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**Title:**

Beyond the ethnographic turn: (re)-conceptualisations of, and approaches to, selfhood and otherness in the *Dis-Location/Re-Location* project

**Abstract**

Twenty years after Hal Forster (1995) conceptualised ‘The ethnographic turn in contemporary art’, it may be argued that artwork which has similarities with anthropology and ethnography in its theorisations of identity politics, the politics of representation and cultural difference, has become standard practice in the global art arena (an example being *All the World's Futures*, curated by Okwui Enwezor for the Venice Biennale 2015). Indeed, Forster’s theorisation of artists representing alterity and otherness has, under the rubric of representational politics (the ethics of representing, speaking for, of, to, and with the other), been subject to critique, not only within the visual arts, but also in fields across the Humanities. Given the plethora of theoretical positions that has been covered regarding the ethics of representation, this terrain is well worn; quite simply, it no longer seems possible, desirable, or productive to frame debates around representation in terms of Self /Other as clearly distinguishable categories.

Therefore, with reference to my Practice-Led Research project titled *Dis-Location/Re-Location* (2007-2012), I consider alternative ways of conceptualising selfhood and otherness in visual representation; what forms might these take, and what methodological approaches might be employed in their realisation. In *Dis-Location*, as in many contemporary art projects, conceptualisations of the dichotomous Self/Other shifts towards the framing of subject positions in terms of heterogeneous identity formations – such as hybridity, creolisation, entanglement – emerging from processes of cross-cultural contact and exchange. Working from within these subject positions necessitates awareness of one’s positionality: the multiple, shifting historical, political, geographic, social and cultural contexts that constitute the place from which one speaks.

*Dis-Location* is a multi-dimensional engagement with archival material, biographical narratives, and South African colonial cultural history, articulated through installation, sculptural, video, photographic and performative work, as well as textual outputs. As an alternative to Forster’s ethnographic approach, I use autoethnography as a primary research method. Referring to the self (‘auto’); culture (‘ethno’) and the act of writing (‘graphy’) (Munro 2011:162), it offers a reflexive account of personal experience that is not only autobiographical but reflects the subject’s understanding of her “personal history [as] implicated in larger social formations and historical processes” (Russell 1999). The artwork thus offers a space for the “staging of subjectivity” wherein the self-reflexive self, constituted through its positionality, is performed (*ibid.*).

**Sources cited**

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Russell, C. 1999. (ed). 1999. *Experimental ethnography: the work of film in the age of video*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

**Bio:**

Leora Farber graduated with a BA Fine Art, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985; MA Fine Art (*Cum Laude*) University of the Witwatersrand; and a DPhil Visual Art (Creative Production), University of Pretoria, 2013. She is currently Associate Professor in the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (FADA), University of Johannesburg (UJ), where she holds the position of Director, Visual Identities Art and Design (VIAD) Research Centre (2007- ). She practices as an artist, writer, curator, and supervises MTech students and Post-doctoral Fellows. [http://leorafarber.co.za/?page\\_id=9](http://leorafarber.co.za/?page_id=9)