

## Return to Reinvent

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We end this academic year with the world in trouble once again (and as usual). We can track dilemmas of violence and power along academic industries, anthropology networks, and amidst global wars and atrocities. In our spring 2022 issue, our authors' insights and analyses feel like generative responses to these dilemmas. Collaborative ethnographies, archival explorations, and visual media reframing reimagine how anthropologists might respond to the emergencies that shape our contemporary moment. Smaller struggles of overextension confront us as our own editorial office transitions, reflecting a new academy composed of mostly pre-tenured and contingent scholars. Lee Douglas, our newest Editor-in-Chief, offers a wealth of insight into the themes of this issue, a return to visual archives and their materialities that can agitate ethnographic methods in productive ways. In partnership with Darcie DeAngelo, our first issue together addresses experiences with return and reentry. These themes resonate with what we suspect is a collective sense that reentry into a supposedly “post” pandemic world is a false start. Reflecting on the intersections between our editorial labor and broader academic responsibilities, we are increasingly aware of how we (and many of our fellows) spend energy compartmentalizing dilemmas from our everyday experiences. As editors, we sought to curate this issue in a way that illuminated how our authors are taking on such compartmentalization—the bracketing of everyday obstacles and academic commitments—by returning to anthropological archives, renewing citational politics, and reframing media in the context of postcolonial histories.

When anthropologists conceptualize returns, they often emphasize migrations that reinstate belonging. In these formulations, to return is to restitute and recuperate stability. Returning, however, can also be disruptive, disquieting, and uncertain, challenging ideas of consistency and stability. Despite return and reentry's emphasis on location, rootedness, and fixity, these movements are also geographically and temporally unsettling. We believe that the concept of return is valuable for its ability to emphasize the uncertainty of location and the straddling of multiple temporalities that allow here and there—past, present, and future—to overlap and coincide. Following the work of anthropologist Charles McDonald ([2019](#)), return is therefore both “a referent” and “a means and objective.” As he notes, drawing on the work of memory scholars Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller, “Returns can also ‘be directed back toward the past, sideways to detours and alternative trajectories, and, as a critique of the present, forward toward the future’” (Hirsch and Miller [2011](#), 18; in McDonald [2019](#)). This reverberates with feminist poet Adrienne Rich's lecture “Notes Towards a Politics of Location,” where she explained, “I've been thinking a lot about the obsession with origins. It seems a way of stopping time in its tracks” (1984 [[1986](#)], 227). Here, a return to origins, precedent, things, and events from *before*, is not a call to inhabit the past, but rather a way to cross temporalities, to recognize the simultaneousness of intersecting oppressions.

This issue features two dialogues and a research article that return to past archives regarding ethnographic photographic engagements that can unsettle our origin stories of anthropology. In her research article, “Translating the Field,” Jaanika Vider uncovers one of the “many-gendered mothers of our hearts” (Nelson [2015](#)) with her investigation of the methods of Russian Arctic explorer and early twentieth-century anthropologist, Maria Czaplicka, who produced

ethnographic photographs of Siberia. Rather than documenting evidence, Vider argues that Czaplicka relied on the “excess” of photography to translate faraway places for general audiences. Her public anthropology offers a model for outreach beyond academic communities, a story that continues with our dialogues. Both highlight the accomplishments of image-makers who center Indigenous stories and partnerships in their work.

These archival returns also trace new kinships and forms of authorship. The dialogues map collaborations forged by politically engaged image-makers committed to creating new modes of representation. Rowena Pott's conversations with Juno Gemes and Frances Peters-Little reveal how photographic and filmic documentary practices are entangled with Aboriginal rights movements, thus illustrating a common genealogy that situates image authorship as inevitably linked to the making and staking of claims through media representations. These genealogies demonstrate that making images and claiming rights have not been separate processes, but rather simultaneous movements that are collective and collaborative. Similarly, Christine Mladic Janney's conversation with Nora Izcue highlights the alliances and networks brought into being through Peruvian documentary film projects that sought to shed light on agrarian reform while also depicting indigenous, Quechua-speaking life experiences in “more realistic and personal” ways. The conversation unpacks how political struggles specific to Peru were depicted by new forms of documentary practice that, while locally specific, were also connected to a growing network of Latin American filmmakers engaged in developing a new documentary gaze. Stretching from Latin America's Southern Cone with new works from Miguel Littín in Chile, to the articulation of Brazilian Cinema Novo, and finally to the Caribbean where the International School of Film and TV in Cuba played an active role in training a new generation of politically engaged filmmakers, New Latin American Cinema was a movement that established alternative creative kinships among image-makers dedicated to narrating and making visible political and social realities across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mapping these artistic kinships also resonates with Camila Sastre Díaz' critique of Giuliana Borea's book *Configuring the New Lima Art Scene*, which describes the production and circulation of contemporary Peruvian art. As Sastre Díaz notes, the author charts the representations, artistic narratives, and institutions that congeal in Lima “to define the ‘contemporary’” in a context that is shaped by neoliberal logics as well as an embrace of new urban subjectivities. Here, artistic networks are, in part, brought into being and reinforced by art fairs, events that Borea describes as being akin to *linderaje*, Andean border-making rituals. Ethnographic attention to artistic practice and the circulation of artworks brings to light how new cultural kinships are constituted, celebrated, and even challenged. Concurrently, Borea uses “trajectory” to refer to a series of conversations between herself, the anthropologist, and the artists whose work she tracks. While the word certainly emphasizes the growth and expansion of artists' careers, it also refers to the circulation and movement of their artworks and to the evolution of the complex art world and cultural networks that they inhabit. Transforming interviews into readable conversations, Borea's “trajectories” reveal new forms of constituting anthropological knowledge, interactions that suggest the co-construction of meaning, and the collective articulation of forms of sociality. In Lisette Gamboa's review of *The Vulgarities of Democracy*, she follows X. Andrade's trajectory through archives of underground political pornographic materials. Andrade's work investigates how such imagery constitutes power and resistance in the construction of masculinity. Underpinning these delineations of new origin

stories, alternative kinships, and new imaginaries is a commitment to another, indeed, radical politics of citation. In the research article *On Finishing*, authorship is shared between anthropologist Eimear Mc Loughlin and farm manager John Casey who contributes to the piece stories about and photographs of the animals on his Irish thoroughbred stud farm. In this case, co-authorship is a conscious decision that positions the anthropologist's interlocutor as a co-participant in the production of multi-species worlds where cattle are important receivers of forms of care. Reflections on “finishing” are, thus, not only observations of animal sacrifice, but rather reflections on the affective relationships, new kinships, and practices of care that are central to sustaining farm life.

Affective reflections can also reframe what has already been remembered as Karen Strassler's Page feature, “Fragments of Memory,” shows through the author's return to her personal fieldwork archive. She reframes decades-old field notes from ethnographic research, reflecting on the memories that arise and the emergence of associated archival images from a collective memorialization of mass violence in Indonesia. Drawing from image theory, she uses layout to portray *imagetexts*, fragmented field notes upon photographs that she has deliberately curated to be cropped or represented as fragments. Her layout design also responds to the media reframings imposed upon *VAR* by our publisher, Wiley, who has urged us to rethink the Page not as a two-page spread that reads right to left, but rather, as a vertical pdf. Karen has suggested a layout that works across both, as the vertical layout (re)presents further fragmentation, allowing the design to speak to the “disruptive force of traumatic memories of unresolved violence” no matter how it is framed. Her project first appeared as part of an Indonesian artist's crowd-sourced memorial, *Living1965setiaphari* (Living1965everyday) where Indonesian artists sought to reveal the silences and memories surrounding the trauma inflicted by a violent dictatorship. While the image texts originally appeared in that memorial, here in *VAR* they are reframed once again, opening up new conceptualizations and new memorialization that undermine taken-for-granted remembrances and unearth new moments that sometimes portray terror and pain, but most often, reveal courage and kinship.

War and trauma follow in two of our critiques that concern how television mediates conflict and identity. Timothy P. A. Cooper discusses *Religious Television and Pious Authority in Pakistan* by Taha Kazi and the “televised pluralism” that is less pluralist than meets the eye in Kazi's fieldsite. The television confirms its religious stars with “pious authority” that echoes media worlds in other places where audiences become bifurcated and are “[encouraged] to pick sides.” Narges Bajoghli complicates that thesis with her review of *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars: Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Activists* by Wazmah Osman, which draws from Osman's fieldwork in Afghanistan under US occupation. Bajoghli deftly underlines the importance of such a book to offer insight into not only propaganda during wartime but also into Afghanistan's media worlds and resistance. Bajoghli explains that Osman's ethnography “carefully threads a more nuanced way to understand the ‘imperial gaze’ and ‘development gaze’ apparent in this timeframe of Afghanistan's history.” In her book, media makers address warlords, US political and economic influence, race, and protests. This review dovetails with Diana Young's consideration of museum objects appropriated from Aboriginal Australian people in her research article, “What Do (Museum) Objects Want?” In it, she documents how museum curators themselves address the colonial weight of the sacred objects they seek to display and to “assert [the objects'] right to look back.” As a museum practitioner herself, Young collaborates

with Indigenous colleagues to photograph museum collections in ways that subvert how these archives are usually cataloged. In her return to the archive, she disrupts imagistic standards so that museum objects play, return gazes, and even travel.

We end this introduction with thanks to our reviewers who take on the burden of academic service to help us curate collections like this one. At the beginning of this year, VAR co-hosted a AAA workshop with other editors and our newest VAR board member, previous editor-in-chief Stephanie Sadre-Orafai, where we discussed the media world of academic publishing. We called this webinar “Precarious Positions” to attend to the increasing number of contingent positions in academia, something reflected in the makeup of our own editorial office. While editors-in-chief have traditionally been tenured professors and more senior scholars, in the last few years VAR's editorship roles have fallen to two more junior scholars. These shifts influence our thoughts on knowledge production, academic publishing, and anthropology in general.

What do these shifts in the academic landscape—in the labor of research and writing—mean for our field? While as a rule we seek out reviewers who are more senior, most of our reviews are done by tenure track, recently tenured, and even independent scholars. Adding to this, this spring faced us with an increased number of reviewers who dropped away and writers who could not commit to revisions. The sense of burnout seems to overshadow any feelings of return as revival. We want to acknowledge this hesitance about post-pandemic reentry. With it, we also acknowledge the service of our community of increasingly precarious workers, service that is integral to the ways in which anthropology produces knowledge. For us, visual anthropology offers ways to rethink the value of our research and the methods we employ. We believe this also provides an opportunity to reconsider the power structures that shape our discipline. Thus, our reentry to a post-pandemic world is a return with unease but hopefully marked by new kinships and alternative ways of acknowledging the power disparities that can disrupt our taken-for-granted means of knowledge production. In this issue, return and reentry are just that, ways to recognize, reflect and revisit, but also to reinvent and reshape. We can reclaim positionality and location to confront and question the uncertainty pervading our contemporary moment where the world is in trouble *once again and as usual*.

## References

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