

# Introduction

## The ethnographic invention

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‘inquiry is always a matter of “invention”’  
(Martin Savransky (2016, 38))

This inventory bears witness to the relational inventiveness that is essential to the field practices of ethnography. The projects inventoried neither follow standard techniques nor fit into established methodological conventions. Instead, the anthropologists carrying out these investigations have creatively engaged in devising the conditions for their ethnographic encounters: creating digital infrastructures for collaboration, arranging workshops to map together, curating exhibitions while investigating with artists, scripting interviews in the city with their companions, and poetically disposing their attention in the field. We call these situated arrangements that dispose the ethnographic situation field devices. They emerge out of the integral relational inventiveness of all ethnographic encounters and bear witness to the creative practices of anthropologists in their endeavours to find relevant anthropological questions.

The explicit call for invention in this inventory should not be understood as an advocacy of creative methods or methodological innovation: we are not proposing novel techniques or replicable formulas. Our proposal responds to the widespread realization – experienced by ourselves and many others – that our methods are incapable of responding to the challenges of the contemporary and the resulting urge to renovate the relevance of our inquiries, a task that, as Martin Savransky has compellingly argued, demands ‘speculating on the possibility of inventing new and different modes of asking questions’ (Savransky 2016, 4). The accounts in this book convey the improvisational and creative activities of anthropologists engaging in this challenging endeavour. In the collective effort represented by this book, we sideline the persistent framework that envisions (and describes) the empirical practice of anthropologists in methodological terms. Instead, we argue for a conceptualization of the ethnographic encounter as an act of invention: anthropologists always invent how to pose relevant questions in the field.

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The idea that invention is integral to anthropological practice is not entirely novel. Forty years ago, Roy Wagner (1981) proposed that rather than discovering the cultures they studied, anthropologists were inventing them. Wagner's groundbreaking work unveiled the creativity that takes place in the conceptual work of anthropologists. A vision originated in his conception of social worlds as fundamentally creative; thus, the activity of anthropologists is as inventive as that of the social worlds they investigate. A decade later, his contribution was to be extremely influential in the rhetoric turn and the provoking claim that anthropological writing is essentially a creative practice (pervaded by poetics and politics) and not a mere unmediated representation of social worlds (Clifford and Marcus 1986). While the discipline has come to terms with the notion that its conceptual and representational activities are suffused with creativity, an admission that field practices are essentially creative and inventive has rarely been made. The language of improvisation, creativity and invention is seldom – if ever – present in conceptualizations of ethnographic practices, which are usually described as an expression of what we call method – a framework that suffocates and invisibilizes any trace of creativity. However, our field experiences – like those of the Inventory's contributors and many others – demonstrate that the opposite tends to be the case: the empirical practice of anthropologists is thoroughly imbued with creative improvisations and inventive activities.

The contributions presented in this book are quite unlike the naturalistic accounts that portray anthropologists as mere participants in the social worlds they investigate. Instead, they manifest the agential role of anthropologists in devising the conditions of their ethnographic encounters. Each piece provides a glimpse of the multiple agencies, material interventions, spatial arrangements, and sensorial dispositions entwined in their respective ethnographic projects. Certainly, field devices lack the stability and standardization typically attributed to methods but are nonetheless essential dispositions for the ethnographic projects in which they have been devised. The argument we advance here combats the idea that the figure of method exhausts the complexity of the ethnographic encounter. The accounts here demonstrate that method is both an insufficient guide for, and an inadequate description, the field situation. To reiterate, this book is not concerned with treating ethnography as a method, rather, we posit ethnography as a creative and improvisational practice, the distinctive condition of which is the relational invention that emerges from the ethnographic situation.

### **Anthropological creativity**

The advocacy of a more inventive and creative anthropology has become central in certain circles of the discipline since the 1980s. It has been a common descriptor for the practices developing at the intersections between art and anthropology over the last two decades, can be found in anthropological

incursions into the digital realm and, more recently, has become integral to debates about multimodality. The programmatic proposal of a multimodal anthropology by E. Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón (2019), for instance, promotes an anthropological practice that overcomes a fixation with text and embraces other modes of representation and engagement. They envision ‘an anthropology yet to come: multisensorial rather than text-based, performative rather than representational, and inventive rather than descriptive’ (220). This is an anthropology that explores a politics of invention, an argument that can be retraced to the influence of Roy Wagner (1981). Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón’s proposal has certainly been inspiring for us, but while we are responsive to their theoretical arguments and programmatic prospectus, our line of reasoning in this book follows a different track.

Wagner’s central idea that invention is an integral condition of anthropological activity paved the way for the rhetorical turn of the mid-1980s, when anthropologists admitted the creative nature of their writing. As George Marcus and Michael J. Fischer (1986) argued at the time, anthropological texts are not merely transparent representations but constructed accounts, replete with rhetorical artifices; a declaration that opened room for an abundance of creative explorations with various writing genres. However, writing is not the only anthropological practice that relies on creativity, as demonstrated by Andrea Ballesterio and Brit Ross Winthereik’s recent volume on anthropological analysis, an activity that has been mystified or obfuscated within the discipline, reduced to a singular creative spark or mechanical procedure. Acknowledging ‘the conceptual creativity and relational commitments that sit at the core of ethnography in its best forms’, they propose ‘that analysis is a creative and organized process of generating insights’ (Ballesterio and Winthereik 2021, 3). Recent calls for creative ethnographies (Culhane and Elliott 2016) and all kinds of creative experimentations (Estalella and Sánchez Criado 2018) demonstrate that fieldwork has not been left out of these debates. To a large extent, this is a response to an intense experience that ‘fieldwork is not what it used to be’ (Faubion and Marcus 2009) and the realization that our modes of inquiry are not sufficient for the challenges of the contemporary. As Paul Rabinow attested some time ago: ‘[t]he currently reigning modes of research in the human sciences are, it seems to me, deficient in vital respects’ (Rabinow 2003, 2). Years later, this diagnosis was followed by a clear and straightforward appeal: ‘it is time once again for experimentation and invention’ (Rabinow 2011, 116).

The core of our argument here is sensitive to these debates but differs in two fundamental ways. First, although Marrero-Guillamón and Dattatreyan’s (2019) call for a politics of invention within the discipline has been inspirational, we are not presenting a programmatic proposal – what anthropology should be – but rather a conceptual discussion about what anthropological activity already is, and how we can better understand this. Our argument

aligns with Wagner's idea that 'the task of building an awareness of invention constitutes the goal and culmination of the social sciences' (Wagner 1981, 110). There is a second important divergence from the invocations for creative ethnographies made by Dara Culhane and Denielle Elliot (2016), or even the call for inventive methods in neighbouring disciplines made by Nina Wakeford and Celia Lury (2012). The object of our discussion is not a 'method' but the integral creativity and inventiveness of anthropological practice. Thus, since we do not subjugate creativity under the strictures of method, we are aligned with those colleagues who simply invoke the creativity of anthropological practice when referring, for instance, to writing and analysis.

In brief, our discussion seeks to expand Wagner's idea that creativity is integral to anthropological activity to include field practices. Although his argument centres on the anthropologist's conceptual activity, we not only believe it can be extended to other instances but that it has already been over the last few decades. We are thus not calling for more creative anthropology but arguing that this inventive condition is integral to anthropological activity within the field. The problem, we suggest below, has been the tendency of anthropology to conventionalize its activity, masking and invisibilizing its creativity. Thus, rather than an alternative programme for anthropology, this book aims to provide a different conceptualization of its empirical practice: one that acknowledges its creative and inventive condition.

### **'Devising' inquiries**

The ethnographic projects in this book have been carried out in highly diverse empirical sites and field situations. They take place in urban contexts within the intimate gatherings to embroider together in Colombia (Pérez-Bustos), in the complex circumstances of assisted suicide in Switzerland (Stavrianakis), in collaborations with minors across different countries (Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss) and in the rhizomatic contours of digital viral worlds across the Americas (Patel and Postill). In these many situations, contributors do not merely become involved in existing contexts but actively devise the conditions under which ethnographic relations are established: designing digital data infrastructures (Núñez and Suárez), curating art exhibitions in collaboration with artists (Martínez), engaging in a perpetual re-design of games (Farías and Criado), actively working through disconcertment (Verran) or flowing after materials in various ecologically inspired interventions (Harkness). Each contribution offers an ethnographic description of one of these situated arrangements – and its distinctive mode of inquiry – that has been essential for the corresponding ethnographic project: what we call field devices. Beyond observation and participation, habitually used to describe empirical anthropological activities, these accounts of field devices pay attention to the diverse materialities, spatialities and agencies involved in the ethnographic encounter.

The Asthma Files project carried out by Kim Fortun, Mike Fortun and many other collaborators is perhaps a paradigmatic example, involving as it does the design of a digital infrastructure (PECE) to gather diverse participants into collaboration. In their contribution, they describe their work with GREEN-MPNA, a neighbourhood association in Santa Ana (California), and with other scientists through PECE-The Asthma Files. Their engagement is not restricted to attending association meetings and following their political activity. On the contrary, they take an active role in designing and implementing a digital infrastructure to practice a form of collaborative hermeneutics in which interpretations of the same object (an image, a datum, etc.) can be brought together. We appreciate The Asthma Files as an illuminating case of contemporary ethnographic projects that stand apart from naturalistic visions of the ethnographic encounter. Here the anthropologist does not merely step into a situated social context; she gets involved with her ethnographic counterparts in the activity of disposing conditions to inquire together. EthnoData, developed by Jorge Núñez and Maka Suárez, is another exemplary project where the process of designing data platforms – in this case investigating statistics about violence – opens all kinds of unexpected collaborations within the ethnographic endeavour. These two cases exhibit how certain projects in the contemporary are carried out through activities involving the design of digital infrastructures to sustain ethnographic relations. In contrast to visions of the field encounter exclusively focused on social practices (participation, rapport, etc.), these projects demonstrate the relevance of devising material conditions for the ethnographic encounter.<sup>1</sup>

We have found the methodological sensibility of Science and Technology Studies (STS) particularly relevant for illuminating the material dimension of this kind of ethnographic project. The STS scholars John Law and Evelyn Ruppert have elegantly captured the materiality integral to any inquiry by envisioning research methods as devices, an insightful heuristic for understanding the projects inventoried in this book. The two authors conceive devices as teleological arrangements that ‘assemble and arrange the world in specific social and material patterns’ (Law and Ruppert 2013, 230). Devices are thus modes of patterning the social, devised to gather data, produce knowledge, and articulate questions. In contrast to the abstract and standard quality characteristic of research methods, they imagine devices as provisional arrangements that result not from polished design but from tinkering practices. While certain visions of research methods (and methodologies) tend to abstract these from the social, we value the insight of Law and Ruppert on the social condition of methods: they are historical products of their time, tentatively striving to put some order into the social.

Andrew Irving’s contribution illuminates further aspects of the endeavours anthropologists engage in when they are – as we describe it – ‘devising’ their inquiries. Irving’s interest is the interior imagination of people experiencing terminal illness, a difficult phenomenon to grasp and one for which, he argues, conventional methodological approaches are ill-equipped. Under

these circumstances he repurposes and adapts the conventional interview arrangement, staging an encounter between his interlocutors when walking in places they deem relevant. The situation goes as follows: one participant walks and narrates her thoughts while the other asks questions, interjects, takes photographs, and records the conversation. These movements through the city create a situation able to elicit thoughts and memories of their difficult experiences of living with HIV/AIDS. This intimate encounter is possible because Irving has previously established a collaborative relation with his counterparts, Margaret Ssewankambo and Nalongo Kaweesa. Irving posed a question to these two HIV+ Ugandan activists: how would you like to represent your experience to someone living in my country, England? While *The Asthma Files* highlights a material intervention in the field, Irving's contribution captures the scenographic condition of the ethnographic encounter and calls attention to the spatial arrangements so often demanded by an empirical situation.<sup>2</sup> These two accounts shed light on how anthropologists *device* the social, material and spatial dispositions for ethnographic relations to emerge. Drawing inspiration from Law and Ruppert's proposal, we conceive these arrangements as field devices; that is, devices that grow out of the field situation to devise the dispositions for ethnographic relations.

Drawing inspiration from an STS sensibility, we have highlighted the material and spatial arrangements devising the dispositions for an ethnographic encounter. Yet, there is a second sense for the concept of disposition that reveals a different dimension of field devices, one closer to an anthropological sensibility. This draws on Bourdieu's understanding of disposition as an inclination constitutive of habitus. We understand Leah Zani's conceptualization of *fieldpoems* as a mode of attention in the field in this sense. Zani followed explosive clearance technicians in Laos working their way through the incendiary remains of covert bombing campaigns by the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s. As the slightest click may be the indication of a trigger, their work demands an complete silence, a stark contrast to the tremendous noise of controlled explosions. Zani was captivated by the soundscape of her field. Developing a particular attention to sound led her to create field notes in the form of sound poems. Far from a mere writing technique or form of representation, these *fieldpoems* are a poetic disposition – in her own words – that seeks to enliven her attention to the sensoriality of the ethnographic encounter. The field device constituted by Zani's *fieldpoems* is not a spatial or sociotechnical arrangement but a particular sensibility able to grasp the inhabited soundscape and emotional landscape. Anna Harris' contribution on how to disrupt certain field habits illustrates that these dispositions are not inherent: training may be required to enable the ethnographer to notice what is relevant in the field.<sup>3</sup>

Field devices – as these projects and the other contributions demonstrate – are emergent accomplishments that respond to challenging field conditions.<sup>4</sup> They emerge from the life trajectories and epistemic sensibilities of anthropologists, as well as the diverse expectations and abilities of their

counterparts. As Andrew Irving demonstrates, they allow anthropologists to pose questions that they didn't have: had it not been for the scenography that situates the dialogue between Margaret Ssewankambo and Nalongo Kaweesa within the city, it would have been impossible for him to find certain questions that emerged between his two counterparts. It was only due to the particular situation – talking to an interlocutor with a similar living experience while walking through known places – that relevant memories emerged and participants were able to recount these experiences.

While invoking the concept of field devices we explicitly set aside the figure of method, for this seems entirely insufficient for apprehending and describing what is taking place in many contemporary ethnographic projects. The concept of method is too wide to offer a faithful description of many empirical situations and its standard condition leaves no room – or pays no attention – to the many improvisational gestures that are essential to the ethnographic encounter. In contrast, the concept of field device provides a fine-grain texture of the composite condition of ethnography, making visible the many diverse entities, trajectories, and agencies that are part of the ethnographic situation. Following this argument, it is possible to envision ethnography as an assemblage of various devices, some conventional techniques such as participant observation, note taking, interviews, etc., others improvisational arrangements that repurpose some of these devices, and others that are invented from scratch.<sup>5</sup> Anthropologists combine these different devices in their empirical encounters: they follow the conventions and recommendations of method, but not only,<sup>6</sup> since, as we describe in the next section, the ethnographic encounter always exceeds our methodological knowledge.

### **An alternative to method**

Research methods are undoubtedly valuable practical knowledge for anthropologists: they anticipate situations and offer guidance for the always complex task of fieldwork. The handbooks, seminar, and lessons on methods were certainly relevant in our own anthropological training, in learning how to approach people, build relations of rapport, and the different ways to account for these experiences. Yet the ethnographic encounter always exceeds the method: its conventions and anticipations are insufficient for coping with the complex and unexpected situations that occur in the field. In contrast to the profoundly established culture of method within anthropology, we subscribe to George Marcus' account of the ethnographic encounter as characterized by 'the essential unpredictability of fieldwork, its virtuous unruliness, and its resistance to standard ideas about research design and methodology in the social sciences' (Marcus 2009, 23). The accounts assembled in this Inventory demonstrate that which seasoned anthropologists know well and those in the early stages of training guess very soon: the practice of anthropology requires its practitioners to

constantly engage in creative improvisations within the field. The accounts of field devices here bear witness to this fact: far from standard techniques and methodological conventions, these field devices are the outcome of creative improvisations growing out of the ethnographic encounter.

The creativity we invoke has nothing to do with popular conceptions of this figure. What we have in mind is not the romantic idea of the individual quality of exceptional persons engaged in the production of novelty, particularly in domains such as art, design or technology. Instead, we draw on a radically different vision that emplaces creativity in the mundane situations of everyday life and acknowledges its centrality in social relations. We owe this vision to authors like Roy Wagner (1981) who have presented a description of culture and social life as a phenomenon pervaded by creativity and improvisation. Far from an individual quality of certain people, anthropological literature has shown that creativity and invention are emergent phenomena, the outcome of relations that people establish with other people and materials (Ingold and Hallam 2007; Rosaldo, Lavie, and Narayan 2018). Irving's account is illuminating in this respect since the walking dialogue between his counterparts Ssewankambo and Kaweesa is not his achievement alone, but a relational outcome of those involved in the situation. His agential role in the entire process is ambivalent: he is the one prompting the situation, but once the dialogue takes place, he assumes a secondary, passive part in the activity. Field devices are thus not the mere outcome of the anthropologist's individual activity, but an emergent accomplishment growing out of the relational entanglement of the ethnographic encounter.

Although the projects we have brought together move away from the (imagined) conventions of ethnography, we make no claims of novelty, and certainly do not invoke any kind of methodological innovation: such an approach would once more risk endorsing romantic understandings of creativity. Instead, the creativity involved in these projects describes an activity that recombines and recontextualizes objects to produce outcomes that are deemed valuable. These valuable objects are, in this discussion, what we have called field devices. They emerge as adaptations of standard techniques such as interviews (Streule, Irving), draw on previous life experiences (Pierotti and Giordano), extend previous ethnographic insights (Pérez-Bustos) or are the outcome of experimental remediations of ethnography (Estalella).<sup>7</sup> Further, we argue that even the most conventional ethnographic practice – say, participant observation or interviews – requires a quantity of creativity. We believe the ethnographic encounter has the same nature as any social interaction, as Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam have argued: 'There is no script for social and cultural life. People have to work it out as they go along. In a word, they have to improvise' (2007, 1).

The invention we invoke is not equated to innovations that overcome conventions. The ethnographic invention we signal is a moving ratio that tensions the relation between invention and convention: it is not in the nature of things but in the relational act (or description) of our relations



within the field. Let us consider, for instance, Letizia Bonanno's contribution, a personal take on the practice of ethnographic drawing, a technique that has become widely popular among anthropologists over recent years.<sup>8</sup> Whilst some hail the novelty of this approach, we should perhaps acknowledge that since the end of the 19th century, anthropologists as diverse as Alfred Cort Haddon, Arthur Bernard Deacon, and Claude Lévi-Strauss have used drawings in their fieldwork. Certainly, present-day ethnographic drawing differs in its orientation, function, and articulation, but it is not a newcomer to anthropology. Depending on how it is related, ethnographic drawing could thus be described as a conventional technique or an inventive approach. This case illustrates the ever-present tension between convention and invention, insightfully described by Wagner: '[i]nvention and convention stand in a dialectical relationship to one another, a relationship of simultaneous interdependence and contradiction' (Wagner 1981, 43). Hence, invention and convention are mutually dependent in his account and, even more interestingly, tradition (and its conventions) is the outcome of an inventive process that masks its own presence: in other words, we invent our own conventions.

For too long, anthropology has masked and obviated its creative practice by conventionalizing its tales of the field under the figure of method. By invoking the integral creativity of the ethnographic encounter, we seek, on one hand, to counter the absolute primacy of method as the descriptive figure used to account for empirical situations, and on the other, to offer a conceptualization that acknowledges the inventive condition of the field situation. This invention takes expression in unstable, provisional and situated arrangements that we have called field devices. Far from totalizing methodological approaches, these should be regarded as concrete interventions, made relevant by their capacity to respond to specific ethnographic situations. There is thus a certain irreducibility to each and every field device, since they bear the imprint of the field from which they emerged. Lacking the formal abstraction and replicability of method, they are nonetheless of exceptional value: when a method cannot cope with the unruliness of the ethnographic situation, field devices 'open possibility for other possibilities [...] a structured space for improvisation' (Ballestero 2019, 9). Andrea Ballestero's description of the technical instruments – that she also terms devices – of activists and technicians involved in the production of knowledge about water is also an appropriate description here.

A shared quality of some accounts in this book demonstrate that field devices are carefully devised sociomaterial dispositions, arranging spaces for specific activities intended to produce generative situations for the anthropologist and all involved in the ethnographic project. This is the case, for instance, with the theatrical workshops of Greg Pierotti and Cristiana Giordano – dedicated to Affect Theater – aimed at discussing how, whilst fieldwork enables anthropologists to 'get caught' in research, their practice enables 'getting caught anew' in the empirical material during the process of

collectively composing theatrical episodes. The counter-mapping workshops organized by the 3Cs collective, Counter-Cartographies Collective (originally founded at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), illuminates further elements of the activities through which anthropologists devise spaces for collective inquiry, in this case around the activity of producing maps that not only represent territory but are also able to create relations to explore relevant issues. As we argue in the next and final section, it is out of the possibilities opened by field devices that anthropologists may find relevant questions.

### **Inventing relevant questions**

Anthropologists have diverse ways of approaching and understanding ethnography, whether through the centrality of writing, the singular experience of participant observation, or the learning qualities of fieldwork. These are common conceptualizations that highlight relevant dimensions of the ethnographic endeavour. This inventory grows out of a conceptualization that seeks to bring to the fore a commonly ignored dimension: the relational creativity of the field encounter. Ethnography, we propose, is an act of invention: anthropologists invent ethnographic relations in – and out of – the field. In this formulation we draw on Marilyn Strathern's (2020) vision of the anthropological endeavour as one founded on relations. As she argues, anthropologists use relations to investigate relations, producing analytical relations in the elaboration of arguments and creating descriptive relations in their expository representations. We extend Strathern's argument to include in this vision the empirical relations integral to the ethnographic encounter: the relations that anthropologists establish in the field.

As we have recounted, anthropology is fully cognizant of the creativity essential to the production of its descriptive (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and analytical relations (Wagner 1981). In sharp contrast, it has rarely admitted the creativity of relations in the field. This differentiated understanding reproduces the romantic vision that restricts creativity to those practices usually described as intellectual – writing, analysis, and conceptualization – whilst ignoring the creative improvisation integral to everyday social relations. However, as the anthropological study of creativity has demonstrated, our social life is intrinsically inventive: 'mundane activities become as much the locus of cultural creativity as the arduous ruminations of the lone artist or scientist' (Rosaldo, Lavie, and Narayan 2018, 5). The contributions to this Inventory demonstrate that anthropologists constantly engage in improvisational and inventive practices in their ethnographic encounter beyond the conventions of methods, they always resort to invention. The field devices described here account for the agential role of anthropologists addressing the ethnographic encounter and creatively disposing the conditions for their relations. The ultimate goal of these dispositions is always the same: to find relevant questions.

This is not a minor task. Much less so at a time when, as Martin Savransky (2016) has argued, the relevance of the social sciences is under threat. To reinvigorate this relevance in these particularly tumultuous times may require partaking in what he describes as an adventure, one that demands we ‘produce tools to cultivate a sensibility capable of opening up a different care of knowledge for the contemporary social sciences’ (2016, 35) so that we might be able to invent modes of posing relevant questions. Savransky traces the notion of invention to its pre-modern sense when it involved an activity of creative fabrication and discovery. Invention, in his elaboration, encompasses ‘a singular attentiveness to the many versions of how things come to matter in a specific situation, and a constrained creativity that might allow the latter to find a manner of encountering the situation such that a problem that matters can be defined’ (2016, 78). Our use of the notion of invention stresses this twofold dimension: we conceive ethnography as an activity aimed at *devising* the dispositions for the ethnographic relation in order that relevant questions may be discovered, or even invented. The activity of *devising* inquiries is thus a creative improvisational process that explores what may be relevant for a given situation in a twofold sense: how to respond to the conditions of the ethnographic encounter in a relevant manner so that relevant questions may be invented.

Thinking of ethnography as an act of invention is our reaction to the widespread experience that our modes of inquiry are not up to the challenges of our contemporary worlds. By signaling the inventive condition of the field encounter, we seek to provide a conceptualization of ethnography that is faithful to what really occurs within the empirical situation. We expect this effort will animate the creative engagements required to pose relevant questions in ethnographic investigations. In a world on the verge of collapse, it is more necessary than ever to come to terms with the way we practice empirical inquiries and produce novel accounts of our ethnographic practices. While Anand Pandian (2019) has formulated the challenge of these uneasy times as one of imagining the world as it may yet be, we formulate a correlated endeavour that we deem as relevant: to speculate with ethnography as it may yet be. This enterprise demands anthropologists avoid the historical obviation of the inventive condition of their field practices by offering relations of them: thus, this Inventory. Perhaps the time has come to take the invention of ethnographic inquiries more seriously. In our view, this requires speculating with what ethnography might be by acknowledging what ethnography has always been: an act of invention.

## Notes

- 1 The relevance that material engagement and design practices have for constructing ethnographic field practices is demonstrated in other contributions to the Inventory. This is the case for Ignacio Farías and Tomás Sánchez Criado’s piece in how the process of designing and testing a game enabled projecting field sites and

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- staging relations with activists and civic initiatives to study of housing and real estate markets. A similar case is presented in Adolfo Estalella's account of a project of urban pedagogy involving the design of a digital infrastructure in collaboration with his ethnographic counterparts in Madrid, the urban guerrillas Zuloark and Basurama. In both cases, the practice of material design is an essential part of their inquiry into the city. Finally, Rachel Harkness' contribution discusses a series of creative field devices that entail paying close attention to the life stories of materials in the field. What is important is the ecological relations in which the ethnographer is embedded and the possibility of flowing with materials.
- 2 We find this careful scenographic practice in Francisco Martínez's discussion of curatorial practices, where the exhibition is not merely an activity dedicated to displaying objects but a device for ethnographic inquiry. The design activity is, for Martínez, an interventionist practice that arranges objects and people in a careful way and offers the anthropologist the possibility of cultivating surprise. Other contributions pay similar attention to the careful design of situations in which to relate to their counterparts.
  - 3 This is the case with Helen Verran's disconcertment, a response to those situations that cause the anthropologist epistemic trouble. Verran proposes cultivating the capacity for disconcertment and being attentive to 'the sense of not knowing how to know', because this sensation is significant. In her case, it demands assemblage stories able to foreground the disconcertment the ethnographer has experienced.
  - 4 This is clearly the goal of the photo-stories device designed by Sevasti-Melissa Nolas, Christos Varvatakis and Vinnarasan Aruldoss in their effort to investigate the relationship between childhood and public life, a collective certainly difficult to investigate. To make public the children's experiences with public life, they articulate a practice of photography carried out by children with exhibitions and other techniques.
  - 5 The contributions of Monika Streule and Tania Pérez-Bustos illuminate two completely different empirical trajectories through which field devices can emerge. While Streule adapts conventional methodological techniques such as interviews and participant observation to explore heterogeneous urban territories, setting ethnography in motion in dialogue with recent developments in mobile methods, embroidering together creates an intimate atmosphere for Pérez-Bustos and her ethnographic counterparts, one that demands careful listening and where questions are answered through embroidery.
  - 6 The distinction we make between devices and field devices thus differentiates between conventional arrangements – what we have called plain devices, such as participant observation – and the improvisational and inventive 'field devices' that emerge out of the field encounter.
  - 7 As the contributions to this Inventory demonstrate, sources of inspiration for devising field devices are manifold. The world of art and digital technologies are certainly two primary sources of inspiration for a number of contributions (Núñez and Suárez, Estalella, Patel and Postill, Pierotti and Giordano, Martínez). The work on *pathosformeln* by Anthony Stavrianakis is illustrative of inspiration from the world of art. The formula used to express pathos is a means for Stavrianakis to attend to the gestures of people involved in the processes of assisted suicide. In these extremely difficult situations, the concept of *pathosformeln* offers the ethnographer a way to render visible the relevance of their interlocutors' final

gestures. The epidemiography of Shama Patel and John Postill is the outcome of seizing the distinctive qualities of digital technologies to investigate viral phenomena on the Internet, turning ethnography into an investigation of unfolding digital mediated events.

- 8 See *Illustrating Anthropology*, an online exhibition supported by the Royal Anthropological Institute: <https://illustratinganthropology.com/> (Accessed May 31, 2022).

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