abandoned the real economy: “Economics has become an increasingly arcane branch of mathematics rather than dealing with real economic problems,” wrote Nobel laureate Milton Friedman (1999: 137). Tony Lawson, the Cambridge critical realist economist, opened his *Economics and reality* with the headline from an edition of the *Times Higher Education Supplement*: “No reality, please. We’re economists!” (1997: xii) before proceeding to launch a sustained case to “bring reality (or more of it) back into economics.” Closer to anthropology, Michel Callon (2005) and Daniel Miller (2002) have debated whether economic theory constitutes economic realities or virtual fantasies of neoliberal ideology. Karen Ho (2009: 36) argues, based on her ethnography of shareholder value, that economic ideas are performative—but not in a total fashion—as well as being “virtual substitutions for real life complexity”—but again, not wholly so.

Not acting anything. The Director’s statement implies a first-order reality in which resides the true nature of intention or purpose. Aristotle famously differentiated the primary and secondary uses of things, the former associated with their true, intended use, and the latter with second-order purposes to which they might be animated:

Of everything which we possess there are two uses: both belong to the thing as such, but not in the same manner, for one is the proper, and the other the improper or secondary use of it. For example, a shoe is used for wear, and is used for exchange; both are uses of the shoe. He who gives a shoe in exchange for money or food to him who wants one, does indeed use the shoe as a shoe, but this is not its proper or primary purpose, for a shoe is not made to be an object of barter. (*Politics IX*)

Such secondary purposes are not necessarily immoral or unjust. It is only when the secondary use of a thing is employed in the service of unlimited acquisition that it veers from its intended use. Household management, for Aristotle, “has a limit,” a natural one, determined by the size of the household and the provisioning of its members. Trade and money-making moves beyond the confines of what is natural and good when it exceeds this natural limit and when wealth acquisition is undertaken as an end in itself. Such an end is unbound by any natural constraint or convention. The shoe, to stick with this example, starts acting in a whole new way when it is traded to make money beyond limit. When it is a shoe on my foot, however, it is not acting anything other than itself. It is simply being what it is, or what it was intended to be.

Anthropologists, for our part, have tended to assume that the real economy has those same natural limits that Aristotle postulated. This is perhaps born of our long-standing interest in family, kinship, and household. It is also born of our commitment to telling the reality of others’ lifeways: what is “real” is generally understood to be what is “on the ground,” as Jane Guyer has said to us in conversations about this workshop. What is on the ground tends to be the creation, maintenance, and sundering of familial and other interpersonal relations. So when we try to counter the “fictions” of finance, say, we seek out those “real” relations underneath or behind the fictions. Or when we try to sketch “real” economies, we find ourselves returning to the *oikos* or the human scale. This tendency is reflected in theoretical statements about the articulation of modes of production among the French structural Marxists (Meillassoux



1975), feminist anthropologists' criticisms of the French Marxists' naturalization of the biological generation of new humans, sidelining their social reproduction (Yanagisako and Collier 1987), and more recent work that understands capitalism and kinship as mutually implicated (Yanagisako 2002).

There is a tension, however, over whether those other social relations are sutured into a dominant mode of production, say, capitalism, or whether they exist outside, to one side or, or sometimes out of phase with it, and when or whether it matters. For J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006), noncapitalist relations are all around us. Capitalism's apologists, promoters, and critics alike refuse actually existing economic plurality and diversity, and in so doing make out capitalism—and any critical response to it—to be singular or monolithic. Anna Tsing (2015a) is closer to the articulation of modes of production approach, in that she “look[s] for the non-capitalist elements on which capitalism depends” (2015a: 66). What she calls “pericapitalist” spaces are both inside and outside capitalism—say, Lao and Hmong mushroom foragers' trajectories of and relationships to war, displacement, and migration. In designating these as pericapitalist she foregrounds their articulation to or mobilization for “salvage capitalism” (Tsing 2015a: 106) in order to show how things “created in these non-capitalist processes are translated into capitalist value” (Tsing 2015b: ¶2). Indeed, “economic diversity makes capitalism possible” and at the same time provides the possibility for “instability and refusal of capitalist governance” (Tsing 2015a: 301).

Tsing's argument, and the analytical perspective on economic plurality presented by the Gens Manifesto (Bear et al. 2015), restages while challenging earlier Marxist accounts of the relationship between noncapitalist and capitalist modes and relations of production. Revisiting those debates gets us right into the thick of the “real”—and the association in anthropology between the real and the household, and how things “count” as real—literally and figuratively. There is an accounting problem here, and what Taylor Nelms (2015) has called a problem of delimitation: How do we understand kinship, gender, and the real economy and decide whether, when, and how these forms are alternatively opened up or closed off in people's practices, making bridges or articulations possible or not, sometimes or often, durable or periodic (as Nelms also argued in a paper that was circulated after the Rio conference).

Let's dig into anthropology's history for the often-overlooked antecedents of theories about economic plu-

rality. Claude Meillassoux (1975) argues that there is a twofold dependency of capitalism on non- or precapitalist forms. First, capitalism depends on the reproduction of labor power in the household. Second, capitalism as a global phenomenon in colonial imperialism depends on reserves of cheap labor power and resources outside its core loci in the industrialized West. To paraphrase Bridget O'Laughlin's summary (1977: 4), capitalism preserves these pre- and noncapitalist forms in order to exploit them more fully; primitive accumulation from noncapitalist modes “is a functional requirement of the reproduction of capital” (1977: 8).

O'Laughlin criticizes Meillassoux for naturalizing reproduction. Household, family, and biological generativity are simply assumed as coterminous and given. Take, for instance, Meillassoux's discussion of the supposed transition from land as a subject of production (among, say, migratory gathering and hunting bands) to land as an instrument of production (among quasi-settled horticulturalists). The ethnographic record on such quasi-settled communities contains examples of people developing systems of accounting between the full season and the fallow—they carry over surpluses and take stock of who has lent what to whom. Meillassoux describes them as resting on a system of “advances and returns”—credits and debts. This is because “production is delayed”—it takes time for those crops to grow—which requires ongoing “co-operation between members of the productive cell” (1975: 41). How is that cooperation organized and maintained? In addition to the social relations maintained between those who labor together, there are the relations over time between “the successive workers who, at each season, depend for their survival through the non-productive period and for the preparation of the next cycle on the subsistence food produced during the previous productive period” (1975: 41). Over time, he writes, the work team changes—but this establishes a relationship of debt to “those who came before” (Meillassoux 1972: 99–100). Thus elders gain authority over juniors, as being closer to as well as being an example of those who came before.

The problem O'Laughlin and others (see Collier 1988) identified, however, is that this account assumes what should be explained: the “contingency of the biological reproduction of workers” (O'Laughlin 1977: 7). In Meillassoux's account, elder men perpetuate their authority over junior men “by controlling both the distribution of women and access to the valuables young men must present to women's kin to validate marriages” (Collier 1988: 4)—the stuff of “primitive money,” or the



accounting or memory-devices that make up so much of the early ethnology of money (e.g., Quiggin 1949).

Collier's account of marriage and inequality in classless societies further advanced O'Laughlin's critique by pointing out the obvious from the evidence of the ethnographic record: it's pretty clear that elder men don't control women at all, at least, Collier writes, "not in any ordinary sense of the word 'control'" (1988: 4). Rather, they are "constantly involved in litigation because unmarried girls have affairs and married women leave their husbands to run off with lovers or return home to mother" (1988: 4). Rather than controlling women, elder men face the accounting problem of "who owes what to whom" (1988: 4) and need to settle up with men jilted by their wives. Those primitive moneys, far from suggesting the price of a wife or compensation to the wife's family for her labor is better seen as a remedy to a conflict situation rather than a right to a woman's labor, reproductive or otherwise.

Read one way, Meillassoux's critique sounds like Friedrich Engels's account of the rise of private property—men gaining control over women's reproductive powers once the "discovery" of paternity inaugurates the institution of private property through inheritance from those (men) who came before. This, too, is the story from Louis Henry Morgan's (1877) reading of Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1877), which was picked up by both Engels and Karl Marx. The defeat of the female line and common property by agnatic descent and private property represents the resolution for Marx and Engels of the first great world historic class struggle.

The classic Marxist version of the story depends on a "real" of biological reproduction, lineage, and "blood." As Collier succinctly put it, however, "mating and marriage are not the same thing" (Collier 1988: 4). As O'Laughlin put it, "social reality can never be adequately analyzed in . . . empiricist terms because the surface world of appearances provides only a fleeting and necessarily incomplete glimpse of the contradictory social relations that underlie it" (O'Laughlin 1977: 23). And now we come to the heart of the thing. How do we get at what's on the ground—to return to Guyer—without falling into the empiricist trap? How do we "see," ethnographically speaking, what we see? And how do we analyze relations without being fooled by what we see?

When ethnographers witnessed the exchange of valuables at marriage, it appeared to them to be a payment for a wife, the exercise of control over social relations of reproduction that effected a transfer of rights of the bi-

ological capacities of the wife from her family to the husband. What they did not always see were the ways in which debts were socially organized, and in which the delimitation and durability (à la Nelms) of relations among men were maintained or restored in the breach of such debts.

Consider, however, Collier's accomplishment in *Marriage and inequality*—and the ethnographic accomplishment that actually preceded it. The book is not based on fieldwork, but on rereading some old ethnographies. Collier "saw" things in those old ethnographies that others had not. How so? By placing herself in the position of the women whose lives and conflicts could be imagined through the pages of those ethnographies (and, admittedly, doing so by reading across a host of such ethnographies). She admits, this was a just-so exercise, imagining one playing the game from her own point of view and perspective. But nevertheless, it allowed her to open up the relations structuring social inequality and the importance of marital instability (really, women's agency) in classless societies. There was enough in those old ethnographies for Collier to imagine herself in the position of the actors portrayed—even if only just off to the side, just off stage—to ask herself, what would I have done?

Empirically plural

I rehearse the feminist debate over Meillassoux because I think it is restaged in contemporary anthropological conversations about the real economy, and provides a cautionary tale on the limits of empiricism. It also reminds us that the translation of noncapitalist forms into capitalism has a prehistory in the annals of anthropological thought. It is easy to see Meillassoux's first error—naturalizing biological reproduction, which then prevented subsequent anthropologists from questioning the diverse forms of life-forces and their social production and organization into other value projects (to borrow some language from the Gens Manifesto). It is more of a challenge to grapple with how we might still be reproducing his second error—subsuming all noncapitalist relations into capitalism. I think this is because revealing the subsumption of the noncapitalist into the capitalist feels like the answer. Having found the answer, we can then take our attention away from the "doing" on either side of that operation of subsumption as well as from the operations or infrastructures of conversion facilitating that subsumption. In effect, finding the answer is like making those hyperexag-



gerated expressions of emotion Stanislavski made fun of; attending to the doing requires just sitting in the chair, like Maria that second time she was asked to do so, and acted convincingly by not playing at anything at all.

“Real” economic diversity, or “real” translation into capitalism: which one of these two constructs we as analysts or social actors take up, and when we do so, it seems to me, depends on the stakes of whichever game we are playing at whichever time or in whichever temporality. This, in turn, requires openness to these alternative times and games, or, to put it another way, openness to putting oneself in the shoes of those playing those games, much as Collier, but to the extent possible without caricature (about which, more below—I realize this is a perilous charge, and a place ethnography has been before . . . and not always a happy place!).

But we experience people doing this kind of operation themselves, out there in the “real” world. Take Nelms’s argument (Nelms 2015, and in Nelms, n.d., which circulated among the Rio conference participants afterward): Various positioned Ecuadorians either seek out those economic alternatives as a source of refusal of neoliberalism, or simply live them—not acting anything. Sometimes anthropologists (and some of Nelms’s interlocutors) foreclose possibility in the name of ideological or analytical purity, or a desire to state what is “really” going on or what is “really” important, consequential, meaningful (such as incorporation into capitalist accumulation). I know that in refusing this foreclosure I am just putting forward another conception of the real; but I am going to do it anyway, to see what it might evoke, to muster whatever resources it may afford me and my own nature for the new contexts and configurations, indeterminate, yet to come.

And, *nota bene*, I am doing it *here*, in the pages of HAU, for its audiences and in terms of ongoing conversations it has fostered. (In spite of statements about surfacing contingency and refusing totalizing purity in analyzing the things of the world, anthropologists remain pretty stingy in granting the same indulgences to each other!). I would very likely do otherwise in other venues, on another stage, so to speak, or in another time phase of this being that I call myself and my world. This, of course, implies a certain kind of being in a certain kind of world—one in which something called an individual in something called a society can occupy different roles, take on different perspectives. Marilyn Strathern (1991) has been a signal guide through the questions this sort of

being/worlding evokes, and I will return to her in my conclusion.

Many of the actors described in the Real Economy essays are themselves simply on a quest to sort out what’s real from what’s not. Whether they are trying to get an accurate count of something (the size of South Africa’s economy, for James [2017]; smuggling into Brazil, for Rabossi [this issue]), or trying to make themselves visible through formality and documents (as with migrant laborers at the Zimbabwe–South African border, for Bolt [2017]), or trying to determine whether a set of representations corresponds to a real economic fact (in securities trading, for Ortiz [2017]), these actors’ goals are often to establish an incontestable baseline to guide their own and others’ future action. To be successful as fact, that baseline has to be accepted by any parties that might consult it. It has to account for the real, and the activities that produce it have to be undertaken *for real*. Those *actions* cannot be an *act*.

Of course, this path to objectivity is littered with failure. It’s hard to count certain things, and these essays detail why, in particular cases, achieving a count that can stand as objective is often thwarted—by people’s everyday practice, their negotiations and conversions of one form of value into another, their resistances, or the lack of fit between the counting tool and the reality “on the ground” being counted. Still, the belief persists that counting can give access to the “real” economy.

What is this real economy? For some of the actors described here, it stands in opposition to the fictions of the financialized economy. The real economy is the economy of stuff, labor, construction, or manufacturing or mining or whatnot, as opposed to paper or digital trading of representations of some supposedly more real assets backing them. These fictions can become so complex, however, that deducing the reality behind them is a puzzle for analysts and actors on the financial scene alike. There are contested claims, too, as we see in Ortiz’s and James’s essays: it is often difficult to differentiate what is economic from what is stately, or what is neoliberal from what is redistributive. Multiplicity, ambiguity, and the intertwining of relations and institutions that are supposed to be separate keep getting in the way. The real economy is also the economy of certain time horizons, which, as Zaloom (this issue) shows, involves a great many leaps of faith, not straightforward economic calculation.

Stanislavski warned that theater based on “conventions”—stylized gestures expressing inner states, like



clutching one's head to convey anguished surprise—may entertain but will not truly move the audience. Hence, the quotation that I have chosen as one of the epigraphs for this essay. Stanislavski challenged such “unrealities” in favor of acting that grows out of living, or, what he elsewhere called “the direct co-operation of nature herself” as opposed to “representation” (Stanislavski 1948: 22). The direct co-operation of nature gives you true intent and thus real drama. Anything else is just play-acting.

If Muniesa's interlocutors are using cases to create subjective experiences that actors can draw on to guide future actions, some of Nelms's interlocutors crave cases, which they can turn into on-the-ground examples of alternative economic relationships or arrangements, not to experience but to implement, to make what they call a “real change.” If Muniesa's worry that the real that business students seek can never be realized, at least some of Nelms's informants commit themselves, given this same condition, to keep on trying, to “hang in” and hang on. Their commitment is reminiscent of Slavoj Žižek's (1989) analysis of the ideological fantasy: ideology is not a veil masking the real, because we know full well that the real never lives up to its name. Yet we continue to persist in its fictions. This is analogous perhaps to drawing on one's real emotions, in co-operation with nature, while nevertheless on the stage. Or method ethnography, we might say: experiencing in co-operation with others their experiences, which are also yours.

It is a phase-shift in time. In method acting, I know I am not this guy (whomever it is I am portraying; and let's keep the masculine terms for now, for this is arguably a masculinist fantasy). But I have spent months, maybe years, turning myself into this guy—changing not just my physical appearance but my actual physical type, to the point possibly of causing health complications; not just reading about the lives of those like the one I will portray but partaking of their peccadillos or their perversions. So, *am* I that guy? Of course not. And yet . . . I have become him. And yet . . . I am not him. And so on. (An aside: I think ontology would have a tough time here.)

The process is similar to what Nelms's informants describe, as they seek or embody economic alternatives. Or what James's interlocutors experience as they juggle debts and relationships, here becoming responsible and responsabilized borrowers or creditors, there falling into over-indebtedness and financial chaos—complexly intertwined, or again, at the “same” time yet out of phase,

just as informal and formal or neoliberal and redistributive practices themselves intertwine. And it is in play in the multiplicity and plurality of both money and houses in Mariana Luzzi and Ariel Wilkis's essay (this issue). In her paper for the conference (not included in these issues of HAU), Eugênia Motta (2016) told an evocative story about a house in a favela whose owner styled hair. She reconfigured the main room of her autoconstructed house each time: what is today a living room would become tomorrow a hairdressing salon. So, which is it, *really*? How do we live it, have muscle memory of it as we move through it, inhabit it? As Luzzi and Wilkis relate, building materials—bricks—can be a store of value. But of course they are just bricks. And of course they are a store of value. But they're bricks. You get the idea.

Intentional ethnography

In their exhortation to “live” the business case or to “live” the dramatic passions and types, Muniesa's business instructor and Stanislavski's Director might be describing the orientation in ethnography set out by Stephen Tyler in his contribution to the *Writing culture* project. Strathern's reworking of that orientation may give purchase on how ethnography can help us grapple with real economies. The real economy and ethnographic reality have something in common: they exceed representation. Tyler wrote that ethnography is “imperfect” (1986: 122)—one might say partial—because it does not produce a universal metalanguage nor truly describe in total another reality. Rather, it evokes “what cannot be known discursively or performed perfectly”:

[If] a discourse can be said to “evoke,” then it need not represent what it evokes, though it may be a means to a representation. Since evocation is nonrepresentational, it is not to be understood as a sign function, for it is not a “symbol of,” nor does it “symbolize” what it evokes. (Tyler 1986: 129)

In Tyler's view, “fragments of discourse” “evoke in the minds of both reader and writer” a “possible world of commonsense reality” that produces an integrative, even therapeutic effect (1986: 125). Such fragments create an object of joint attention that exceeds those fragments themselves (again, going back to Hart's insights, that is why for ethnography there are never clear or direct “sources” for truth claims). Taking the etymology



of *intend*, they stretch or strain one's attention toward something. Why strain, I wonder? Perhaps because the thing is not really perceivable as such, not amenable to empirical observation. Like a "culture" or "society," much less an "individual."

In any event: how like the method of *An actor prepares* or the case method of business instruction! The result is an "emergent holism" (Stanislavski 1948: 133), a "restorative harmony" (134). Tyler also invoked polyphony and temporality in his effort to craft a new realism (1986: 137).

The *limit* of evocation, however, is precisely this restorative harmony, this integrative therapy. As Strathern wrote of the situation of the ethnographer working "at home" in a generalized "Western" context or an English village, there is never any real integration. Rather, there is constant interruption. Whether from colleagues from other disciplines—sociology, economics—also working on the terrain of home, or our subjects, themselves theorists of their practices, there are constant "presences that impinge" (Strathern 1991: 23)—including the mundane knock on the door, new email, or administrative crisis that jolts us out of our research timespace and into our lives as bureaucrats (I speak for myself here). I would add: they impinge first in this time, then in another; here in one locus, there, elsewhere. There are different timespaces to these interruptions, and different spatiotemporal horizons. The situation is not limited to the ethnographer at home, of course. It is characteristic of any analytical or descriptive endeavor in which we hold onto the self in society, the concept of the person that denies its own partiality and multiplicity, its own distribution or dispersion across and within a social field, and its own interconnectedness with other such distributed entities. Strathern writes:

Interruptions to the self do not guarantee a therapeutic return to the familiar. Rather, there is a sense of holding in one's grasp what cannot be held—of trying to make the body do more than it can do—of making a connection with others in a partial manner. (Strathern 1991: 27)

What Strathern and Tyler do for ethnography—as a site of connections and conversions—the Gens project (Bear et al. 2015) and Tsing do for capitalism. They "look beyond market exchanges and monetary forms to explore these conversions to take into account the full range of mediations: for example, between state

debt and social debt, humanitarian projects and entrepreneurship, and non-human forms and commodities or resources" (Bear et al. 2015: §5), radically empirical without being irreducibly empiricist.

For those of us in Fairservis's class, to read Stanislavski and then (trying) to act Chekhov was a peculiarly effective way to stage the method of ethnography—and to stage it as "method" in the acting sense. To borrow one of Federico Neiburg and Jane Guyer's terms from their introduction to this collection, it "provoked," and it strained, pulled us toward a nonperceivable object. Despite our having been thrown into the *Writing culture* and deconstructive moment, words did not matter here so much. Showing was more important than saying, as Ludwig Wittgenstein had it. We were put in the position of Maria in *An actor prepares*, on the stage without realizing that the acting had begun, by which fact we were able to act.

Can the ethnographer bridge scenarios, Neiburg and Guyer ask? Can ethnography itself be the bridge, the thing that facilitates that stretching-toward, that intention in the sense I've used above? That is to say, can ethnography of the real economy be the kind of conversion device, or infrastructure, that Bear et al. discuss in their reflections on capitalism? For the Gens project, conversion devices channel the values and possibilities of plurality and multiplicity into capital—at least sometimes, and contingently so. Toward what would ethnography channel the possibilities of the polychronic (Bear et al. 2015), the polyphonic (Tsing 2015a: 24), and the multiple timescapes in which human and nonhuman actors coordinate their activities (Bear et al. 2015: §8)? My own struggle has been to harness ethnography's infrastructures rather intentionally when setting off from the starting point of Gibson-Graham's world of economic plurality and possibility. I try then to come back again toward that world, but now dropping the "economic" frame altogether—in order to set our interests sometimes athwart capitalism as our primary object of concern and practice. This, anyway, is what I have intended to show.

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Bill MAURER is Professor of Anthropology and Law and Dean of Social Sciences at the University of California—Irvine. He is also the Director of the Institute for Money, Technology, and Financial Inclusion (www.imtfin.uci.edu). He conducts research on law, property, money, and finance, focusing on the technological infrastructures and social relations of exchange and payment. He has particular expertise in emerging, alternative, and experimental forms of money and finance, and their legal implications.

Bill Maurer
University of California—Irvine
3151 Social Sciences Plaza
Irvine, CA 92607-5100, USA
wmmaurer@uci.edu

