

The Art of Anthropology: The Potential of Art to Create Postmodern Anthropological Knowledge

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“To treat ethnography (and the concomitant processes of research and representation) as ruin and fragment, possible sites of intended and unintended, past and present destructions and reconstructions, from which new meanings can be engendered in processes of bricolage and assemblage, is a challenge that anthropology can take up, from and in collaboration with, contemporary art.” – *Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (2010:20)*

This essay seeks to demonstrate the potential of art to create postmodern anthropological knowledge, in the hopes of encouraging methodological, epistemological, and representational diversification within the discipline at large. Legitimising artistic practices as of postmodern anthropological potential requires a preliminary re-examination of the values which underpin anthropology’s processes of knowledge production. This examination reveals the perpetuation of positivism in anthropology’s representational practices and therefore the continued relevance of postmodern critiques regarding ethnocentrism and the problematics of exclusive ethnographic authority. Thereupon, I seek to demonstrate the potential of artworks to create sensuous, emotionally evocative, ambiguous, and polyphonic anthropological knowledge that, through a process of fragmentation and negotiation, can processually construct multiple levels of meaning, including incisive anthropological abstraction.

The following images are analysed and juxtaposed in terms of their potential to convey postmodern anthropological knowledge. The titles of the images (which follow the final plate) are separated from the images to free them of that discursive framing.



Plate 1



Plate 2

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List of Plates:

Plate 1: Holiday #1 - Ilya Kabakov

Plate 2: 5 Saami Women Against Snow – Sarah Cooper & Nina Gorfer

Plate 3: Demonstration in favor of the leading opposition figure Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari - Gilles Peress

Plate 4: The Answers of an Experimental Group – Ilya Kabakov