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# Introduction

In Response

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*Annelise Riles*

FROM CINEMA TO ADVERTISING, management studies, and even military and police science, ethnography is enjoying something of a renaissance. Across the social and human sciences, the arts, and the professions, ethnography excites, provokes, and intrigues. In the academy in particular, in disciplines from law, sociology, and economics to literary criticism, scholars are turning to ethnographic work as a way out of overdetermined paradigms, as a theoretically sophisticated antidote to the excesses of theory.

This volume foregrounds a particular aspect of the ethnographic enterprise. Our specific focus is not the new *subjects* of ethnographic work, per se, but the *nature* of ethnographic knowledge itself. And within that knowledge, we draw attention to a particular aspect or dimension of ethnographic work: the act of *ethnographic conceptualization and response*. We are interested in how ethnographers conceive, grasp, appreciate, see patterns—or rather, in a telling colloquialism, how certain insights or patterns “come to them.” We explore, through experiment as much as analysis, how ethnographers become caught in others’ conceptualizations (Wagner 2001) and stopped in their analytical tracks, how they appreciate and empathize. And most of all, we draw attention to, and experiment with, anthropologists’ *response* to their subjects, and to one another, as a form of ethical and epistemological engagement.

The volume is organized around one particular ethnographic artifact, *the document*. Why a focus on an artifact rather than a shared theoretical or

methodological perspective? And why documents, of all things, a subject that Bruno Latour has termed “the most despised of all ethnographic subjects” (1988, 54)? Documents provide a useful point of entry into contemporary problems of ethnographic method for a number of reasons. First, there is a long and rich tradition of studies of documents in the humanities and social sciences. Second, documents are paradigmatic artifacts of modern knowledge practices. Indeed, ethnographers working in any corner of the world almost invariably must contend with documents of some kind or another. Documents thus provide a ready-made ground for experimentation with how to apprehend modernity ethnographically.

At the moment when scholars in other fields are, in increasing numbers, embracing ethnography, anthropologists, whose discipline gave birth to the method, pose questions. Anthropologists are now profoundly aware of their own complicity in local articulations of global political forces, and they are concerned about the ethical implications of their relationship to their subjects (Turner 1997). Experiences with translocal forces of decolonization, economic turmoil, and militarization have sewn fears that ethnographic accounts of particular places may actually obscure, rather than illuminate, the impact of wider political and economic forces. In a world in which the people anthropologists formally referred to as “informants” now often attend academic conferences and speak in the language of anthropological theory, moreover, uncanny connections and ironic alliances abound in anthropological discussions of the way globalization has altered the nature of the “field” and the task of fieldwork (Marcus 1999b, 4; Tsing 2005). At the same time, anthropologists’ ethnographic encounters with new agents and artifacts—subjects such as financial instruments, biotechnologies, social movements, robots, scientific and legal theories, even academic bureaucracies—have raised new questions about the limits of traditional ethnographic description and analysis.

Moreover, if anthropologists ever truly believed that facts were “collected” in the “field” rather than produced collaboratively in the intersubjective experience of the ethnographic encounter, they have abandoned any such pretense. Gupta and Ferguson, for example, critique conventions of “spatial separation” and temporal sequence that separate “the field” from “home” and with these, the moment of data gathering from the moment of writing and analysis (1997a, 12). Marilyn Strathern (1991) likewise analyzes conventions of scale at work in understandings of ethnographic data, and also the “aesthetic of relationality” animating both

ethnographic research and anthropological analysis (Strathern 1995). Anthropologists have definitively critiqued such conceptual categories as culture, society, or statehood, which once were the workhorses of ethnographic research. And the enduring legacy of the critiques of ethnographic writing practices of the 1980s (Clifford and Marcus 1986) has been doubts about the conventions of ethnographic narrative. One way to rephrase many of these concerns is to say that a once productive distance ethnographers maintained, implicitly or explicitly, purposefully or not, between ourselves and our objects of our study, between the things studied (the data) and the frames we used to study them (the analysis), between theorizing and describing, has now definitively collapsed.

Anthropologists' current questioning of fieldwork method marks out, in a practical and engaged way, large and important political, philosophical, and epistemological questions that are the province of no particular discipline. Already, enthusiasts of ethnography in other disciplines have begun to confront these questions as well. The early embrace of ethnography in science and technology studies and in film studies (e.g., Ruby 1992), for example, has given way to reflexive concerns much like the anthropological crises of representation of the 1980s (Lynch 1993). But for anthropology in particular, the future direction of the discipline now depends on finding answers to some very old and deceptively simple questions: What exactly differentiates ethnography from, or joins it to, journalism, fiction writing, cultural theory, historiography, or political activism? What notions of truth, and what ethical, political, or aesthetic commitments, does it embrace and demand? Who and what is ethnography for? How does description incorporate, supplement, or counterbalance ideas and ways of thinking in social theory? In recent decades anthropologists have pinpointed and dissected the methodological, political, and epistemological problems ethnographers confront in the field, and at their desks, with great acumen and skill. But the question of what ethnography should *become*, what should count as ethnography, in light of this internal critique, of what is the skill or the art of ethnographic work in the aftermath of the debates about politics and epistemology, still remains out of focus.

Articulations of the limits of conventional fieldwork have generated a number of proposals for how ethnography should be done. Many current proposals focus on new *subjects* of anthropological research—on identifying new institutions, new conditions for ethnographic work, or new objects of study, from laboratories to war zones (Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren 2002; Ong and Collier 2005). George

Marcus's notion of "multi-sited" research (1998, 117) addresses the perceived limits of locality, for example. Another strand of proposals has focused on the character of relations between anthropologist and the people they encounter in the field—on moving away from a model of "informant relations" toward a focus on political, ethical, and conceptual collaboration with the people the ethnographer encounters in the field (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b; Marcus 1999b; Tsing 2005). Gupta and Ferguson propose a more actively engaged ethnographic practice focused on the concept of "political location" rather than fieldwork locale, for example (1997a, 39). A third strand of proposals has focused on the stylistic conventions of ethnographic writing and representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus 1995, 1996; Raffles 2002).

This volume offers, by experiment and example as much as by argument, another view of the path forward, one that is surely related to both problems of rapport between field-worker and informant, and stylistic conventions of ethnographic writing, but is also not reducible to these. The focus here is on *ethnographic response*. The book proceeds through a series of ethnographic studies of one class of salient artifacts that ethnographers are now bound to encounter in modern fieldwork contexts from law to science, to the arts, religion, activism, and market institutions: documents. The chapters concern documentary practices in diverse ethnographic contexts. Adam Reed's essay juxtaposes the prison intake records of a maximum security prison in Papua New Guinea with prisoners' own "autographs" modeled on these intake records. Don Brenneis analyzes the aesthetic features of a recommendation form produced by an American funding organization. Marilyn Strathern writes about the production of a university mission statement. Mario Biagioli asks what the names affixed to large-scale multiauthored scientific papers document. My chapter considers the negotiation of a document at a United Nations international conference. Carol A. Heimer compares the medical documents produced in neonatal intensive care units to the "family" documents produced by the parents of the patients. Hirokazu Miyazaki's chapter addresses the uses of documentation in mortuary rituals he witnessed in a peri-urban Fijian community.

What I term ethnographic response may or may not require long-term fieldwork; it can involve subjects that are familiar or strange; it certainly does not depend on sociological constructs and conventions such as notions of society, locality, state, and culture that have come under such heavy critique in anthropological theory in recent years (Clifford 1988;

Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997c; Moore 1993; Strathern 1992; Taussig 1997). Ethnographic response is part art and part technique, part invention and part convention, part the ethnographer's own work and part the effect of allowing others to work upon the ethnographer. It is theoretically informed but not theoretically determined. Hence the volume brings together ethnographers working from the standpoint of very different problems and paradigms, and it makes no effort to reconcile these differences. The volume includes a chapter by an organizational sociologist (Heimer); a philosopher of science (Biagioli); and five chapters by anthropologists working in various subdisciplines from linguistic anthropology to legal anthropology.

In this introduction, I retrace the trajectory of this project, from the initial reasons for the focus on documents to the response it ultimately offers to the challenges of doing ethnography in conditions in which the distance between anthropologist and informant, theory and data are no longer self-evident or even ethically defensible. I conclude with the surprise of our project: the emergence of questions of reception and appreciation, as integral aspects of the ethnographic enterprise, to be valued and worked on alongside questions of production and representation.

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### Artifacts of Modern Knowledge

Practices of documentation are without a doubt ubiquitous features of late modern life. From bus tickets to courtroom transcripts, employment applications to temple donation records, election ballots to archived letters, documents appear at every turn in the constitution of modern bodies (Scarry 1987), institutions (Ferguson 1990), states (Lass 1988), and cultures (Foster 1995). The ability to create and maintain files is the emblem of modern bureaucracy (Dery 1998), part of what Thomas Osborne has called the establishment of "the ethical competence to rule" (1994, 290). In modern criminal law, for example, efforts to limit the power of the state often take the form of demands that the state document its case against defendants in records accessible to the public (Sarat and Scheingold 2001).

Historians tell us that the word *documentation* was coined by the American Documentation Institute at its founding in 1937 to connote the joiner of new information technologies with a universalist rationalist philological outlook (Otlet 1934; cf. Farkas-Conn 1990, 4–36).<sup>1</sup> At about the same time, documentation also became the target of critique of both phenomenologists and Marxists (Day 2001, 729). Walter Benjamin, for exam-

ple, condemned the fetishization of capitalist technology at the heart of the documentation project, and Martin Heidegger attacked the universalist pretensions of documentation in an argument that now finds a new audience in latter-day critiques of technological utopianism (e.g., Brown and Duguid 2000). The document therefore references *both* a utopian modernist vision of world peace through transparency and information exchange (Day 2001, 727) that had its roots in an earlier Victorian celebration of the public archive (Joyce 1999, 41; cf. Thomas 1992, 104), and also an ongoing critique of that vision.

Most recently, the changing character of the document has been at the heart of the seemingly endless excitement surrounding new information technologies. Kenneth Megill, for example, writes, “In the electronic age, ‘document’ is becoming a verb” (1996, 25). No longer a physical object, the document becomes “a response to a query,” pure “function” (27), he argues. Corporate how-to books and intellectual property scholars describe a new world order built around new forms of Internet-based documents. Much of the debate about the consequences of the information revolution for the law revolves around the question of whether, and under what circumstances, an electronic communication is “like” a paper document (for the purposes of forming a contract or recording a deed, for example (e.g., Whitman 1999; Ealy and Schutt 2002).

As Giddens (1990) and others have suggested, modern knowledge is characterized by a persistent endeavor reflexively to seek further knowledge about itself. One of the principal instruments of this self-knowledge has no doubt been the document. Many of the buzzwords of the moment—from transparency to accountability—are in practical terms calls to documentation (Rosga 2005).

But if documents are so ubiquitous, why are documents also so “despised,” as ethnographic subjects, in Latour’s terms? Documents are special ethnographic subjects in one sense: they are also paradigmatic artifacts of ethnographic research. Field-workers document empirical phenomena in the world—and they do so concretely by producing documents (field notes, field reports, ethnographic archives)<sup>2</sup> or by consulting others’ documents in archives (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).<sup>3</sup> In other words, the document has a special status in the humanistic sciences as an artifact of what Carlo Ginzburg describes as “an epistemological model,” a paradigm of interpretation, prevalent in fields as diverse as art criticism, detective novels, and psychoanalysis as well as ethnography: “a method of inter-

pretation based on discarded information, on marginal data, considered in some way significant” (1989, 101).

In this respect, the subject of documents demands that ethnographers treat their own knowledge as one instantiation of a wider epistemological condition: As George Marcus writes, there is “an affinity between bureaucrats, officials, professionals, and left-liberal scholars that may be disturbing to the latter but which progressive scholars would have to take self-consciously into account in pursuing future projects” (1999a, 9). Holmes and Marcus have coined the term *para-ethnography* to describe the knowledge practices of actors in the world such as central bankers that are, in many respects, analogous to the anthropologist’s own (Holmes and Marcus 2005). As a result, Marcus writes, “many of the spaces in which anthropologists work call into question the use and value of anthropological representation” (1998, 241).

Two chapters in this volume present this problem in particularly poignant form. In Marilyn Strathern’s and Don Brenneis’s chapters the bureaucrats they observe producing documents are literally themselves, or rather versions of themselves cast in the temporary role of bureaucrats, whether seconded to the bureaucratic state as evaluators of national research grant proposals (Brenneis) or serving in the capacity of university administrators (Strathern).

We have here one important reason for taking up the subject of documents, then. Documents are artifacts of modern knowledge practices, and, in particular, knowledge practices that define ethnography itself. Therefore, the ethnography of documentary practices—whether at a step removed from the academy, as in the case of the chapters by Heimer, Riles, Miyazaki, or Reed, or closer to home, as in the case of the chapters by Biagioli, Brenneis, and Strathern, affords an opportunity to reflect and work upon ethnographic practice in a particular way—not straight on, in the guise of critique or self-reflexivity, but laterally, that is, ethnographically. To study documents, then, is by definition also to study how ethnographers themselves know. The document becomes at once an ethnographic object, an analytical category, and a methodological orientation.

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#### On Ethnographic Interest: “As If” Naïveté

But it is important, from the standpoint of our theme of ethnographic conceptualization, to acknowledge that this explanation of the project is not

actually where this project began. The idea for this project originated rather in the course of fieldwork a decade ago among international organizations and NGOs (Riles 2000). I had become drawn, entirely by accident, into NGO workers' and government employees' preoccupations with conference reports, funding proposals, and nongovernmental organization newsletters. Slowly, by force of involvement in the mundane activities of daily bureaucratic life, I backgrounded the theoretical concerns that had initially framed my project and succumbed to the pull of these documents, as my interlocutors in the field experienced it.

Back from the field, I discovered that other ethnographers had similarly experienced the pull of documents. Early conversations with Reed and Miyazaki about practices of document production, collection, and dissemination they had observed caught us off guard. It certainly was an unanticipated point of collegial engagement, and at first glance, these conversations seemed to have nothing to do with anything of theoretical importance. But it was clear that the interest our research subjects had shown in documents had become contagious. Our subjects' interest had the effect of producing interest *in us*, the researchers. As we puzzled over how to "make something of documents," we turned to Brenneis's work (1994) on funding proposal documents as a model. In the months that followed, we learned of Biagioli's and Heimer's own encounters with similar phenomena in the field. What struck us was the energy that animated these conversations about the details of others' documentary practices, and the way that energy put other possible points of theoretical and methodological difference in the background as we pretended naively to indulge in the "ethnographic material."

This realization in turn prompted more fundamental questions about how interest is generated in humanistic research—where did this interest in documents come from? And what might it tell us about how theoretical questions emerge from the ethnographic encounter and are maintained through the retrospective experience of analyzing ethnographic data? Might there be lessons here about what to do at moments at which dominant theoretical paradigms no longer seem to generate the interest they once did? With a kind of leap of faith, the contributors to this volume decided to take their shared interest in documents as ethnographic artifacts as a basis for rethinking these fundamental questions surrounding the practice of ethnography and its relationship to theory, even though it was not clear at the outset what to make of documents analytically or where the subject might lead us theoretically. An initial meeting at Northwestern

University in 2000 provided the first impetus for a dialogue that since has become considerably richer and more nuanced as the years have passed.

### *Disparate Contexts*

Our initial commitment to documents as ethnographic objects had a kind of purposeful naïveté to it, therefore (Marcus 1998, 124). But the fascination was always also, if implicitly, theoretically strategic. Becoming ethnographically engrossed in documents provided a kind of hiatus from theoretical debates that had blocked each of us, in different ways. By way of introducing the essays that follow, let me sketch out some of the different theoretical contexts we brought to our newfound ethnographic object.

#### *Carol A. Heimer: Responding to the Weberian Tradition*

As Carol A. Heimer explains in her chapter, organizational sociologists since Max Weber have looked to documents as crucial technological elements of bureaucratic organization (Weber 1968). Starting from a view of the organization as a more or less rational instrument, sociologists have considered how documentary practices shape behavior within organizations (Ouchi and Wilkins 1985). For example, Raffel (1979) describes how hospital medical records create alliances, and Smith (1990, 216) shows how social relations are “mediated” through items such as passports, birth certificates, application forms, and bills. Henderson considers how changes in the instruments of design technology in turn lead to other changes in organizational structure (1999).<sup>4</sup> Wheeler analyzes record keeping as a tool of social control made potent by a number of special characteristics of the file—its legitimacy or authority, its permanence, its transferability, its facelessness, and the fact that files can be combined and organized in a number of different ways (1969, 5). This approach is prevalent in the sociological literature, but it also has advocates among anthropologists interested in the effects of documentary practices on social organization and development (Goody 2000).

In her chapter, Heimer points out that the debate for sociologists has concerned the impact of documents on the degree of formality within the organization (Stinchcombe 2001). The assumption here is that documents strip away context, she explains, and hence enable the routinization of innovation (Hargadon and Sutton 1997), what Smith terms documents’ “co-ordinating function” through the production of multiple copies of a

document (Smith 1990, 213), and the more general “planned and organised character of formal organisation” (1990, 217; cf. Henderson 1999). This emphasis on the instrumental uses of documentary technologies within institutions dovetails with a number of sociological studies of the social and cognitive effects of writing technologies (Ong 2002) and, more recently, of new digital documentary forms.<sup>5</sup>

Although Heimer does not dispute the more general Weberian claim, she turns to ethnography to describe the range of uses of documents that characterize hospital employees’ and family members’ experiences of neonatal care. Specifically, she contrasts the “case analysis” of medical experts with the “biographical analysis” of the family members among whom she conducted ethnographic research and demonstrates that both forms of knowledge are structured by documentary forms. Heimer’s careful attention to the uses of family members’ documents and the kinds of “objects” (children) they produce nicely parallels the contrast Adam Reed draws in his chapter between the uses of “warrant cover” documents by prison wardens and prisoners themselves in the maximum security Papua New Guinea prison in which he conducted fieldwork. Documents, Heimer demonstrates, can also enable forms of cognition that are quite the opposite of formal bureaucratic reasoning.

*Adam Reed: Responding to the Foucauldian Tradition*

As Adam Reed explains in his chapter, it has become commonplace in the humanities and social sciences to analyze the constitutive effects of documents—the ways documents produce the very persons and societies that ostensibly use them (e.g., Foucault 1991). Historical anthropologists working on colonial documents have focused attention on “the role of inscriptions of various kinds in the making of ideology and argument” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 34), and hence on what these documents suggest about colonists’ relationships to their subjects (Dirks 2001; Stoler 2002). Bernard Cohn (1987), for example, discussed how the documentation of population in colonial India served to objectify, and hence reify, particular sociological categories. Thomas (1990), likewise, emphasized the panopticon-like devices of control at play in colonial report-making in Fiji. Voss and Werner have described the technologies of classification at work in the production of documents (1999, i). Nicholas Dirks and others have borrowed from Foucault to describe the colonial archive, and

the documents it contains, as a technology that “encodes a great many levels, genres, and expressions of governmentality” (2002, 59; Joyce 1999, 53).

For Foucault, the critique of the constitutive power of the modern bureaucratic document necessarily extended to practices of documentation in the social sciences also. It was with this social scientific usage of the document as evidence in mind that Michel Foucault summed up his life project as “the questioning of the document”:

Of course, it is obvious enough that ever since a discipline such as history has existed, documents have been used, questioned, and have given rise to questions; scholars have asked not only what these documents meant, but also whether they were telling the truth, and by what right they could claim to be doing so. . . . But each of these questions, and all this critical concern, pointed to one and the same end: the reconstitution, on the basis of what the documents say, and sometimes merely hint at, of the past from which they emanate and which has now disappeared far behind them; the document was always treated as the language of a voice since reduced to silence, its fragile, but possibly decipherable trace. (1972, 6)<sup>6</sup>

In his work on forgery as a preoccupation of historians, likewise, Carlo Ginzburg describes the ways in which the evaluation of documents’ authenticity has historically involved evaluations of the text’s rhetorical dimensions (1999, 55) and he argues for an appreciation for the ways in which proof and rhetoric are inexorably intertwined (1999, 57). Historical anthropologists in particular have purposely treated historical documents “not as repositories of facts of the past but as complexly constituted instances of discourse that produce their objects as real, that is, as existing prior to and outside of discourse” (Axel 2002, 14).

This tradition, then, foregrounds a series of questions about how social science, policy science, and related documentary traditions render the world real for themselves (Sprenger 2001, 27).<sup>7</sup> Some writers have chosen to treat realism as a rhetorical stance, a matter of presentation rather than simple fact. Clarke (1999), for example, discusses what he terms “fantasy documents”—documents produced by organizations outlining contingency plans in the event of mass disasters such as a nuclear war or a massive environmental disaster—as “rationality badges” (1999, 16), that is, statements to the public that things are under control. Scholars and artists

working in documentary film, likewise, have queried how the realism that is the hallmark of the documentary genre is produced.<sup>8</sup>

This work, along with several traditions of work on documents in literary criticism, treats documents as cultural texts—as receptacles of (politically or culturally) meaningful knowledge to be “read” by the theorist/observer (Bloomfield and Vurdubakis 1994; Inoue 1991).<sup>9</sup> The new historicist tradition of literary criticism, for example, has read documents such as bills of mortality, accounting tables, maps, and bookkeeping ledgers as evidence of a wider “cultural logic” that motivates the form of the documentary text (Miller 1984, 125).<sup>10</sup> In the same way, many ethnographers have understood themselves to be “reading” narratives of modernity. Key themes in these readings have included notions of trauma, loss, nostalgia, excess, ambiguity, plurality, and phantasm (Ivy 1998; Morris 2000; Siegel 1997).

Yet as Reed discusses in his chapter, there are a number of limitations to these discursive and textual paradigms. These limitations, moreover, have by now been well articulated and understood within the discipline of anthropology. Rappaport (1994) challenges the focus on textual meaning with the observation that for the Peruvian activists with whom she worked, the textual meaning of documents was rarely accessible and hence largely irrelevant. Carol Greenhouse has drawn attention to “the extent to which text fails to cover the surface of social life, that is, the ways in which interpretivists might be predisposed to assume that accessible articulatory practices in the public sphere comprise the full range of articulatory *needs*” (Greenhouse 2002, 18) and she has argued that “to limit discussion of ethnography to its representational aspects is to restrict ethnography to the symbolic dimensions of experience” (2002, 17). Ian Hodder (1994) argues that unlike human informants, the document does not so readily “talk back” to the ethnographer. The problem with a purely textual or discursive approach, he argues, is that sometimes documents may be intended to be representational, and sometimes not. Where they do “represent,” they often do so differently than through the representational system of symbols found in oral or written language: precisely because they endure over time, they can also “work through the evocation of sets of practices within individual experience” (1994, 396). The temporality of the object also has implications for its meaning: an image that is at first metaphorical over time becomes a cliché, for example: “An artifact may start as a focus but become simply a frame, part of an appropriate background” (1994, 398).

Reed also has a larger concern about the Foucauldian treatment of doc-

uments: its emphasis on the “hegemony of document technology” tends itself to become fairly hegemonic, he argues. Scholars working in this tradition tend to focus on one “highly specific” aspect of documentary practices, their strategic or instrumental character. This analytical frame makes it difficult for scholars to grasp what else actors may do with documents, or indeed how else documents may be “good to think with” for scholars as much as for their subjects. This question then becomes the context of Reed’s analysis of prisoners’ emulation of prison documents.

*Mario Biagioli: Responding to Science and Technology Studies*

One tradition of scholarship that has engaged the subject of documents with particular élan is science and technology studies. Actor-network theorists Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar have described scientific documents as “inscriptions” (1986; cf. Hevier 1998), and scientific work as the practice of producing, circulating, and evaluating these inscriptions. Latour and Woolgar describe scientists as “compulsive and almost manic writers” who spend their days making lists, filling in forms, writing numbers on samples, and drafting and redrafting articles (1986, 48). They draw attention to “transcription devices,” such as the centrifuge machine, that “transform pieces of matter into written documents” such as graphs or diagrams that in turn are manipulated into documents of yet other kinds (Latour and Woolgar 1986, 51). Documents in this understanding are “immutable, presentable, readable and combinable” artifacts used to mobilize networks of ideas, persons, and technologies (Latour 1988, 26).<sup>11</sup>

From the standpoint of this volume, one important contribution of the actor-network approach is its methodological and epistemological stance. Latour and Woolgar refuse to treat labels on petri dishes as of a fundamentally different order than academic articles. Both are “inscriptions” for them. In this understanding, the distance between documentary practices in the world and critical analysis of those practices that some social scientists take for granted is replaced with a series of chains of artifacts—our documents, their documents, each capable of being manipulated into ever further forms of one another.

This focus draws on the insights of ethnomethodology (Lynch 1993), and Heimer and Reed pick up on Garfinkel’s ethnomethodological analysis of clinical records in their own chapters.<sup>12</sup> Brenneis likewise draws on Richard Harper (1998)’s usage of the ethnomethodologists’ notion of the document’s career (Meehan 1997) to describe how, as a result of the divi-

sion of labor within the International Monetary Fund bureaucracy he studied, the document changes social and material form as it moves from one setting (the study mission for example) to another (the archive) (cf. Laurier and Whyte 2001).

But Biagioli asks why this approach, which has broadened our understanding of what counts as an actor, ignores the issue of authorship—the subject’s and one’s own. In a turn of phrase that says much about his own approach to ethnographic artifacts, Biagioli writes that science studies scholars treat names “as units to be counted, not as documents *to be opened up*” (emphasis added). His wider concern, as with Reed’s view of Foucauldian modes of analysis, in other words, is that science studies approaches tend to become overdetermined, and even at times mechanical in their theoretical claims. This concern becomes the context for Biagioli’s investigation of scientists’ practices of naming in academic articles.

#### *Annelise Riles: Responding to Politics and Gender as Analytical Categories*

One tradition of social scientific work on documents and other technocratic artifacts engages the document in a modality or critique. This tradition is exemplified by the work of Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (1999). Bowker and Star seek to “demystify” technology (1999, 9) by presenting an exhaustive survey of documentary processes across disparate cultures and institutional domains. They are interested in how information technologies such as data entry procedures constrain or enable by the way they “categorize” (1999, 36). They emphasize, for example, the political effects of bureaucratic classifications based on race, class, gender, or sexual orientation (1999, 26), and they seek to recover the “practical politics” of categories (1999, 45) by digging up the “conflict and multiplicity” that is “buried beneath layers of obscure representation” (1999, 47).

Bowker and Star call for a high-tech, politically engaged sociological analysis that would use new computer technologies, for example, “to describe this territory” (1999, 31). They write, “We need a topography of things such as the distribution of ambiguity; the fluid dynamics of how classification systems meet up—a plate tectonics rather than a static geology” (31). This new objectivism—which Michael Lynch (1993, 66) has termed “Left Mertonianism”—differentiates Bowker and Star from the more reflexive tradition of Foucauldian work on documentary categorizations. They critique what they view as the outdated and reactionary char-

acter of the ethnographic perspective: “By the very nature of the method . . . we also shared the actors’ blindness. The actors being followed did not themselves see what was excluded: they constructed a world in which that exclusion could occur” (1999, 48).

Bowker and Star’s critique of ethnography captures the particular ethical gloss of much contemporary work in the humanities and social sciences and the challenge it poses for ethnography. From law to science and technology studies, from anthropology to philosophy, the epistemological and political conflicts that characterized the academy in the 1980s have given way to a desire to *instrumentalize* academic knowledge. We now want to share with our subjects a set of tools and thus become potential allies, critics, or adversaries—in sum, we see ourselves as actors engaged in a singular plane by virtue of our shared objects, rather than observers. We seek a renewed connection with our publics; we want anthropology to be connected and relevant to the world we have too often kept at a remove (e.g., Nader 2001; Di Leonardo 1998).<sup>13</sup> As a result, ethnographers are now taking the artifacts of others’ instrumentality as transparent things in the world, with straightforward uses *for us*.

But in my chapter, I seek to come to terms with the limits of analytical categories such as “politics” and “gender” to understand events seemingly laden with political and gendered implications. Like Reed, Heimer, and Biagioli, I am attentive to the consequences of this overdetermined analytical frame. Specifically, I am concerned that it obscures those aspects of “gender” that are most salient and those aspects of “politics” that are most powerful, from technocrats’ own point of view. I worry that a failure to appreciate the efficacy of technocratic knowledge, in the rush to critique it, ironically renders ethnography itself nonefficacious in the face of politics and gender (as is explicitly suggested by Bowker and Star’s critique of the ethnographic method) (cf. Jean-Klein and Riles 2005). This then becomes the context for my investigation of an explicitly political and gendered meeting—a meeting of states at the United Nations to draft a document on gender.

### *Don Brenneis and Marilyn Strathern: Responding to Technocracy*

Finally, for Brenneis and Strathern, documents invoke a different kind of context—the context of their own enrollment in projects of producing and evaluating bureaucratic documents. They are both concerned with finding ways of coming to terms with the exhaustions surrounding the bureaucra-

tization of the academy and its accompanying effects on both the production of knowledge and the agency of the scholar-turned-bureaucrat (Brenneis 1999; Strathern 2000).

For the authors in this collection, then, the theoretical contexts are disparate and diverse. But what the authors share is *a technique of response*. That is, they seek out a way of engaging with existing paradigms in the social sciences and humanities, from Weberian sociology to identity politics-driven activism, to Foucauldian history to science studies, that does not reject or critique these outright, and indeed that acknowledges their productive contributions. In fact, the authors are engaged, animated by the problems they identify at the limits of these paradigms, by what these paradigms make it impossible to observe, enact, or describe. Collectively, the authors seek a way to respond to rather than critique these problems.

The contributions of Heimer and Reed together provide a kind of response to the Weberian tradition of studies of the role of files within modern organizations: although neither author displaces Weberian arguments, each rephrases those claims with ethnographic understandings of other kinds of uses of the same artifacts. Likewise, for Reed, but also for Brenneis and Riles, documents provide an ethnographic alternative to the Foucauldian tradition—a way to respond in practice to the critiques of that tradition Greenhouse, Hodder, and others have articulated. Strathern and Brenneis both return to ethnography as a response to their own interpellation into bureaucratic practices. They respond by treating the artifacts of bureaucratic work—recommendation forms in Brenneis’s case, and the university mission statement, in Strathern’s—as ethnographic artifacts. Hence in a practical and concrete way, the volume demonstrates a collective hope in ethnography: ethnography emerges as a technique of response, at a moment at which one acknowledges the limits of existing theoretical paradigms, but also the limits of the critique of such paradigms.

### *Artifacts*

We are not by any means alone in searching for places of respite from overdetermined theoretical paradigms or outworn descriptive tropes. But what differentiates this project is that many of the chapters engage this widespread concern from a particular ethnographic direction, that is, through the redeployment of Marilyn Strathern’s notion of the “artifact” (1988, 1990). For Strathern, the artifact is something one treats *as if* (Leach

1986; Vaihinger 1924; Wagner 1986) it were simply a found object in the world. And yet, it is by definition always the artifact of ethnographic work as much as a found object. Specifically, it is the fruit of the ethnographic effort of working through one's theoretical concerns not by deductive analysis but laterally, through the ethnographic apprehension of, or empathy for, others' analytical concerns. An artifact-centered anthropological practice neither fetishizes objectivity (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 38) (the artifact is an *as if* found object) nor indulges in self-reflexivity (the subject is the artifact, not the anthropologist). In Roy Wagner's terms, it "obviates" existing theoretical oppositions (Wagner 1986) rather than resolving them or turning to a third hybrid category. As Strathern has shown in other ethnographic contexts, to take other people's knowledge practices as an ethnographic subject is also necessarily to think "laterally" about the epistemological and aesthetic commitments of one's own knowledge. Concretely, the artifact is what the ethnographer looks for in the field.

But the artifacts on display in this collection are special artifacts. They include the bracket, in Riles's chapter; the bullet point in Strathern's; the grid-shaped tabular chart in Miyazaki's; the warrant cover in Reed's; the name in Biagioli's; and the case and the child in Heimer's. The difference here is that the ethnographic subject (bureaucratic practice) and the ethnographic method are both the ethnographers own, albeit at different moments in time (at one moment, Strathern and Brenneis are thinking as committee members; at another moment they are thinking as ethnographers).

In their chapters, Strathern and Brenneis deal with the conflation of subject and object in ethnographic studies of modernity, in other words, by daring to take that conflation one step further, by bringing the moment of ethnographic observation into the moment of bureaucratic participation. Ironically, by collapsing these moments, they are able to continue to think about themselves and their own practices *as if* they were thinking laterally about them, as ethnographic objects. The discovery and articulation of new ethnographic themes in these mundane practices becomes a kind of bureaucratic instrument of its own, a weapon for conditions in which, as they explain, critique on the one hand, and bureaucratic engagement on the other, are always already assimilated into the very practices the academic anthropologist would wish to critique or engage.

From this standpoint, a number of provisional themes—ways of talking across individual chapters in the "meantime" (Weston 2002) of the project—emerged.

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### Temporality

Questions of temporality appear and reappear across all the chapters in the volume. As Brenneis puts it, working with documents necessarily entails moments of document making and moments of evaluating. Biagioli analyzes scientists' names as the "hinge between two distinct moments" in scientific production—the development of scientific claims and scientific publication. My chapter considers a moment of UN conference document drafting, bracketing, at which units of time and of analysis, two entities one normally would think of as of entirely different orders, collapse into one. I describe the formal techniques intrinsic to the negotiation process that negotiators deploy to unwind the two, and hence to bring both temporal and analytical closure to the negotiations.

Our attention to the way moments of document creation anticipate future moments in which documents will be received, circulated, instrumentalized, and taken apart again implicitly engages a wide range of work in the humanities and social theory. Temporal analysis is now widely taken as an alternative to what is interpreted as the overly static nature of social theory. In many parts of the humanistic social sciences, alternative understandings of temporality indexed, for example, by Heideggerian notions of "becoming" as opposed to "being" serve as a ground for the critique of the hegemony of modern and technocratic temporal practices. Likewise, for many scholars, a focus on pragmatist concepts of "emergence" enables a more dynamic, nondeterministic, complex understanding of social life.

Our focus on the temporality of technocratic artifacts such as documents responds to these projects by demonstrating that expert knowledge itself is far less hegemonic and far more interesting than the caricatures of technocratic knowledge often make it out to be. Moreover, we are interested not just in drawing a contrast between technocratic and "everyday" temporalities but in tracing the engagement between these (e.g., Heimer). At the same time, treating documents as artifacts also draws explicit attention to the temporal nature of social and cultural theory itself. Some of the authors find in the temporalities of documents, for example, counterpoints to the urge to produce an aesthetic of complexity in one's own analysis simply by setting one's analytical categories in motion (Miyazaki).

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### Form Filling

As a response to the instrumentalization of documents, and also to their treatment as mere texts to be read, several of the contributions to this vol-

ume focus on questions of form—the uses of the formal and aesthetic properties of documents, the relationship of form to information technology, and the question of how attention to document form might engender a rethinking of the document’s instrumental or informational purposes (cf. Danet 1997). Reed considers how the form of the prison intake document, as experienced and then emulated by prisoners, prefigures the past and future agency of those who complete it and are subjected to it, while Brenneis analyzes the kind of interaction anticipated by the NSF recommendation letter form. Brenneis’ chapter builds upon earlier work in which he has shown how documents serve not only as instruments for collecting and conserving information about individuals but also as the means by which individuals inform about themselves through the pleasures of self-objectification and mimesis (Brenneis 1994). Here, Brenneis echoes James Aho (1985), who argues that the invention of double-entry bookkeeping is explained not by its instrumental uses but by its rhetorical ones: double-entry bookkeeping created an aura of transparency. This rhetoric has gone largely unnoticed by scholars, Aho argues, because it is a rhetoric of instrumentalism—a rhetoric that convinces and appeals by adopting the language of antirhetoric—of uses, functions, and effects.

Documents are by definition artifacts of a particular genre, or form. As scholars in informational design theory have pointed out, documentation implies a particular set of aesthetic commitments (Henderson 1999; Kinross 1989): “the belief in simple forms, in reduction of elements, apparently not for reasons of style but for the most compelling reason of need—the need to save labor, time, and money and to improve communication” (Kinross 1989, 138). All of the chapters in this volume address questions of documentary form, from the aesthetic rules that govern the production and completion of documents to the evaluation and appreciation of documentary genre.

In particular, most of the chapters concern, in one way or another, a set of aesthetic practices associated with the production, use, and circulation of documents that distinguish documents from other genres of texts, that is, practices of form filling. Miyazaki’s chapter, for example, describes a tabular record prepared in advance of a mortuary gift-giving ritual by Fijian clan members, to be filled in during the ritual itself in order to produce a record of the gifts received. In Miyazaki’s analysis, at the moment of its making, the table anticipates certain kind of future form-filling practices. At the moment of its completion, likewise, the spatial arrangement of columns and rows to be filled in effectuates a particular experience of the exchange taking place at that moment.

Recently, ethnographers of modernity have taken an interest in subjects that overflow and subvert workhorses of sociological interpretation such “culture” and “society.” Form filling turns out to be a highly interesting terrain for a postsocial, postcultural, even postrelational humanistic scholarship of this kind. As I have suggested in another context, the form is a self-contextualizing entity (Riles 2000): the gaps in the form to be filled in contain within themselves all the terms of analysis one would need to understand or complete them. The question then becomes methodological as well as theoretical: what might an ethnography of such a self-analyzing, self-contextualizing object look like? What might it contribute?

The authors in this collection are by no means the first to pay attention to documentary form. Sociological studies of organizations have long treated the form and material qualities of documents as influential on the character of communicative practice. For example, in an historical study of the evolution of the memo form in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Orlikowski and Yates consider how different “genres” of bureaucratic communication (memos, letters, meetings) (1994, 301) are both produced by and influential upon ideologies of managerial behavior and actors’ communicative practices (310–11), and how new documentary technologies both trigger, and are influenced by, new ideologies of managerial behavior (311).<sup>14</sup>

But in some of the chapters, the ethnographic treatment of documentary forms and of associated practices of filling them out pushes the boundaries of social analysis by refusing to contextualize documentary form in arguments about its social contexts and institutional purposes. Instead, the authors produce empathetic accounts of the aesthetic qualities of the form and its effects. Brenneis, for example, deploys insights from linguistic anthropology to not so much to analyze fellowship reference forms as to make it possible for readers, most of whom routinely process such forms in large quantities as part of the mundane aspect of their institutional lives, to see these objects a second time, as if new. Reed’s description of the documents produced by prisoners draws at times on prisoners’ exegesis, but also reflects his own appreciation of these documents. This ability to appreciate, what Bateson (1987) termed empathy toward pattern, is an effect of ethnographic work: only through ethnographic engagement did the authors come to appreciate the document’s form. And yet this is a differently empirical enterprise: Rather than simply describing a documentary form as an instantiation of existing analytical categories and problems, the authors respond to that form with further replications and extensions.

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## Authorship and Agency

In her chapter, Carol A. Heimer observes that “the bureaucratic uses of documents often assume that someone outside the organization will have a rather different relation to the subjects of their documents.” In other words, documents anticipate and enable certain actions by others—extensions, amplifications, and modifications of both content and form. All of the contributors are concerned with these practices of extending, completing, or recycling, as modalities of authorship and of agency. We are interested in how diverse types of agency are produced, stretched, or abbreviated through the medium of the document; in short, in the responses, human and nonhuman, that documents demand or offer up. Brenneis’s analysis of recommendation forms, for example, shows how they anticipate and call forth certain disciplined responses from evaluators that nevertheless sometimes leave room for surprises. Reed shows how prisoners respond to the forms prison officials use to describe and categorize them by producing other exemplaries of the form as self-descriptions.

Drawing on Strathern’s earlier work (1988) on agency, Miyazaki argues that the ritual form of Fijian gift presentations, and the documents participants use to capture its effect, are both open and closed at once: on the one hand, only certain responses to the speeches, or notes in the boxes on the document’s form, will do. But at the same time, these documents cannot complete themselves. Each must await completion, in a successive temporal moment, by another agent. In Miyazaki’s analysis, what is crucial is that the gift-giver momentarily places his agency “in abeyance”—he submits to the evaluation of the gift-receiver—and this act of abeyance also ultimately compels the gift-receiver’s response. One insight of our ethnography likewise concerns the capacity of documents to place their own agency in abeyance, such that what is made visible in the document, rather, is the creativity of another agent (the point of the completed reference form, for example, is what is said about the candidate, not the nature of the form or the questions it poses). This is not to deny that documents allow only for certain kinds of responses and self-descriptions. But it does suggest that to critique bureaucratic processes for the way they assert agency over us, and for the limitations they place on our own creativity and agency, would miss the very means by which bureaucratic processes compel others’ creativity in the first place (see Riles, this volume; Strathern, this volume).

In particular, in his discussion of scientific names as documents, Biagi-

oli draws attention to authorship as a corrective to current conceptions of agency in critical theory. Against current work that reduces authorship to a kind of agency, Biagioli asks how names at the top of scientific publications come to be documents of scientific agency. Commenting on the way authorship is presumed to be multiple and fragmented in scientific circles in ways that mirror claims in critical studies of authorship, Biagioli nevertheless insists on a crucial difference between scientific notions of authorship and those of critical theory. Scientists deploy authorship in a “documentary” sense, he argues: authorship is precisely the physical presence of the name on a byline and all the privileges and liabilities this brings with it. This documentary practice of authorship is what allows scientists to criticize authorship in policy debates while still holding onto it as a mundane practice.

Biagioli’s attention to the character of documentary authorship necessarily invokes questions about the status of authorship within the humanistic social sciences. What can be learned about ethnographic authorship from scientists’ mundane understandings of authorship? How is it that the same critiques of authorship that have been so destabilizing in the human sciences have so little practical force in the lives of scientific authors? Against Foucault, Biagioli points out that responsibility for one’s artifacts is as important to the constitution of scientific truths as epistemological authority. Responsibility, in other words, does not end with challenges to authority. His description raises the question of responsibility, as a corrective to questions of epistemological authority, in ethnographic authorship.

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**Ethnography as a Modality of Response**

I mentioned earlier that the contributions in this volume are unique in their manner of seeking to respond to, rather than merely critique, the limits they find in humanistic theory. The same could be said of the authors’ engagement with their ethnographic artifacts. One way of thinking about agency, temporality, and form collectively is to say that we are interested in how documents themselves elicit particular kinds of *responses*. Recommendation forms anticipate their own completion, for example; or UN documents that call for action on particular social problems anticipate that state bureaucracies will review these calls and respond with further policies and documents. In focusing on the responses that documents effectuate or command, we are responding also, as ethnographers, to our documentary subject. To return to the larger theme of ethnographic practice, we are

necessarily thinking about questions of ethnographic epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics “through the grain” (Shaw 1999) of the documentary practices we describe: the ultimate question is what kind of response ethnographic objects such as documents might demand, enable, or compel *of us*.

The authors take different approaches, here. For example, when Heimer describes her subject as “comparison itself,” she subtly but crucially asks her reader to consider the parallels between bureaucratic and sociological knowledge. Brenneis focuses not so much on parallels between academic and institutional knowledge as on actual social, material, and conceptual relations between them. Brenneis builds specifically on projects in linguistic anthropology that focus on the artifactual quality of texts and on “entextualization practices” (Silverstein and Urban 1996) to treat documents in terms of a “socially mediated textual performance in which there are norms of interconnectedness between texts, their authors, and readers” (Kaplan 2002, 347).<sup>15</sup> From this perspective, he looks to documentation as the ground for a new set of questions about how academics and their bureaucratic subjects both make knowledge together.

Two caveats are necessary here. First, in common usage, the concept of response has an unfortunate aura of passivity. It will be apparent from the ethnographic materials in the chapters that follow that there is nothing inherently passive or automatic about actors’ responses to documents. Some of the responses to documents are pro forma, so to speak; others are creative and destabilizing of the form itself. Most responses the authors describe are interesting precisely because the agency of the form and the form-filler are not neatly circumscribed.

Second, the authors entertain no utopian fantasies about the responses documents demand of both the ethnographer and the bureaucratic subject. In her chapter, Strathern sharply critiques the excesses of “responsiveness” within which the university mission statement she describes is drafted. Institutions have taken to producing documents like the mission statement largely “in response to demands,” she points out. Calls for the production of particular kinds of documents are demands that people describe themselves, and that they do so in certain bureaucratically circumscribed ways. Her usage of metaphors of pitifully unequal warfare to describe document drafting casts responses to documents as a dangerous and often hopeless game of deflecting the power of others by reflecting it back onto themselves.

However, what is interesting about documents and the responses they enable and compel, as ethnographic subjects, is that a straightforward cri-

tique of responsiveness will not do. Oppositional thinking about a contest between bureaucratic agents and their subjects obscures the way in which, as Reed powerfully demonstrates in his ethnography of prisoners' uses of prison documents, completion is effectuated only through and because of both sides' shared appreciation or "empathy" for the aesthetics of completion (Miyazaki 2004, 105). We will need some alternative to the critique of technocracy if we are to come to terms with this empathy—and indeed engage and redeploy this empathy for other purposes.

The notion that at its best, ethnography should be responsive or empathetic to its subject is of course nothing new. Neither is there anything particularly shocking about the claim that an ethically engaged ethnography would entail not just a responsiveness to one's informants as social persons, but also a response to the artifacts—the knowledge, the commitments, the practices—others introduce to us in the ethnographic encounter. But I want to suggest that thinking of ethnography as a response to artifacts is a particularly helpful way of understanding ethnographic work in conditions where the artifacts at issue already interpolate us into their practices on their own terms, where they *already demand a response*, as for example in the case of mission statements, UN documents on gender, scientific articles, or fellowship reference forms.

Audit practices are particularly pernicious, Strathern writes, because they exploit a "fundamental human capacity—responsiveness to others." Her comment invites reflection on the final section of Miyazaki's chapter in which he describes how indigenous Fijian gift-givers and gift-receivers complete the gift-giving ritual by turning together to dedicate their gifts to God. In Miyazaki's interpretation, this second act of gift-giving replicates the first on another terrain. Replication on another terrain, that is, in another register, for another purpose, is one modality of response, in other words, and one that Miyazaki explicitly adopts as his own ethnographic response to the gift-giving rituals he observed.<sup>16</sup>

The suggestion in Miyazaki's chapter, in light of Strathern's critique of responsiveness, then, is that one hard-nosed response to the document, including its demands of responsiveness, might be to borrow a method from the document itself (Holmes 2000; Maurer 2002; Rosga 2005). Of course, this is not to suggest that academic work actually emulate bureaucratic work—no one is proposing that ethnographers start drafting UN documents, or producing mission statements, or writing recommendation letters, or tracking valuables in exchange settings *as academic work*. Thankfully, as Strathern points out, this is not possible anyway: when bureau-

cratic documents translate academic language into bullet points, academic language becomes no more than unformed data, bits of information. As my chapter on academic feminist engagement with the usage of the word *gender* in UN documents illustrates, although academics increasingly take on bureaucratic tasks, the words and the authors are no longer the same entities.

Rather, these chapters show how ethnographers might respond powerfully to the mundane practices that interpolate them, by borrowing responses from the ethnographic artifact itself (here, documents and documentary practices) *onto the ethnographer's own terrain*. Strathern's essay takes the form of a series of bullet points, and in this way, far from becoming bureaucratic knowledge, it reflects and deflects the bureaucratic power to compel responsiveness. My essay responds to a specific problem in the humanistic sciences and in critical theory—a condition in which academic analytical tools such as “political analysis” or “gender analysis” are already incorporated into the object to be analyzed—by thinking about these problems as if with bureaucrats' tools for accessing the analytically inaccessible. Miyazaki borrows the device of replication in order to address the philosophical question of how to access a present moment. For Reed, the abbreviations of warrant covers, and the extensions they in turn enable, become the form of his own analysis. Collectively, then, these chapters fashion an alternative response to form filling, one that is appreciative and empathetic of the knowledge practices at issue, including perhaps most of all the propensities for violence they contain.

This then raises a further question: where lie the ethical commitments of such an ethnography? How should those commitments be defined and defended? This brings me, finally, to the ultimate surprise of this project—the emergence of the question of scholarly collaboration, and of the creative work and ethical commitment it demands.

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### Conclusion: Response as a Modality of Collaboration

Taken as a whole, this collection of essays is a somewhat odd-looking artifact. Unlike most collective academic projects, in which each of the chapters can be read as an instantiation or empirical elaboration of a singular theoretical stance—different facts under the rubric of a singular theory—this collection gathers together the artifacts of a series of particular and situated borrowings, extensions, replications—responses to—the artifacts the authors encountered ethnographically. By definition, our particular

responses to abbreviations, bullet points, and brackets are not local versions of a singular global theory. Nor are they representations of a singular set of factual phenomena. To the extent that the chapters are comparable, it is in the unpredictable resonances that emerge from setting the artifacts of our responses side by side—from the comparison of responses, rather than of factual findings on the one hand or theoretical positions on the other.

In other words, the reformulation of ethnography as a modality of response gives rise to a larger descriptive and interpretive problem: the problem that the artifacts of ethnographic knowledge *cease to be comparable*, and hence open to evaluation, in a conventional disciplinary way. Because each ethnographic artifact is the outcome of a specific analytical interaction with the knowledge practices of a particular subject—the borrowing of a particular method—the results are no longer instances or exemplifications of a singular stylistic genre. Ethnography can no longer be defined and evaluated by the degree to which it conforms to a given form or positions itself within a given debate. This opens up new questions about what kind of response the artifacts of such ethnography would in turn demand of colleagues, as readers of ethnographic texts or interlocutors at academic talks and conferences. Perhaps before we need new and creative ways of “doing” the fieldwork and writing of ethnography, we need a new set of means of responding to one another’s artifacts.

On the whole, ethnographers give surprisingly little attention to the task of receiving one another’s artifacts and the commitments it demands. Here ironically there is a model in the very documentary practices many of the contributors to this project would in other ways revile. As Brenneis recently has put it: “I am at times surprised that many anthropologists who are extraordinarily subtle and sophisticated in their analyses of field situations are considerably less analytical about the institutional webs that we daily inhabit here at home” (2004, 581). Peership, Brenneis writes of the peer review system, is crucially “review with as well as of peers” (2004, 583). Brenneis enacts the point in a recent article that takes the form of an interview with a colleague, and in which the subject is precisely collaborative relations among specific anthropologists, artists, and activists (Feld and Brenneis 2004).

We need more subtle, creative, and careful genres of empathy and intellectual appreciation among colleagues. Traces of this empathy are on display in this volume in the way the authors speak across chapters, and find resonances in one another’s work. But most intellectual appreciation

does not leave overt markers in this way, as the creative work of producing texts by definition does. That is its nature—it erases its traces. Rather, the artifact of this creative work is the very existence of this book, as a totality: indeed, the effort and efficacy of collegial response became real for me as the central theme of our project in the commitment the contributors to this project maintained, over the years from our initial meeting, as we struggled at once to define new terms for ethnographic practice and to communicate them to various academic audiences accustomed to hearing problems framed in other vocabularies. This book is in a very concrete way the artifact of that commitment.

One place where response has been valued as ethical and creative work alongside production and representation is feminist debate. Marilyn Strathern has written, “Feminist debate is characterized by a compatibility that does not require comparability between the persons who engage in it, bar their engaging in it” (1991, 35). As she elaborates in another context, “One position evokes others” and hence, “The positions are created as dependent upon one another. . . . Feminism lies in the debate itself” (Strathern 1988, 24). To put the point in a different way, perhaps ethnography, like Fijian ritual (Miyazaki, this volume), is a form that cannot complete itself without others’ response. I want to conclude by suggesting that one terrain for the completion of ethnographic work through response is the terrain of collegial relations.

Collaboration is both a means and an end of most projects of document production (Riles 2000). The experience of academics working together on a university committee, or of United Nations bureaucrats working together to draft the language of a UN document, is premised on the understanding that the only coherence to the project lies in the thin and surface-level identity of the subject itself (the particular UN document or committee decision at issue). This point of contact is explicitly understood as provisional: the document is just a means; it points to an end beyond itself—even as what captivates participants is the means of document production (Riles 2004). In much the same way, the participants in this project have met on the thin and provisional terrain of the document, as ethnographic artifact, while keeping firmly in mind that what was important was precisely not the document per se. This almost instrumental appreciation of the way our questions both were and were not the same, were and were not disposable, enabled other resonances to emerge. We began to compare not documents but responses to documents—our subjects’ and our own. Documents became the self-con-

sciously expendable ground of our reception of one another's work. One might think of it as ethnography's (overdue) concomitant to the replications of scientific studies performed as responses to innovative "results" in differently empirical social sciences.

The subtle appreciation ethnographers have for their relations with the people they encounter in the field, then, now is poised to serve as a model for collegial reception and response among humanistic social scientists themselves. Ethnography of course always demands evaluation and critical judgment of our subjects' practices; ethnographic empathy has never meant naive acceptance of what informants say or do. But that judgment takes place in the context of the ethnographer's careful appreciation of the way the subject's problems both are and are not the ethnographer's own. The subject's problems and solutions, the starting points and ending points, are analogous in interesting ways but also different. Appreciating these similarities and differences is the *work* of ethnography, whatever one's concept of "the field," "the informant," or "the ethnographic subject." The same subtle modality of critical appreciation is surely required of the collegial reception of one another's ethnographic artifacts.

The example of collegiality I have had the privilege of encountering in the experience of working toward this volume, and also of the documentary practices captured in these ethnographies, suggests that ethnographers might devote the kind of ethical commitment they routinely show toward their social relations with their subjects, and the creativity they display in writing about these relations, to the act of ethnographic response. This would involve both responding to the artifacts one encounters in the course of ethnographic work, and also in analogous ways, responding to the artifacts of one another's ethnographic work.

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NOTES

1. One of the most exhaustive debates of the documentation movement concerned what should properly count as a document. There were a myriad positions and counterpositions, but all shared a commitment to two key categories, the ideal and the material, and to an instrumental relationship between the two: A document was an idea committed to material form such that it could be used—it could become a technology of its own. Walter Shurmeyer wrote in 1935 that a document included "any material basis for extending our knowledge which is available for study or comparison" (quoted in Buckland 1997, 805). The functional view of documents promoted by Paul Otlet and others suggested that documents were "objects

to which the techniques of documentation could be applied” (Buckland 1997, 805). Thus the philosopher and information specialist Suzanne Briet described documents as organized physical “evidence in support of a fact” (quoted in Buckland 1997, 806) of any kind—a wild animal was not a document, but an animal in the zoo was.

2. As George Marcus comments, this argument for the discipline is instantiated institutionally in the midcentury Human Relations Area files project, and the publication of *Notes and Queries* (1951), the massive checklist of information every ethnographer was expected to collect in the field (Marcus 1998, 50).

3. “The fiction is that the authority comes from the documents themselves, as well as the historian’s obeisance to the limits they impose on any account that employs them” (Steedman 2001, par. 39).

4. Historian Roger Chartier, likewise, considers the history of the production, inventorying, and circulation of books and manuscripts and of the effects of printing on the formation of “communities of readers” (1994, 2), and he compares different forms of classifications of texts—physical libraries that arrange texts in space, anthologies that arrange texts by classes of knowledge, bibliographies, book lists, and publishing series—according to their instrumental uses and effects.

5. Questions include, how can information technologies produce institutional change? And under what organizational conditions are new information technologies productively integrated into organizational environments (Orlikowski et al. 1995)? Orlikowski and Yates (1994) track the evolution of genre rules for long-term communication between a group of scientists over e-mail. Richard Harper argues that hypertext liberates the reader from the dominating effects of documents by allowing them to gain control over the form of information (1997, 41). In contrast, Nigel Thrift queries what is new about these “new forms” of electronic communication (1996, 1464). Thrift argues that grand claims about historical shifts associated with electronic communication—claims that electronic technologies engender new forms of temporality, subjectivity, and economy—derive from a view of technology dating to the industrial revolution that he terms “technological determinism” (1996, 1466). What is new, he suggests, is that such deterministic accounts have encountered their own limits.

6. Against this view of the document, Foucault provocatively proposed “not the interpretation of the document, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it” (1972, 6), a move he termed the transformation of documents into “monuments” deserving of “intrinsic description” (7).

7. Scott Sprenger emphasizes the political dangers of a realism that “silence(s) others by obliterating the space for adjudicating differences of interpretation” (2001, 28)—a danger he terms terrorism—through a close reading of Robespierre’s uses of documentary evidence in arguments for the execution of Louis XVI during the Terror.

8. These scholars have foregrounded the rehearsal process that goes into the making of documentary dialogue, the interactional dynamics between filmmaker and subject (e.g., McAuley 1998), and the aesthetic techniques deployed by directors (e.g., Shapiro and Godmilow 1997) that allow the news to emerge as some-

thing in the world, documented by the film crew, rather than created in the newsroom (Baker 1989). In theater studies, likewise, critical attention has been devoted to the limits of documenting live performance and hence the politics at play in what gets documented, by whom, and how (e.g., Cutler 1998).

One interesting trend in film studies is the emergence of forged, or faux, realism as a creative genre of scholarship—the production of fictional films that parody or replicate the documentary genre precisely in order to foreground debates surrounding the documentary’s realist claims (Feldman 1998). In something of the same spirit, Hillel Schwartz takes on “the culture of the copy” to ask,

How has it come to be that the most perplexing moral dilemmas of this era are dilemmas posed by our skill at the creation of likenesses of ourselves, our world, our times? The more adroit we are at carbon copies, the more confused we are about the unique, the original, the Real McCoy. (1996, 11)

9. Natalie Davis, for example, proposes that the historian pay attention to the “fictional” aspects of documents, “their forming, shaping, and molding elements: the crafting of a narrative” (1987, 3). In Davis’s study of sixteenth-century French letters of remission, letters serve as sources of narratives “from the lips of the lower orders” (1987, 5). Peter Burke, likewise, in his bid to convince historians to treat visual images as seriously as textual ones, considers images a kind of text, with interpretable meanings (Burke 2001).

10. For example, Richard Kroll (1986) considers the effect of conceptions of physical space on the organization of mental categories in the design of title pages, tables, and other graphic elements of late-seventeenth-century printed books. The literary historian Richard Helgerson (1986) has traced the influence of cartography on Elizabethan conceptions of nationhood and sovereign authority. Attention is given to the images the maps contain and to their interpretive meanings (Fisher 1988; Sherman 2001; Vidler 1993).

11. “The function of literary inscription is the successful persuasion of readers, but the readers are only fully convinced when all sources of persuasion seem to have disappeared” (Latour 1986, 76).

12. Garfinkel (1967) began by examining clinical records as sources of “data” about clinical practices but eventually revisited his own frustrations with the incompleteness of those records, understanding patterns of completeness or incompleteness in terms of the uses of the records within the clinic.

13. George Marcus writes, “This kind of circumstantial activism is indeed the surrogate of the old sense of ‘being there’ in some focused place or site with its own attendant politics and ethics” (1999a, 18).

14. These arguments have analogs in applied social science focusing on the character of documentation and its effect on the structure of thought in clinical settings (e.g., Rivas-Vazquez et al. 2001; Schumock, Hutchinson, and Bilek 1992) or accounting practices (e.g., Cushing and Ahlawat 1996; Purvis 1989). The question of how people think with documents has received some attention in the field of cognitive psychology, for example, where studies contrast the “analogical reasoning” elicited by time tables with conventional forms of reading. There is also an extensive practitioner-oriented sociological literature concerning the impact of the

design of documents on their use by their intended audience (e.g., Frohlich 1986; Kempson and Rowlands 1994). The skills necessary for using documents, these authors suggest, center on the comparison of elements in the document (Guthrie 1988), for example. Building on these instrumentalist insights, reformers have sought to alter the language and format of bureaucratic documents so as to make them more accessible to the general public. Lawyers and linguists have argued that, in terms of due process, so-called paper hearings (the presentation of documents to a bureaucracy) cannot substitute for a live hearing (Shuy 1998). And marketing specialists have taken interest in how technical documentation shapes consumers' perceptions of products (Smart, Madrigal, and Seawright 1996).

15. In a similar vein, William Hanks's analysis of the discourse of Maya nobles in a series of letters to the Spanish Crown critiques colonial historians' treatment of the repetitions from one letter to the next as signs of inauthenticity and finds instead in the subtle pattern of repetition and divergences between letters, rather, evidence of "intertextuality":

Two texts may be linked to one another by concrete shared features, for instance, by reference to each other, by amplification (where one text elaborates on the other), by contradiction, or by reinforcement. They may also be related by common membership in a single genre within a given literary tradition. . . . Interpretation of the discourse cannot treat it as an isolate, but rather as part of a series of texts situated within a larger network. The intertextual context is also a key part of the field of action insofar as it provides objective resources for intelligible communicative performance. (Hanks 2000, 111; cf. Witte 1992)

16. Miyazaki purposely collapses collegial relations, theoretical relations, and relations with his ethnographic material, treating his work as a response to the hope others have shown in his project, to the writings of philosopher Ernst Bloch on hope, and to Fijian gift-giving practices all at once (2004, 7).

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