

A Chronicle of Art (and Anthropology) at the World Trade Organization... in Five Not-So-Easy Pieces

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This paper chronicles a collaboration between artists and anthropologists in producing an installation at the headquarters of the World Trade Organization, Geneva, in June 2013. It was an opportunistic 'second act' to a long-term ethnographic research project that preceded it. For anthropology, it constitutes an experiment in 'second-order observation' that involves different senses of being and acting in field research than are present within classic norms of ethnographic method. Though valued marginally, art is a more conventional presence at the WTO than something as exotic as ethnography. Thus the scene was set for a mutually challenging collaboration that is still being explored by its participants beyond the period of intervention and presence in Geneva.

This chronicle describes a 'second act' or afterlife to a long-term collaborative ethnographic research project at the World Trade Organization—sited primarily in Geneva at the Centre William Rappard (CWR) headquarters of the WTO and experimental in its own right—in which I participated. It lasted from 2008 through 2010, was directed by Professor Marc Abeles with generous funding from CNRS (the French national research organization), and was personally invited by WTO Director-General (D-G) Pascal

Lamy. Through my development of a Center for Ethnography at the University of California, Irvine, established in 2005, I had been interested in documenting the increasingly explicit and ambitiously collaborative nature of ethnographic research projects and how these required forms and contexts that posed creative challenges to classic norms of largely individually conceived ethnographic research (see Rabinow et al, 2008; and Marcus 2012, 2013). In this pursuit, I have found various genres of design thinking (see Gunn, Otto, and Smith 2013) and conceptual art (see especially, Bishop 2012, Kester 2011, Papastergiadis 2011, and Schneider and Wright 2013) immensely stimulating.

Having already produced a scenario, in early 2012, for an ethnographically informed art installation (Marcus, n.d.) for a volume entitled *Curatorial Dreams*—inviting contributors to imagine their most creative or ideal art or museum exhibits—I proposed an installation as a ‘second act’ to the 2008-2010 project to a high



Image 1. Pascal Lamy, Director General of the World Trade Organization until June 2013, and Patron of the Ethnography Project and Its Second Act (image courtesy of George Marcus)

level WTO official with whom we had worked previously, and after checking with Lamy, he agreed with enthusiasm. The exhibit had to occur during Lamy's tenure as D-G, under whose 'license', so to speak, anthropology, as a peculiar but low-key presence, had been allowed to operate within the WTO secretariat for three years. This tenure was coming to a close at the end of June 2013.

The result of producing this project under such pressure (not unusual as I have discovered in the production of highly opportunistic conceptual art projects) has been a messy but invaluable short course of experience for me in what the potential of such projects of collaboration are for contemporary anthropological research that might develop beyond conventionally conceived (and patient) stages of fieldwork toward interventions within or alongside complex organizations, assemblages of institutions, and expert systems.

I have chosen to tell this story compressed in the frame of a simple chronicle, picking and choosing the details that make the methodological import of the project intelligible. As a genre of intervention in contemporary research method evolved within the Malinowskian (or Boasian, or Maussian) organization of ethnographic research, I argue that our project operates at the level of 'second-order observation' (a concept developed by Luhmann late in his career, 1998, and explicitly evoked for contemporary anthropological research by Rabinow, 2003). Second-order observation, in relation to the kind of immersive, cautious participant observation in first-order ethnography, which it succeeds or goes on alongside, requires by its nature, forms and settings that involve explicit scenarios for collective thinking and collaboration (see Kester, 2004, for an account of a line of conceptual art projects based on dialogic *mise-en-scenes*).¹ I tried to do something like this within the earlier collaborative project at the WTO (with Hadi Deeb, as a 'para-site' conducted with D-G Lamy, see Deeb and Marcus 2011, and Michael Silverstein's witty and penetrating response). This experiment in second-order observation—or an intervention orchestrating displacements in

on-going fieldwork based on local knowledge and competencies incrementally achieved—had interesting developmental potential, but it should have started earlier in the project. It seems to me that the work of designers in their studios alongside and within contexts of social life (Cantarella, Hegel, and Marcus, n.d.) or the inventions of conceptual artists and curators (as installations, performances, or contexts of collective participation) offer in spirit and content better models for interventions than what ethnographers might conceive for themselves in collaborations such as the one that I undertook in 2013 at the WTO under severe time pressure and other constraints. In the frame and limits of an article, my purpose is to give a sense of how this experiment unfolded and the potential for other such interventions and partnerships between art and anthropology (as well as their problems) that it suggests.

The World Trade Organization

The World Trade Organization, before 1995 known as GATT (the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs), and now headquartered in a villa—the Centre William Rappard (hereafter, CWR) on Lac Lemman, Geneva—is one of those international organizations created at the end of World War II by the victors (the U.S. and Britain primarily) to provide the means for preventing conflagration on such a scale in the future and to govern the world. This last phrase is the title of an overview by Mark Mazower (2012) of successive efforts in the modern Western world to establish such conditions, from the Congress of Vienna in 1815, following the Napoleonic Wars, to the League of Nations following World War I, to the institutional inventions negotiated at the Bretton-Woods conference following World II and with which we live today. As Mazower explores, these organizations, including the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the WTO, are composed of actors in the nation-state form originated by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. It is very clear that in the future, the renewal of the international system cannot be based on response to world war (e.g., the

challenge of climate change is a more likely source of potential renewal) nor will states alone (especially Western states) remain the primary international actors. The ending of the Cold War gave the aging post-World War II international system a temporary reprieve from decline, in the vigorous implementation and regulation of a neoliberal 'new world order' through the imposed structural adjustments on the economies of the vastly multiplied nation states (the WTO formed in 1995 from GATT, did its part in setting rules of accession for membership, and has a unique process of 'single undertakings' which binds all member states to agreements).

By the end of the first decade of the new century, the relevance of each of the international organizations is challenged at the very core of its foundational arrangements. The WTO came late to full development as an organization and is perhaps the most specialized and least well known of the post-World War II set. Dominated by



Image 2. Exterior of Centre William Rappard and advertisement of its own Open House following our departure (image courtesy of George Marcus)

the influence of the United States, run administratively with a British accent, it is now composed of 159 state members, most of whom have missions resident in Geneva, very different from the 'club' atmosphere of the 30 or so major states in terms of which it had long been run. Before Director-General Lamy left his position at the end of June 2013, he commissioned an excellent, informative history of the WTO and an assessment of its future (It is readily available on the WTO website in 5 languages, VanGrasstek 2013).

As constituted as an organization, the WTO has many virtues and is near utopic in conception. It concentrates the globe for deliberation and action. It is member- and rule-driven; it is the only international organization that has a mutually binding and functioning dispute settlement process; its bureaucracy, the Secretariat, really does serve, rather than control the membership. Trade, being the obverse, yet kin, of the sort of competition that generates war among states, makes the WTO either at certain moments a cockpit for power politics among major states or, at others, mostly irrelevant. Its sustained ability to regulate trade depends on its capacity to generate new binding agreements among its growing membership. When it does so, or is in the act of doing so, it is a major player in world governance, and leading states participate with motivation in the politics of negotiation; lesser states have voice and participate with cunning and subtlety in the politics. The WTO last achieved this condition in 1995 on the basis of the so-called Uruguay Round, a comprehensive agreement that remains the substance of trade rules in many areas and still defines much of the WTO's work. In 2001, the Doha Round was initiated, as a second major effort at a multilateral order of trade for the WTO that would deal explicitly with questions of development and inequalities among member states.

Repeated efforts to conclude it, especially during the tenure of D-G Pascal Lamy (serving two terms from 2005-2013), have failed—and spectacularly so, through media attention—calling into question the function and effectiveness of the WTO as an organ of world governance. As of June 2013, the Doha Round was largely

in abeyance (though partial aspects of it were achieved to little fanfare at a Bali ministerial meeting in October 2013 under the new Brazilian D-G). In recent years, with its efforts in bilateral and regional partnerships—the ambitious Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and wide-ranging trade negotiations with the European Union—the U.S. clearly has withdrawn its active engagement in the WTO process. Failures in trade diplomacy elsewhere or the rise of other powers in WTO affairs—especially China, admitted after lengthy accession negotiations in 2001, and as yet, reserved in its presence—may re-center truly global movement in the WTO, but there was little sign or hope of this in June when we conducted our ‘second act.’²

Pascal Lamy’s Anthropological Curiosity

Pascal Lamy, a senior French technocrat with previous important high-level positions in the French government and at the European Union, was intellectually committed to advancing multilateral trade during his terms as D-G, which meant on the one hand bringing the Doha Round to a successful conclusion, in which he failed, and on the other, ‘nudging’ changes by other means and more subtle strategies in a member-run, rule-bound organization in which the Secretariat and the D-G have very few defined prerogatives, little power, and a very conservative tradition of service. Though he did make his interest in and partiality toward anthropology clear (at one point, holding up to us recent essays by Marshall Sahlins as exemplary!), and he respected the earlier work of Marc Abeles, who proposed the original project on the European Union, he never made clear to us what he expected from our work. Perhaps he expected insights about institutional culture that would suggest the kind of subtle organizational changes that might shift the WTO further in the direction of a broad-based, multicultural organization that in fact was becoming (or had already become) truly global and at least more public in the complexity of relations that it concentrated within its rule-bound and functionally narrow professional culture.

Lamy was not an idealist, and we were far from consultants, experts, or policy scholars of trade, of whom there have been many passing through the WTO. Most of these have viewed state structures as the key actors in the international space. Anthropologists come from a tradition of research in non-state societies, and though accustomed to working in modern institutional contexts, they see social and economic relations with a fundamentally different lens than other experts who have consulted at the WTO. Perhaps, this was at the core of anthropology's appeal for Lamy. He seemed to be moving close to recognizing the realities of an alterity driven 'cosmopolitics' that Bruno Latour has defined (2004).

In the beginning, we were an anomaly, however low-profile, and a controversial one at that. It was difficult to explain our presence—anthropology was little understood among diplomats, bureaucrats, lawyers, and economists—and it was used as fuel by Lamy's resident critics who resisted change in the organization, as another of his unwarranted moves to change WTO culture. But as with most fieldwork projects, initial reaction settled down after our entry, and the sustained, low-key presence of first-order participant observation was afforded.

So, Lamy was not our partner (or only a very silent one), and he gave us no charge. Rather he gave us, rather bravely, 'license' to be there, and the gift of access, essential to anthropological research, and then kept his distance (but one of his chief assistants, a diplomat, was a sustained representative, interlocutor, and friend of the project, who ironically advised Lamy against it when it was first proposed). Lamy did not consider himself a special informant of the project, though he seemed to like the counter (WTO) cultural idea of anthropological inquiry in the quiet corridors amid the discrete conversations of the CWR, and he occasionally consulted one or another of us for an interpretation or meaning of a term or detail that seemed more than technical. I think he grew to expect less of the project as its three year term progressed, perhaps partly because his own prospects for success in the Doha Round dimmed early on (during the first year of the project), and we were patiently

going about our business of dwelling without delivering short-term insights or ideas.

Anthropologists at the WTO, 2008-2010

The results of our three-year project are reported in a collective volume, introduced by Marc Abeles and with a brief preface by Lamy, published soon after its conclusion (Abeles 2011). The chapters reflect the very specific intellectual style and interests of each of the ten researchers recruited to the project, with ten distinct cultural/national backgrounds, very different levels and intensities of fieldwork engagement with the WTO, and a diverse range of topics that were individually pursued. The result is a varied, interesting, valuable, but unsynthesized portrait of the WTO in a period of both subtle organizational tweaking and innovation and an uncertain future of increasing engagement with publics inside its processes. The license to do fieldwork, however, did not mean access, understandably, to actual contexts of negotiation. We lacked the drama of field materials that give participant observation its sense of excitement when ‘something happens.’

Missions from various countries were visited by different researchers, and there were many interviews with a range of delegates, but the focus of the project, as participant observation, remained largely on the Secretariat and its work. Our individual researchers were coordinated, and there were collective meetings of the team in Paris and Geneva, but the project did not establish a well-defined collaborative structure or forum for itself, sufficient to evolve a distinctive argument from the diverse ethnographies that would assess the present condition and prospects of multilateralism, beyond the original design and GATT culture of the organization.³ Mastery of the exotic technical language and culture of trade was a very high bar for most of us. So were the rules of discretion–frankness in privacy, but ‘not for attribution.’ We needed more

lawyer-anthropologists among us, to provide what Annelise Riles has called “collateral knowledge” (Riles 2011).

On one level, this project was a methodological experiment in an international collaborative effort in ethnography, and as such, it produced both valuable lessons and mixed results. None of the researchers continue their active research on the WTO, and only one to my knowledge, Jae Chung, is writing a full account of her work, based on the most prolonged and intensive participant observation—among us, during 2008-2010, as well as follow-up fieldwork that she undertook in conjunction with our ‘second act’ intervention in June 2013.

Art at the WTO (as the Opportunity for a ‘Second Act’)

While the presence of anthropologists might have seemed markedly strange and invasive at the WTO, the presence of works of art, which pose an analogous kinship of ‘otherness’ to the spare and hyper-rational business of trade negotiation, certainly was not. Works of art at the WTO are abundant, in the sculptures of surrounding grounds and integral to the architecture and spaces of the CWR building itself ⁴, especially with regard to a number of murals on its walls and in stored collections of paintings and objects that the WTO itself has accumulated over the years as gifts and symbolic prestations, as ironic supplements to the ‘high rationalist’ calculative regulation of modern trade. Art was there at the CWR to be seen as everyone daily passed through and worked in the building—if only they looked with attention! Promoting the mostly ignored but very present art as heritage of the somber building was one of Lamy’s concerns and ‘countercultural’ projects. It was of particular interest and pride to the official, who was the main advisor to the anthropological researchers and our main liaison to Lamy.

Indeed, it was through his enthusiastic supervision and curatorial work that many of the striking murals on the walls of the CWR were restored. This might be interpreted as a subtle commentary

of critique and recognition, since these murals are collectively an homage to labor, collected and created during the long period that the CWR was the headquarters of the International Labor Organization (ILO). When the GATT bureaucracy replaced the ILO in 1977 at the CWR, the then D-G determined that the murals were unsuitable to the new occupants, and all but one were removed or plastered over. Their restoration had been mostly completed before the period of our team research. We thus worked in the presence of these works, in an otherwise spare environment, and several of us in our writings have called attention to them, as have other major commentaries on the WTO (e.g., Mazower 2012; VanGrasstek 2013), noting their irony, and, to us, striking presence.

Both Lamy and the official who was the anthropologists' liaison thus valued some level of artistic expression within the CWR (and its building expansion which did not actually manifest until the period of the team project). I took this mildly countercultural effort inside the WTO as an opportunity to propose a second act return of anthropology, this time through collaboration with artists or curators in an installation. When I proposed the project to our liaison in early 2012—at that stage, as a project involving a collaboration with an ethnographic museum (see below)—he responded with enthusiasm, after checking with Lamy.

The use of artifacts from an ethnographic museum was already a second prototype (see below) for the project, and not the last. Our liaison diplomat (and presumably Lamy) stayed with the project through its three proposed plans. Through a succession of prototypes, I could see the advantage in each of somehow linking a second act, anthropology-through-art intervention to the murals already there—if only by spatial association or by some logic and inspiration of artistic invention. This relation to the exposed ILO murals, direct or indirect, was a component of our thinking through each of the prototypes. The murals were an 'other' hiding in plain sight that defined a context to think through an anthropology-through-art intervention.

Prototypes for a “Second Act” Project of Intervention

There were four conceptions or prototypes of the ‘second act’ project, of varying development, before we settled on the one that was produced.

The first was an elicited imaginary exercise, written in late 2011, but it defined certain key problems, issues, and desirable conditions for producing an anthropology/art intervention at the CWR. It was the paper that I mentioned earlier—produced for an edited book project, *Curatorial Dreams*—which invited contributors to imagine their ideal museum or art exhibit. Partially out of frustration with the challenges of access in our earlier project and partly from my long existing interest in site-specific art and ethnographic research collaborations, I imagined an installation situation in close spatial relation to existing murals, where those working in the building were used to seeing art in the CWR. The installation would consist of large clear plastic screens, the degrees of transparency of which would be altered without notice at different locations during the at least three-month duration of the project. Behind the screens would be reverse-engineered key public documents of the WTO, altered to earlier draft states—with bracketing, side notes, and other marks of editing—created by the curatorial team. Different documents would be moved about or appear on a random schedule at the various screen sites, and the screens themselves would be moved randomly among sites over the period. Viewers would become “hooked” on following the movements to increase attention. Additionally tapes of barely audible whispering would be played randomly around the sites of installation. Anthropologists who had been at the WTO would be present to register the reactions in corridor talk and casual lunch conversations.

This might have been the ideal project to actually do rather than imagine, but it came too early in the process, and I had no artist collaborators or specific funding for it. Yet it established what I thought were two ideal conditions for the project to keep in mind for later prototypes: the importance of duration (it would simply

take time for anything placed in the CWR atmosphere to gain invested attention) and the use of low-key, minimalist stimulants, without requiring skilled symbolic interpretation in the first encounter and based on representations of standard knowledge forms close to what basic ethnography learns. As it turned out, we followed neither of these conditions, due to the circumstances of scheduling constraint, of changing visions of the project (where the issue of multilateral possibility became more important than transparency), and the specific dynamics of thinking together in creative collaboration with partners.

The second prototype was inspired by my contacts with and interest in innovative curatorial thinking in ethnographic museums, especially by a visit to the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt and in speaking at a conference in Rome on whether and in what senses do ethnographic museums need contemporary ethnographic research. For the Weltkulturen Museum, which had invited artists and craft specialists of various kinds to reside and work creatively with selections from its collections to produce exhibits, I conceived of such a “labor” as a space to prototype an installation at the CWR, which would install there artifacts of traditional, non-state society trade systems, somehow not as the predecessor or heritage of modern trade but in critical and complex dialogue with it. The prototype forged in the Weltkulturen Museum labor would be installed at the CWR in June 2013, and then it would return to Frankfurt as a museum exhibit and a museum-sponsored conference including interested CWR/WTO participants. The development of this proposal lacked funding (e.g., to transport museum artifacts) and sufficient motivation of the Weltkulturen Museum partner. However, it was the first version of the proposal to the WTO, and it did elicit the enthusiasm of our liaison.

The third prototype—or the effort to create one—arose from the serendipity of me finding my first real (but not, alas, final) partners at a conference in the fall of 2012 on “Interventions in Ethnographic Research,” organized at the Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus, Denmark, by the anthropologists Rane Willerslev and Lotte Meinert.

Willerslev had recently become head of Cultural Museums in Oslo, Norway, and he had brought curators, museum anthropologists, and exhibition designers to the Intervention conference in Aarhus. The example of Peter Bjerregaard and Alexandra Schussler and their work on Willerslev's research and exhibition plans in Norway caused a shift in my thinking about what might be done at the WTO. They suggested doing something far more interactive and overtly challenging than I thought possible at the WTO. They joined me and Jae Chung in thinking through scenarios and prototypes for the WTO installation. Jae is an anthropologist teaching at a German business university and a former student of the Rice anthropology department, and of the members of the 2008-2010 team, had spent the most continuous time at the CWR and developed the closest relationships with WTO personnel.

The third prototype involved intensive exploratory discussions among Peter, Alexandra, Jae and myself. The four of us visited the WTO in late October 2012 and had encouraging and enthusiastic discussions with our longtime liaison, who, in consultation with Lamy, approved the 'second act'.

Jae and I deferred to the considerable curatorial expertise of Peter and Alexandra. The latter thought through a number of ideas based on their visit and their openness to previous prototypes. Additionally, Alexandra brought in, as possible participants, three colleagues from the Basel School of Design who had experience doing such installation projects in public and private institutions. Our discussions were, for me, heady and very valuable. There were ideas, characteristic of anthropology and museums, to show the deep and sometimes paradoxical role of gift relationships in the constitution of the WTO's work of regulating modern trade. There were different suggestions for relating to the murals—re-covering them, screening them, and substituting different images.

One problem was that nothing of sufficient duration could be done, and many of the suggestions we thought through would involve more interactional dynamics—though key to many projects

of museum exhibit and conceptual art—than our WTO sponsors would permit. In our own interesting discussions under pressure, we were likely pushing limits of what could be done.

The imagining of this third prototype came to a head on a second visit to the WTO in late February 2013, which included Jae, Peter, Alexandra, and two of the three Basel artists (I could not attend because of illness). The final discussions with our sponsor focused on a proposal based on animating the figures in the ILO murals with performance artists and engaging passersby in the CWR in dialogue. I still believe this might have appealed had the proposal been better thought through.

The WTO is a very different kind of environment than museums. Museums play to publics, and the WTO has only been learning to do so in very reserved and uncertain steps. Both are bureaucracies, at base, but the 'game' at the WTO during our time there was being played more earnestly and to higher stakes, especially where it (and other international organizations in its post World War II 'age-grade') had gotten by 2013 in its history.

...Watching this final meeting on Skype, I had a sense of disaster—this is where the second act project would end!

Not so. But before I tell the rest of the story, I want to register a fourth prototype, which was never a real proposal, though it was practically conceivable, and that was my effort to think through something like what Alexandra and the Basel artists had in mind. I discussed it only with Jae. Elements of it were integral to the fifth prototype, and the one that was actually produced with great verve and ingenuity (see below).

The fourth prototype would be the recruitment of mimes who perform daily in the urban public spaces of Geneva (as in many other European cities), and with whom many who walk the streets of Geneva, including trade diplomats and bureaucrats, would be familiar. The idea would have been to find willing candidates among the informal association of street mimes, and to work out a series of symbolic interactions—both scripted and improvised—for them

to perform at various sites and various times during the day at the WTO. Dressed in business attire, perhaps covered in luminous paint, or not so 'marked', and of diverse ethnic background, these pairs or threesomes would mimic behaviorally scenarios of trade of varying complexity. I did not have the contacts in Geneva to actually produce this prototype, but it turned out to constitute an interesting conceptual bridge between the late February animations out of the murals, which were unacceptable, and the improv dance based scores (see below), which became the prototype that we actually produced for the late June intervention at the CWR.

What actually transpired after the late February visit were negotiations with our long-time high official liaison, to end the work on the third prototype for the event and to offer a "Plan B" (actually, by this time it was Plan C!), which would entail quickly starting conversations with other artist friends who were interested in the second act project. The fact that our liaison official (and Lamy) stayed with the project showed admirable faith, curiosity, and a real interest in art as a space of experiment in the WTO. The liaison official had overseen the building of additions to the CWR since 2010, which included a large atrium, a cafeteria, and light passage ways that architecturally welcomed art projects. Along with Lamy's late-term and criticized purchase of a set of stylized global maps, we would be the first experiment, certainly in installation art.

Producing "Trade Is Sublime," March-May, 2013

Jae Chung and I joined Luke Cantarella, who has a background in theater arts and stage design, and his partner Christine Hegel, an anthropologist trained in the arts ⁵, in working on the rapidly approaching June intervention. I described to them the earlier prototypes, the February CWR meeting, and the transitional mime idea as perhaps a stimulus for them to quickly develop a proposal and a plan for a score for the project. Under time pressure, the discussions among the four of us during March through June were

perhaps the richest and most inspired of the entire project, including the 2008-2010 team ethnography. Luke made a preliminary visit to the CWR in March, to survey the spaces for himself and to meet with our liaison and other WTO staff who would work with us. From this visit, he produced an excellent set of 'fieldnotes' and observations, as good as any I had read from the earlier ethnographic research. Apparently, our liaison official was pleased and had confidence in the feasibility of this version of the project.

Luke and Christine have written a detailed draft of a paper on the concept and writing of the score for the work (Cantarella and Hegel, n.d.), entitled "Trade Is Sublime," and we plan to produce a collaborative piece on the actual production of the score during two days of intensive work in a studio at Pace University in New York City in May 2013 (further information can be viewed at tradeissublime.org; please contact Luke Cantarella for access to the project's scores).

The score consists of three segments, each keyed to brief phrases from official literature such as brochures—by which the WTO presents itself to the public—concerning progress in trade as the following of rules and how the WTO provides a forum for the 'thrashing' out of differences. The modality of the score was improvisation performance within imaginatively designed scenography. Ideally, we would have brought the dancers of the piece to Geneva, for unscheduled live performances at various sites within the CWR over, say, a week's period, followed by periodic wall projections of the score for a longer duration—but the project did not have nearly enough funding to produce our second act at this level, nor enough time, with Lamy's departure defining its outer limit. Instead, the piece, as described, was produced at 'just in time' speed in a studio in lower Manhattan, drawing together remarkable performance and production talent (dancers, music, lighting, video, costuming, editing, stage managing) under the direction of Luke and Christine, with advice from me on how to translate 'inside moves' at the WTO into performance (Jae's presence and advice in situ was missed).⁶

Each segment of the score was edited to about five minutes in duration. The first two segments were performed by improv dancers. The first segment evoked trade under strict rules. The dancers of different ethnicities and gender, dressed in the business attire common at the WTO, organized and passed boxes of various sizes filled with brightly colored sand, representing commodities. The second segment evoked the WTO as a space where differences could be ‘thrashed out.’ For this, the dancers created complex (what we referred to as) ‘amoeba’-like entanglements and then disentanglements. The third segment was absent of persons but displayed an endless succession of boxes of colored sand, moving and bobbing in the flow of the ocean.⁷

Given our inability to bring live performers to Geneva, large-scale projection on the walls at selected sites would have been most effective. But lack of funding and perhaps WTO conservatism



Image 3. Filming of the score of Trade Is Sublime, presented at the WTO in July 2013 (image courtesy of George Marcus)

prohibited this level of spectacle. Instead, the score was projected on three computer screens, enframed in cleverly constructed boxes to resemble the architecture of the CWR.

As it was planned and as it turned out (a brief account to follow), there were, for me, two especially brilliant provocations in Luke and Christine's conception of the project that defined its potential as a second act intervention as well as its continuing potential for circulation in other venues. One was in the titling conception of the score itself and, in particular, what the use of the word 'sublime,' an intentionally odd and contrasting term, might elicit in the context of the spare high rationalism of WTO culture. The most frequent response to our intervention was "Why 'sublime'?" which opened interesting conversations, first, about how to translate the word into several languages and, then, about what relevance it could have for the work of trade regulation.⁸ It had the potential to reference both the idealism of multilateralism that Lamy certainly displayed in much of his writing, as well as being a key longstanding goal of the WTO, and current challenges to achieving or even approximating it.

What Christine evoked in this title was our intention to offer a 'proposal,' as she put it, to think of trade as monumental in the way that a number of other past occupants of the CWR had left traces, symbolically and materially, in the building and on its grounds, of their monumentalism. Most notably, we thought of the covered and then uncovered ILO murals that have created a kind of countercultural foothold or presence to which each prototype of the second act project has sought some relation. Exploring the strange titling of the intervention gets to its main challenge and question, in a manner both supportive and ironic. If other human projects and capacities have been monumentalized at the WTO building, why not its major preoccupation, trade itself, and in what manner? This titling alone was a key conversation starter for the intervention—with interesting expressions of reflective puzzlement as well as more subtle responses about what constitutes 'monuments' in the world of calculation and negotiation—a number having to do with the genius of the 'tradedcraft' of trade regulation in the forms evolved

for the construction of agreements, in bracketing, in the evolution of the process that produces drafts, etc... in the system of WTO rules. The titling discussions, themselves, elicited an array of reflections on WTO process, making both its ideology and insights into its practice more explicit and specific.

The second provocation is internal to the medium of the score as performed and more a speculative product of my own interpretative insight rather than a response that was actually evoked or provoked by viewings of the score at the CWR in late June (which I discuss in the next section). However, I could register this line of thinking emerging in nightly discussions among ourselves—the project team—and also in rich interviews that Jae conducted, and I attended, in her ‘return to the field’ that occurred alongside the activity around the installation and is best understood in terms of the advantages that return fieldwork usually offers an ethnographer.

This provocation arises within the specific genre of performance art that we developed for the score: improv dance, with an emphasis, for me, on the concept and practice of ‘improvisation.’ There was a potential in the appreciation of the dynamic of improvisation as practiced by the performers to reflect on improvisation as a condition and practice within WTO tradecraft, not merely as a recognized but unpredictable and elusive quality of trade relations, but as a dynamic that requires extraordinary discipline and structured preparation. These latter values imbue working theories of tradecraft at the WTO. Improvisation is recognized as part of skill by practitioners, but its systemic role as a dynamic is not understood or articulated. It is perhaps part of the suprarational. Maybe, but its practice and condition are well within the ‘scores’ that the WTO has very meticulously made for itself. Seeing this in parallel and by analogy in the performance of those trained in improv dance was a potential of the intervention in late June largely not realized in responses by those who viewed the scores over their two weeks of exposure, but it remains a potential for revision in the score and a motivation for its circulation in other related venues.⁹

June 2013 at the Centre William Rappard

We arrived at the WTO during the last three weeks of June to find a quite transformed space from the gloomy enclosed halls of the CWR in which the long-term project had occurred. Lamy had undertaken a major expansion of the older building, as a permanent legacy of his time as D-G, that opened it up and certainly made it more social and welcoming (with a huge white, bright atrium and a large airy cafeteria as center pieces). It was in this transformed space, in which its occupants did not yet seem at home, that we had to negotiate our second act intervention. This was somewhat disorienting to the history of our project.

The prototypes had been imagined mostly with reference to the older, more claustrophobic spaces of the CWR and especially in some relation to the restored murals in the older spaces, but now the space we negotiated for our intervention was in the transitional space between the new cafeteria and the older CWR. It was perhaps an ideal placement to capture the largest daily flow of people through the building, but the visual and spatial relation to the murals and to the old building was lost.¹⁰

Further, unlike evidence of earlier enthusiasm and involvement by our liaison sponsoring official in responding to the project on our previous visits to the CWR, when the atmosphere at the WTO seemed to be in a more relaxed state, by late June 2013 he was much less attentive and in fact was absent from Geneva during two of the three weeks that the second act intervention was present at the CWR. This had little to do, I think, with judgment of the project, but was an expression of the tense and distracted mood that could be sensed in the halls of the CWR then, in contrast to earlier months. A new D-G had been selected but it was still the interregnum, and during Lamy's final weeks the critical attitude toward him through his term seemed more intense, from those who had been critical before. There were plays for position and power among senior officials during the transition. The future relevance of the WTO itself was more insecure than ever, especially at the then height

of American activity to negotiate the United States' own regional trade agreement in the Pacific (the secretive negotiations around the TPP) and with the European Union. In June, as well, the WTO was distracted by intense planning for its Bali ministerial in October, on which any future for restarting the dormant Doha Round would depend. Finally, based on efforts to relate to a public, the WTO was preparing its own celebratory exhibit of its past to display at an open house for the citizens of Geneva (a periodic event that had been instituted by Lamy), a week or two following our presence. Our installation and the second act ethnographic research around it did not fit into these showcasing plans.

Despite these conditions working against focus and attention to our intervention and in the absence of the ideal duration of a month or two for its presence, our second act registered with many. We had fascinating diverse conversations with both Secretariat members and delegates from the trade missions. What we lacked were forums, occasions of collective discussion that we hoped we could design at the site of display. In the court culture that the WTO is, in the passage way where the installation was situated, we observed others observing others observing the videos. This was interesting. Otherwise, positioned both as curatorial interlocutors at the site of the installation during the two and half weeks of the exhibit and, in parallel, conducting interviews in CWR offices, in cafes, and within various missions that were orchestrated primarily by Jae in the context of return ethnography, we did achieve a rich effect of second-order observation within the project. As its producers, we both collaborated and coordinated among ourselves, making opportunity in the design of the installation and finding it in the serendipity of return fieldwork.¹¹ This produced a rich stew of material that we are still processing, as our second act dealt with the specific conditions of interregnum and transition that it found in June.

Toward the end of our second act intervention, we concluded with a symbolic and analytic act of prestation to Lamy, who kept his distance during the weeks we were present as he had during the

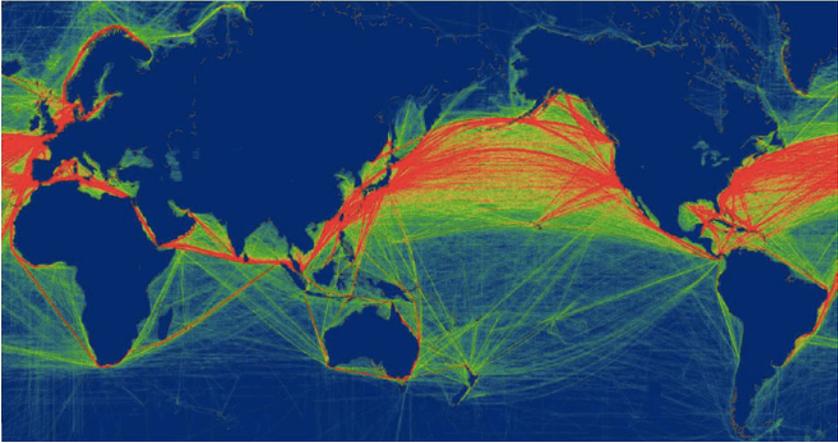


Image 4. GIS Pacific Trade Map, prepared and mounted by ethnographers and artists, based on data for all global shipping over 120 tons for 2010 (Image courtesy of George Marcus)

earlier research period. We produced a co-authored analytic memo, in the WTO communicative style, entitled “a Theory of the WTO Case,” which, in about a thousand words, assessed the situation and prospects of multilateralism at the moment of our second act intervention. Lamy responded succinctly and positively, cc’ing it to specific others at the Secretariat whose work at the WTO he most respected and relied on. Soon after, we—of the second act intervention—left, and a week or so after that, Lamy left.

What Becomes of an Intervention When It Is Over?

After our second act, the inclination of the anthropologist is to ‘report to the academy’: to write an article or even a monograph of argument, analysis, and tentative conclusions; the inclination of the artist (aside from the question of producing a catalog to accompany the project, which we did not) is to find other venues to show the work, to seek other relevant and interesting receptions for it. The CVs of the anthropologist and the artist look very

different.¹² We (as anthropologists and artists) are doing both, but personally, as an anthropologist, having organized and engaged in a complex exercise in ‘second-order’ observation, I am most excited by the artist’s (and, more importantly, the curator’s) open-ended inclination to imagine and actually seek an extended network or ‘archipelago’ of additional receptions and viewings of the work, as shown at the WTO, as produced in studio, and as re-strategized for other contexts. The disappointing conditions in June at the CWR for focusing attention on the art as spectacle partly drives this motivation to produce it elsewhere, but, more importantly, reflexive questions about trade today and the ‘aesthetics’ of its politics were successfully posed in late June at the CWR, such that they require interested commentaries elsewhere as an integral function and component of our project. This impetus to reproduce the intervention is certainly in the spirit of ‘multi-sited’ ethnographic inquiry (Marcus 1998), though an object or process is not being ‘followed’ so much as a set of ideas is being explored by designing forums and constituting diverse relevant ‘micro-publics’ for them as an extension of combined fieldwork/text-making.

At the moment, we are considering additional university, conference, think tank, NGO, online forum, and performative venues for this project, each one conceived curatorially and ethnographically as an intervention and perhaps in the manner of a chain reaction like a ‘Rube Goldberg machine’ (see the serious intention for this fanciful reference in Rabinow et al 2008, on designs for an anthropology of the contemporary).¹³ No doubt this project will eventually ‘dock’ in some venue or venues, with the authority to confer the status and reputation of research as knowledge among experts (in a journal article like this one or the more definitive monograph that Jae Chung is now writing) or art as ‘art,’ but, in parallel, those who have produced it at the WTO are enjoying planning its movement as interventions among other venues and micro-publics. This, I would argue, is a specific and characteristic form of fieldwork that projects of second-order observation—which interventions are—encourage.

Interventions thus both close and open doors. Where they move, end, or fade to black is an important condition of their production—an ethnographic ‘finding’ or result—within the ethos of experiment. We don’t exactly know how this experiment will end, and that is enabling and exciting to both the anthropology and the art that composed it. Further probing ‘in the field’ what anthropological curiosity achieved in a relatively closed space intellectually is what art/anthropology ‘intervention’ as method affords the ethnography that anthropologists have emblematically embraced, amid contemporary bureaucratic structures and global assemblages.

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and *Theory Is Much More Than It Used To Be* (co-edited with Dominic Boyer and James Faubion).

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Notes

1. Luhmann's 'second-order observation'—'observing observers observing,' as Rabinow has developed it—places fieldworkers in the most self-reflexive zone of their subjects' thinking and the most aligned with the ethnographer's own classically detached perspective, though immersed. This occurs most often, though not exclusively today, when projects of inquiry are focused on or require the cooperation of experts (see Holmes and Marcus 2005, Holmes 2013, Boyer 2008, and Riles 2011). This is certainly the condition of the WTO project. Nonetheless, the challenge that second-order observation, which assumes 'epistemic partners' in research as well as 'paraethnographic' articulations (Holmes and Marcus 2005), poses to classic methods of anthropology is more literal forms of collaboration in the production of what is considered 'expert' anthropological knowledge, and the accessibility of these forms as data and concept work, more than just 'technique' or 'method' of fieldwork, but as product or result of research, available to a public of anthropologists and others for reception.
2. A large and varied membership to manage and more NGO activity than ever before, creating a demanding and informed public for WTO tradecraft, have equally challenged the old GATT-minded order in place for trade negotiation. Perhaps the historic signal of an awareness on the part of the Secretariat of a public accountability of the WTO was its shock at the highly organized anti-global protest that turned violent and disrupted a ministerial meeting of the WTO in Seattle in 1999. There have been many such protests outside ministerial meetings and the gates of the CWR in Geneva, but none as massive as the Seattle events. This was before the Doha Round (beginning in 2001) and at the

end of the enthusiastic period of the neoliberal structuring of a 'new world order' following the Cold War and through post-World War II institutions, such as the WTO.

3. None of us, except Abeles, had previous experience in the study of international organizations, although all of us had done ethnographic research in contexts of contemporary political and economic conflict or crisis at varying levels of institutional organization. Only two or three of us sustained a binding and highly motivated fascination with the WTO during the research period. The issue, forms, and contradictions of transparency became perhaps the most interestingly developed anthropological problem addressed by us (notably by Lynda De Matteo). Abeles probed with patient expertise the negotiations on cotton, reflecting well how factors of regional inequalities define neoliberal trade generally. Each component project had its own interest and value. But the collective result remained closely ethnographic and diversely topical. We failed to venture an argument or diagnosis, based on the evidence of ethnography, about the limits and possibilities of multilateral progress, probably the greatest topical stake for the future of the WTO, in which Lamy and his supporters were most vested.
4. The CWR, an Italianate villa, was built between 1923-1926, hosting spaces that could easily have defined a museum or gallery. A number of other mansions on Lac Leman have been so converted. The sculptures on the grounds of CWR are multiple. Inside, the restored murals of the League of Nations and ILO predominate. Lamy supported the restoration of the hidden murals, a production of an attractive pamphlet on the murals, and finally an ambitious, lavish volume on the history of the architecture and art of the CWR (Kuntz and Murray 2011) of which copies were given to the first 'second act' team on its initial visit. In the last months of his term, Lamy purchased some contemporary art—a series of images of global maps, visually bland in my opinion—for the new building additions to the CWR, which seemed largely ignored, characteristically, and he was criticized for the expenditure in corridor talk.
5. I had participated in the conceptual discussions around an earlier installation that Luke and Christine produced called '214 square feet,' created as an installation evoking the cramped quarters of cheap motels in which entire families of the poor live in Newport Beach, California, among the richest cities in the U.S. This installation has continued to circulate with considerable effect in Orange County and beyond since its initial production for a charity event at a yacht club!

6. A weakness of the work perhaps is that because of considerable time constraints, especially regarding the production schedule, the framing and performance of the score were not sufficiently informed by integrating the details of actual WTO culture, which was in the more sustained ethnography (such as Jae's) and, for instance, would have composed the subtleties of document-making behind the screens in the "Curatorial Dreams" prototype outlined previously. The CWR, even in its new, expanded architecture is a space of a varied but restricted public, and this is whom we were trying to address with tweaking by ethnographic subtlety.
7. Another type of projection, aside from, but in relation to, the three segments of the score were the on-site creation of GIS maps of global shipping flows, created by the historian and cartographer Patricia Seed, who observed the project but came to participate in it through her command of technology and map-making skills. Using the most recent WTO data, she created striking visualizations of trade flows, which captured geographically (and geopolitically as well) both micro and macro relations of trade that generated interested discussion during the second act for either not having been noticed, or overlooked, or accenting an issue very alive in ongoing trade negotiation. It was striking to us how little GIS visualization technology was used in research at the WTO, and also when artistically rendered how much ethnographic potential it had for generating conversation. There is a dynamism and institutional specificity to such GIS map art. It would have made also a more lively but similar art legacy for Lamy to have left the WTO than the more static, less noticed (but not uncriticized!) works that he purchased.
8. The 'sublime' was such an interesting trope to pose at the WTO, a center of rational calculation and regulation, because it was so strange a word to be heard there, perhaps ironically, because the WTO is after all a site that summons the world, but to a very cool discipline of reason (despite what is repressed or relegated to literal places of shadow and discretion—but there, philosophy and the sublime are not the subject matter). The sublime evokes greatness or a state of existence beyond all possibility of calculation and measurement, thus leaving opportunity for expressions of social imagination, whether utopic or dystopic (in my view, and others, Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke have provided the most important foundational thinking on this concept, though there is a perennial and extensive scholarly literature on the sublime). In exploring the strangeness of the word with passers-by, it stimulated immediately 'offbeat' conversations, for those who entertained them, with an orientation to the WTO and its 'vision' other

than the hyperrational, bureaucratic discourses and the political/personal small talk that dominated corridor office talk (and probably more important negotiation meetings). It did not serve ethnography (which is immersed in small talk) so much as stimulating response at the site of the art installation where the usual mode of attention would be indifference, glancing attention, or noncomprehension.

9. There is indeed a complex practice-oriented ideology or working theory of method and value which those engaged in trade articulate and which our earlier ethnographic work explored. In its articulation, this ideology has much in common with the terms of classic anthropological analyses of exchange relations in non-state societies, for example, with emphases on reciprocity, diluting actual inequalities through the expression and negotiation of values like trust, fairness, discretion, and compensation... and following rules or customs. The equally important and essential role and dynamic of improvisation, and what makes it possible, is less explicitly recognized and discussed in either WTO trade-craft or anthropology.
10. In a sense, then, we were caught in Lamy's changes and perhaps undermined by them. We wanted to operate within the psychological hold of the old (GATT) regime of WTO, which certainly still reigned, but got situated in the new spaces and hopes that produced them, and that proved awkward for our intervention. The WTO might have architecturally made a transition but, in our view, not yet otherwise.
11. In a sense then, the 'public' for this installation was extremely repressed, as a result both of the conditions of distraction at the WTO in late June and the fact that not noticing (or furtive noticing) was the standard orientation to art of those passing through the building. Thus the 'second act' videos and their reception would not at all have satisfied the questions and terms that are at the heart of art critical writing about genres of production of site-specific installation and performance much in common with our own (e.g., Bourriaud, 2002, Bishop 2004, and subsequent debates about 'relational aesthetics'). As noted, in the text, the 'pay-off' of the installation was present, but primarily 'elsewhere' in the ethnographic work of 'return fieldwork' (conducted mainly by Jae Chung and myself) that was going on while the installation was up. Here the installation provided an affordance of discussion, a backdrop or context for discussing with old and new 'informants' a variety of unfinished conversations about the WTO. In this way, it became a tangible asset for second-order observation, the primary mode of the 'second act' project. Reception of the installation was less at the site of its production and more in the atmosphere of re-started conversations, identified with the original period of research.

12. My art and design collaborators on this WTO ‘second act’ project and I have since worked on other projects and have produced an article that outlines a modality for “Productive Encounters” in ethnographic projects in different stages of development (Cantarella, Hegel, and Marcus, n.d.). We are working toward a short workbook or manual for ethnographers that would make such collaborations attractive, or at least plausible, as a regular aspect of contemporary method. While designers and artists on their own incorporate work that is very much aligned with what ethnographers do, their skills and concerns—their fundamental stakes—and their modes of writing are indeed different (as most clearly articulated in the debates around ‘relational aesthetics,’ Bourriaud 2002, Bishop 2004, Bishop 2012). With respect for those differences, the project chronicled in this paper and the other collaborative work conceived in the modality of “Productive Encounters” do explicitly give the goals and methods of ethnography priority. We touch upon at every point the concerns of design and art writers, but we do not speak here directly to them, thus leaving space for important future conversations. Ethnographers do not require or expect spectacle or a live present public; their sense of working ethics diverges from that of artists and designers. These and other questions deserve explicit attention once there is more of a history of collaboration such as we are encouraging here (but see the very interesting mix of art ethnographic practice in *The Multispecies Salon*, Kirksey 2014).
13. The aim is to explore understandings and interpretations that emerged in Geneva recursively in other venues that our intervention suggests might be significant. Of course finding such opportunities and organizing them with curatorial and ethnographic skills are crucial. Luke Cantarella and Christine Hegel have such experience from an earlier project in southern California. I know of other examples in anthropology. What we are doing in terms of design thinking is conducting iterations of a prototype. We are thinking of combined art school/law school (where trade expertise often resides) events in universities (in California, and in New York City) and think tanks and NGOs, as well as online forums (e.g., while the second act was in preparation we, especially Jae Chung and myself, presented a version of it for treatment in the highly innovative, cross-cultural forum, Meridian 180, originated by Annelise Riles and Hiro Miyazaki of Cornell University, which produced very interesting extended discussions that challenged and extended our thinking about the project in formation). We are also thinking of presenting this work in more popular and populist settings as well, like the “Busboys and Poets” café in Washington, D.C., where interesting anthropological

ideas have been forged in a classic 'coffee house'-like venue (here I am thinking of the concept work done in this very café by Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, on the similarity of forms of parody in late Soviet and current American media; see Boyer and Yurchak 2010). The point is that there are myriad opportunities for building intervention upon intervention once curatorial and ethnographic ingenuity merge in projects such as the one explored in this paper.

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