“The allegory goes: Just as the creation relates to the creator, so does the work relate to its immanent laws. [...] The work is not law, it is above the law”

“No work is determined to go forward, but each work begins somewhere with a motive and grows beyond its organs into an organism”

“We do not undertake analyses of works because we want to copy them [...] We investigate the methods by which another has created his work, in order to set ourselves in motion...”

—Paul Klee.

Introduction

Paul Klee’s framing remarks set three agendas, along which I would like to elaborate this article: 1) artistic creation may originate from a single originating originator, yet it mediates relational situations that go beyond singular authorship; 2) works of art are often not starting points of such situations, but connectors, conduits of existing social, political, aesthetic dynamics; and 3) while artistic creation problematizes difference and
duplication, forms of analysis are often either already a part of them, or implied by them, making them apt sites for a reflection on social relations or political subjectivity. This article seeks to contribute to a discussion on what sets such artistic and anthropological workings and collaborations in motion. In order to do so, I discuss specific conjunctions between ethnographic and artistic investigations that have sought cross-fertilizations, before elaborating the particular case of Ethnographic Conceptualism (EC). Following this conversation with anthropological and artistic theories of relationality and representation, I discuss works by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Jonas Staal as ethnographically-inspired inquiries into colonial (self-)replication. Their projects give substance to my claim that by recourse to ethnographic conceptualism, they can be analyzed as social infrasculptures exposing non-identical forms of replication and repetition.

EC is a theoretical and practical movement of collaborations between anthropologists and (conceptual) artists. It proposes a radical form of participatory and experimental ethnography with conceptual art as both a method and an object of research at its heart. EC thus foregrounds cross-fertilizations between conceptual experiment and ethnographic writing, similar to the artistic-scientific-architectural juxtaposition underpinning works by Jonas Staal and Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll. While Jonas Staal focuses on architectural narratives, juxtaposing urban and Spiritist mythologies in Brazil in his project Nosso Lar/Brasilia, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll makes productive use of the intersection of conceptual art, performance art, and scholarship in her projects rise and Fall, Delirium of the Copy, and Ore Black Ore. The latter work focuses on the black fungi of the Gwion Gwion paintings, tracing a living synthesis of bacteria and granite, technology and mimicry, history and contemporaneity, artistic and historical research.

Ethnographic Art/Art as Ethnography

Ever since the positivist postulation in the early 20th century that social anthropology is an empirical science, scholars have also argued otherwise. The so-called “living exhibitions” of the Cologne museum director and professor of ethnology, Julius Lips, serve as a prominent case-in-point. A particularly striking example is an exhibition entitled “Human Masks” (Masken der Menschen) that Lips curated in the Rautenstrauch-Joest museum in Cologne in 1931 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the institution. Distinguishing his exhibition arrangement from common evolutionary orderings of artifacts, Lips arranged the masks in comparative styles and had them worn and scenically performed by his students, exceeding thus any restrictive form of “vitrine thinking” (Vitrindenken).² Lips’s wife described the proceedings as follows: “[The masks] had come out of their shelves and were awakened to new life on the shoulders of young students.”³

What unifies the desire to innovate anthropological display with the developments in the relatively new field of “artistic research” is a common interest in finding new ways of representing and describing social and cultural phenomena; “the empathy and intuitive understanding of otherness.”⁴ Debates revolving around art and anthropology, particularly in the context of museum exhibits, are not merely significant for the study of representation and ethnographic practice, but also address questions concerning the methodological and epistemological fringes of sciences and history.
works have played with the notion of ambivalence, I believe that ethnographic practice and writing can learn more from conceptual art experiments about integration and acknowledgement of ambivalence and perception, the analysis of aesthetics and participation — in short, about the relation between affect, percept, and concept, to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari.\textsuperscript{11}

Fiona Siegenthaler notes that while anthropological concerns for ethnographic art have intensified since the 1990s, this has surprisingly not led to an “ethnographic turn in contemporary arts scholarship.”\textsuperscript{12} While she is right in pointing out that much contemporary art has turned towards the inquiry and reconstruction of social networks and relations — a paradigm shift labeled and arguably created by Nicolas Bourriaud as “relational aesthetics” — there may be reasons to think that a concern for the exhibition as a space for such inquiries has not entirely been abandoned, as I discuss below.\textsuperscript{13} In her article “Fight the Dragon Long, The Dragon You Become,” Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll suggests that relational aesthetics and anthropology share a concern with human relationships: Relational aesthetics “defines art as information exchanged between the artist and the viewers.”\textsuperscript{14} As she has argued elsewhere, “within performance art, which was traditionally focused on the performer, it is a significant shift to instead conceive of the audience as those who perform the work.”\textsuperscript{15} Testing the claim that “ethnographic conceptualism can analyze the performative responses of an art audience” by placing center-stage and studying the audience “as an artist and academic,” she interrogates any originary and singular understanding of “the artist as author of history.”\textsuperscript{16}

Sergio Jarillo de la Torre has suggested a different way of conceiving of this relationship between

Scholarship on the relation between art and anthropology, both as theory and as practice,\textsuperscript{3} has more recently proposed that a) a broad range of artistic practices since the 1990s (arguably also earlier) have come to resemble anthropological research; and b) anthropological research has begun to be concerned with contemporary art practice. With regard to the first observation, Kris Rutten has noted that it might be useful to speak of an “‘ethnographic turn’ in contemporary art” borrowing explicitly from Hal Fosters’s essay “The Artist as Ethnographer?”\textsuperscript{16} In using this expression, Rutten wishes to emphasize those kinds of artistic practices and works which exhibit similarities to ethnographic working methods, in particular concerning questions of cultural alterity and practices of representation, authenticity, and neocolonial ideologies.\textsuperscript{7}

At the same time, however, anthropologists began addressing some of the anthropological implications of contemporary arts practice. Apart from insights about new and alternative forms of communication and communicability of ethnographic knowledge (cf. the “sensory turn”),\textsuperscript{8} and a critique of the scriptocentrism of socio-cultural anthropology,\textsuperscript{9} this renewed anthropological interest in particular forms of art addresses the social dynamic of production, representation, and reception. This concern with the epistemological and ethnographic questions is significant in particular for the reciprocal relation between anthropological research and conceptual art experiments, since both practices address a particular form of observation, representation, and reflexivity. In the case of empirical ethnographic research in the British tradition of “social anthropology […] as a natural science of human society,” we are often dealing with forms of reflexivity that attend to falsifiable and understandable knowledge.\textsuperscript{10} While more recent ethnographic
anthropology and art by discussing a series of photographs depicting museum visitors looking at art by German artist Thomas Struth (Museum Photographs) and the hyperrealistic participatory installation Simply Botiful by Swiss artist Christoph Büchel.27 Responding to their work, De la Torre suggests that “art and anthropology abut on a ‘metonymic juxtaposition’ that results in a movement of metaphorical comparison in which consistent grounds for similarity and difference are elaborated.”18 He asks “what would happen if art explained anthropology in a non-textual way and if anthropology conceived of its data as artistic performance?” Struth’s and Büchel’s propositions, each in their own ways, are discussed in his article as “artistic ethnographies,” by which De la Torre refers to “those artworks or art installations that function as de facto ethnographies in exploring, exposing, and analyzing sociocultural patterns of livelihood beyond or besides offering purely aesthetic pleasure.”19 The Museum Photographs, for example, “are works of art, yet we can also see them as ethnographic devices.”20 In addition, De la Torre takes Struth’s reflection on viewers’ responses to artworks in museum spaces to suggest that “art is, mostly, a dynamic, ever-changing, and collective process of intersubjective participation, where the subjects have the capacity (if not the will) to produce new understandings in a porous world inhabited by people and things.”21 While contemporary art has thus transcended the museum space to become “a discursive network of other practices and institutions, other subjectivities and communities,” Struth’s series of photographs is a reminder and relational assessment of museums no longer as “static shrines” but as “a dynamic forum where knowledge is a disputed construction, induced by the participation of the public.”22

Simply Botiful, Büchel’s artistic intervention puts its audience into a context where it can (and might be ‘invited’ to) subvert the original creator’s intentions and authority—a complex case of planned misbehavior. Defined by De la Torre as “an art installation or assemblage,” Simply Botiful is a large metonymic juxtaposition of different life-worlds—brothels, prayer rooms, caravans—in warehouse spaces used by Hauser & Wirth Gallery, through which the audience is invited to wander, crouch, climb.23 De la Torre’s argument is that “[i]n Simply Botiful, some of the relations suggested by Struth in his visual study of connectedness are actually performed in the field as the visitors amble along,” asking “to what extent it is possible to affirm that Struth’s gaze makes visible what Büchel has made livable.”24

Ethnographic Conceptualism

How do the preceding accounts illuminate and relate to Ethnographic Conceptualism? Both Carroll’s and De la Torre’s accounts were contributions to a special issue on this new movement and approach to the relation between conceptual art and ethnographic experiments, spearheaded by the Russian anthropologist Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov.25 For him, EC “refers to anthropology as a method of conceptual art but also, conversely, to the use of conceptual art as an anthropological research tool. Ethnographic conceptualism is ethnography conducted as conceptual art.”26 In contrast to Hal Fosters’s concept of “the artist as ethnographer” searching truth in alterity, Ssorin-Chaikov bases his ideas, among others, on the conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth.27 Kosuth describes his method as “anthropologized art,” a form of art, which, not unlike ethnography, makes social reality perceivable and conceivable in new ways. He suggests that the pro-
found immersion of artists in the cultures where they produce their work produces a particular kind of reflection which not only lays bare the infrastructure of these cultures; this form of reflection also represents in itself a socially-mediating activity. Anthropologized conceptual art of this kind thus not only describes the social and cultural fields in which it is located — it creates or changes them.

The starting point for these thoughts was the Moscow Kremlin-Museum exhibition, Gifts to Soviet Leaders, which Ssorin-Chaikov curated with Olga Sosnina in 2006. For the curatorial duo, ethnographic conceptualism was a productive concept to assemble gifts to Soviet leaders from citizens connected to each other through socialism. Juxtaposing them was simultaneously the result of social-historical research as it was itself a performative artifact: the exhibition offered a glimpse into the conceptual and material grid of gift-exchange far beyond the Soviet Union into the relations between museum, academy, social memory, and gift-politics. For Ssorin-Chaikov, the valued added by such conceptual art experiments is that critical artworks become themselves forms of reflections on the process of artistic labor or incorporate them. Accordingly, he proposes that EC constructs the social realities it analyzes, thus radically positing the contemporaneity of object and observer, past and present. Thus, EC also replaces the critique of the positivist gaze and vision on the fieldwork situation with a conceptual critique, which includes art historical as well as anthropological theory: “art as theory rather than theory as art.” In doing so, EC not only interrogates the complexity of “artistic inquiry” as an unconscious practice, but it also asks urgent ethical questions about the reflexivity of such processes.

Hence, EC does not proclaim the end of traditional ethnographic practice, but considers its performative reconfiguration no longer as a mere description, but as a creation of social scenarios. Ssorin-Chaikov formulates this as follows: “In contrast to ethnography as participant observation of what exists, ethnographic conceptualism explicitly constructs the reality that it studies.” Conceived in such a way, Ssorin-Chaikov argues that ethnographic conceptualism could become a type of ethnographic instrument for provoking ethnographic situations by means of conceptual art. These situations engender both a form of art and its ethnographic questioning.

The Delirium of the Copy: Snail Eating Theatre
Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll’s interdisciplinary work on colonial copies is situated at the intersection of art history, art practice, anthropology, and the history of science. It has consistently interrogated the fundamentally unsettling relation of colonial replication. During the 2012 Marrakech Biennale, her three-months durational performance installation *rise and Fall* (with Alex Schweder) is described as follows: “As you move along a fourteen-meter long structure that invites you to walk high above the orchestra pit and stage, the floor rises and falls beneath you, and you have to find a balance, mutually, with your fellow viewers.” For Carroll, this piece denoted not merely an experiment in relational art; instead, it responded to an exploration of the stories of colonial replication. Using colonial copies as artifacts, or protagonists, in a libretto written for the Biennale, she traces the story of a tale-telling failure that links colonist and colonized: Upon his return from a visit to Europe, the Mayor of Marrakech decided to commission a
French Tunisian architect to design a European opera for Marrakech. The reproduction in concrete, Théâtre Royal Marrakech, became the central site for her examination of the palpable but repressed instability and insecurity of Morocco in the wake of the Arab Spring, the pressure of failed colonial models of imposed statehood and architectural replicas as conceptual ethnographic sites. Carroll’s *rise and Fall* in Marrakech thus interrogates the colonial metaphorical assemblages of replication and failure.

*Snail Eating Theatre*

looks at the infectiousness of European high culture that continues, for example also in Schlingensief’s *Opera Dorf Afrika*, to produce mutant replicas of itself in the colonies. The copy is a symptom of an authority that high culture imposes. The colonial copy is born from a fear that there is no local equivalent to that European form.

Jonas Staal: Nosso Lar / Brasilia

Furthering a concern with the idea of colonial replication, architectural copies, and failure, Jonas Staal’s piece *Nosso Lar / Brasilia* invites a striking comparison. Establishing a mimetic relation between two cities, one ethereal and one built, Staal projects an architectural animation of a bird’s-eye view of these imagined and real spaces, overlapping them as his film progresses. A voice-over further explores the possibility of the imbrication of two cities, asking unsettling questions about the intersecting of two different yet reciprocally mirroring architectural projects: “This is a story of two cities. But one could also say it is the story of a single question.”

How to deal with histories that are both too different to be the same, and too much the same to be entirely different? Between 1944 and 1956, the plans for two cities, Nosso Lar (Our Home) and Brasília, exhibited the clash of Spiritist and modernist thought enacted in urban architectural projects. Nosso Lar’s city plans, created in 1944, were based upon the psychographical...
transcriptions of Francisco de Paula Cândido “Chico” Xavier, who would soon become Bazil’s most famous medium. Brasília’s plans, on the other hand, inspired by fifteen freehand drawings sketched in 1957 by architect Lúcio Costa, illustrate a crucifix with a curved crossbar (resembling an airplane). These plans were realized under the center-left liberal politician Juscelino Kubitschek. Although the metaphysicism of the former and the administrative technocracy of the latter seem in contrast, Staal suggests that they are in fact connected on a more profound plateau:

Both cities are instruments of (re-)colonization processes: Xavier recolonizes the field of religion by implanting his Spiritist movement in the occupied domain of Roman Catholicism; Kubitschek recolonizes the country of Brazil, by implanting his Modernist colony in the domain still unoccupied by the Portuguese. 37

By imbricating both cities to create an impossible recreation of failed colonial copies, Staal’s work can be put into a productive dialogue with Carroll’s concern for the self-replicating conservation of the Gwion Gwion. While they might also be said to dispense with the viewer, there is also an inevitable moment in Staal and Carroll where art history is imagined and thus presented by the act of regarding, by the “performing viewer.” 38 Yet he also creates an oneiric neologism that takes EC’s proposition of exposing societal infrastructures further:

Although the metaphysical project of Spiritism and the administrative, planned enterprise of Modernist architecture seem to be naturally in opposition to one another, I will argue that they show similarities to a remarkable
Artworks as Social Infrasculptures

The idea of a social sculpture, or soziale Plastik, is a term often attributed to the work of Joseph Beuys. For Joseph Beuys, who coined this term and paradigm, a soziale Plastik contains as vital aspect of the artwork, not its qualities as “exhibited object,” but those kinds of (human and non-human) behavior internal to it, which immediately address relationality and sociality, social restructuring and formation. Linking my previous account on ethnographic conceptualism as a way to render visible the infrastructure of a given situation, I would like to propose that we can productive rethink Carroll’s and Staal’s work as social infrasculptures that reveal the political nature of the idea of colonial replication and relationality. The Gwion Gwion serve as a background myth and allegory for such a social infrasculpture: they radically urge us to rethink our concepts of art, authorship, and authenticity by extending their own frames of (artistic) reference, question the autonomy of authorship, threaten genealogical as well as archaeological models for linear (art) historical argumentation.

Harald Szeemann, curator of the fifth Documenta exhibition, opened the doors to the public on 30 June 1972. “Questioning Reality — Image Worlds Today” had been chosen as the exhibition’s theme, with a range of conceptual art, happenings, and performances critically inquiring the relation of art to society. Joseph Beuys had been invited to Documenta V and established an Office for Direct Democracy that opened a space for discussion and created an early kind of “museo-lab” or “lab-museum.” On a table in the central space, Beuys placed a red rose that was changed daily. Commenting on this choice, he said:

For me the rose is a very simple and clear example and image for this evolutionary process to the revolutionary goal, as the rose is a revolution with regard to its genesis. The flower’s coming into existence does not happen abruptly, but in the organic process of growth. […] The flower is a revolution with regard to the leaves and the stem, although it has grown in organic transformation. The rose only becomes possible through this organic evolution.

Via the Office, Beuys also issued his famous statement “EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST.” For Beuys, this idea was directly linked to his project “to change the West German constitution so as to take power away from representative political parties and government bureaucrats and transfer it to the people.” Beuys’s conviction was that “[c]ollective systems of self-management guiding the production and distribution of goods would end oppressive economic relations while, in the cultural sphere, ‘free science, free education and free information’ would be enshrined.” It was at Documenta V that Beuys also “proposed that future ‘political intentions’ become artistic: ‘they must originate from human creativity, from the individual freedom of man’.”

Politics as social sculpture would trigger revolutionary changes in economic, governmental and social institutions … when people stopped participating in the existing order of things and turned their energies elsewhere.

Concluding Remarks: Non-Identical Replication

From the point of view of the anthropological observer, it is a productive exercise to reflect upon the enabling epistemological and methodological function of the
are depicting and altering, depicting them as persistent, replicating and multiple difference.

Curator-artist-researcher relation in these two conceptual works I discussed. In the light of my introductory remarks on Klee, we can see how Staal’s and Carroll’s works explore the underlying concept of non-identical repetition and social infrasculptures. Seen in the light of self-reflexive, self-colonizing non-identical repetition, the engagement with the Gwion Gwion challenges archaeological shorthands such as the idea of the cognitive explosion or any idea of originary moment of creation. What’s more, signifier and signified, historical residue and originary artifact, become one, thus necessitating an interdisciplinary genealogical imagination. Much like the rhizome, the colonial copy, or the neocolonial city, each painting becomes “a palimpsest of itself,” countering the political relegation of the indigenous into prehistory.

Understanding difference as a principle subordinate to a model/replica-scheme precludes an understanding of difference and internal self-differentiation as a process of becoming-different, becoming-organism. Staal’s and Carroll’s work both address the question of self-colonisation, making the Gwion Gwion readable as allegoric way pointers to wider issues of artistic creation as multiple, repeated replication, artworks as mediators for social, political, and aesthetic dynamics, and artistic creation as a problematizing difference and duplication. Ethnographic conceptualism, as an example of interdisciplinary conceptual collaborations between anthropology and art, sheds light on how conceptual artworks such as Nosso Lar/Brasilia and rise and Fall foreground cross-fertilizations between conceptual experiment and ethnographic writing. We can thus read Staal’s and Carroll’s artworks as forms of ethnographic provocations, as infrasculptures that expose the processes they


12 Fiona Siegenthaler, “Towards an Ethnograph- ic Turn in Contemporary Art Scholarship,” *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 27.6 (2013), 737; Rutten et al., “Revis- iting the Ethnographic Turn in Contemporary Art,” refer to this reciprocal relation when they speak of “representation” (those who are delegated to speak and act in the name of another) and “representation as description” (the presentation and description of the other).


19 De la Torre, “Art and Anthropology beyond Beautiful Representations,” 150.

20 Ibid., 133.

21 Ibid., 135.


23 De la Torre, “Art and Anthropology beyond Beautiful Representations,” 139.

24 Ibid., 142.


26 Ibid., 6.


30 Ibid., 11.

31 Ibid., 8.


35 Delirium of the Copy, artist’s statement (2014).


37 Ibid., 94.

38 Carroll, “Fight the Dragon Long,” 103.


43 Ibid., 71.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.


