

Art-writing in the modern Maya art world of Chichén Itzá:

Transcultural ethnography and experimental fieldwork

ABSTRACT

In this article I examine the modern Maya art world of Chichén Itzá, México. My ethnographic focus is the political history and technical and aesthetic development of the Pisté Maya art “tradition” that emerged within the transcultural contexts of the anthropological fascination with and touristic consumption of the Maya. I also describe the experimental ethnography project that was developed to study the transcultural dynamics of the Chichén art world. [*transculturation, anthropology of art, fieldwork, art exhibition, ethnographic installation, therapy, emergent audience*]

Anthropology is irreducibly entangled in the “making” of art.¹ In all of its heterogeneous forms, anthropology colludes, wittingly or not, in the making of the complex hierarchies of value, power, status, wealth, and markets that comprise art worlds (Becker 1982; Danto 1964). Studies by Clifford (1988, 1997), García Canclini (1995), Marcus and Myers (1995), and others (e.g., Graburn 1984; Jules-Rosette 1984; Price and Price 1992; Root 1996; Steiner 1994) illustrate how diverse kinds of anthropologies articulate with art institutions, artists, critics, the private sector, museums, collectors, governmental organizations, and other agents and agencies in the assignation of aesthetic values, cultural meanings, and commercial values. Anthropology is, in other words, an integral and inextricable component of the “field of cultural production” of art (Bourdieu 1993). Marcus and Myers (1995) note that these entanglements make the determination or the grounding of “critique”—both the criticism of art and the cultural critique of art worlds—a difficult task. They therefore ask what a “critical ethnography of art” might be.

The problem of art and ethnography

Critique in the world of art has been historically constructed on the idea that art is located outside of capitalist consumerism and of the politics of both the state and the bourgeois lifeworld. Critique in the world of anthropology is premised less on a scientific, objectivist distance from the object of study than on an analytical separation that nonetheless connects the subject and objects of study through or because of the ethnographer’s political empathy and motivation of engagement. The mutual involvement of and collusions between anthropology and art institutions make the place from which to construct an incontestable critical project, or simply the “external” grounds from which to construct critique, something of a mirage. The specific roles, relationships, and forms of anthropological complicity in the production, distribution, commercialization, valorization, and consumption of “art,” however, are empirical and historical questions. Using Carrier’s (1987) analysis of art criticism and exhibition as an

“art-writing” that creates and distributes value, Marcus and Myers (1995) point out that anthropological research on art is also, in effect, a mode of art-writing.

It is certainly true, however, that not all art-writings are of equal “strength” or efficacy in constituting the value and meanings of objects, and the idea that ethnography is also an art-writing points to the mutual reciprocity and interdependency of the discursive practices of anthropological research and of the artwork or art worlds that are the “objects” of those discourses. Further, this understanding reconceptualizes the modes of anthropological complicity and collusion with the art world under study as a necessary part of the object of study. Not only does the history of institutional entanglements thus become a part of the object of study but so also do one’s own research practices.

In so shifting the conception of its object of study, critique becomes dislodged from “solid ground” and hoisted—to use an old and familiar metaphor—into a web of entanglements that suspends itself. It is this mutual interdependency that reduces critical or objective “distance” as an absolute “external” ground of and for critique: Critique is found suspended in webs of significance that refer back to it as yet another form, or mode, of art-writing and to the institutions that enable, legitimize, and constrain such art-writings.

This shifted conceptualization of the object of study is a qualitative expansion not only of the “things” to be studied but also therefore of the problems, questions, and topics that are brought under scrutiny, that comprise the very research directed at those objects. This expansion might appropriately be signaled by a concern for “research positioning.” Although already implicit in the well-known idea of researcher positioning, what is at stake is not simply an account of the (subjective) positioning of the researcher in conducting research. It is also an inspection, however partial, perspectival, and strategic, of the position of the research project (and its practices) in the context of some aspect of the diverse (historical, cultural, social, political, and economic) fields in which and from which the research is conducted. Research positioning and researcher positioning provide a mobile “grounding” for “critique,” even as they leave open the nature of the ethnographic critique and the theoretical framing of the substantive research issues.

Whereas the mandate to account for “researcher positioning” was part of a theoretically diverse movement to develop forms and styles of reflexivity in both fieldwork and representation, “research positioning” may have more dramatic implications for a “paradigmatic” reconceptualization of research problems, that is, for the mode of conceptualizing not only the objects of study but also the problem that is researched. One path to such a rethinking of research problems is opened up if the issue of “research positioning” is connected to questions of transculturation.

In the present formulation, “transculturation” refers to dynamics of borrowing “cultural” elements from “cultural others” in “contact zones” (Pratt 1992) or situations of “culture contact.” More significantly, it also refers to the processes, practices, and dynamics by which those elements are adapted, refashioned, and revalorized as part of identity and belonging within the habitus of their “new” cultural home (Castañeda n.d.c; Coronil 1995; Ortiz 1995; Rama 1997). This cultural appropriation can occur with an erasure of the borrowing and of the elements’ origins in another culture or with a recognition (either positive or negative) of their original “belonging” to another culture. Further, this appropriation, in real historical circumstances, can occur with either an enlarging or a minimization of cultural difference; thus, transcultural approximation can produce both greater heterogeneity (sociocultural differentiation) and greater cultural “unity” (overt similarity and shared identification) between the cultures, groups, individuals, identities, customs, and communities involved. There is more to say about this concept as a theoretical framework, but the present concern with the notion stays close to the ground of ethnographic practice. The rethinking of how to investigate research positioning within the notion of transculturation facilitates not only the reconceptualization of objects of study but also the reformulation of the design of problems of ethnographic research. In short, the claim I make in this article—and the guiding assumption of the research I present here—is that ethnography is a transcultural enterprise.

This move to connect transculturation and research positioning might seem like yet another kind of reflexivity, but it should not be reduced to or confused with reflexivity, especially with types that seek somehow to attain an exhaustiveness or “totality.” The significance of such a connection instead resides in the possibility it provides for formulating new kinds of questions about the *empirical and transcultural* entanglements of anthropological practices and the “objects” being studied. To move in this direction, it is necessary to experiment with and develop new methodological approaches and practices. Thus, instead of comprising a *reflexivity that seeks to partially or holistically account for the self within the object*, the principles of transculturation and research positioning become *ethnographic strategies for actualizing and articulating already ongoing transcultural processes and dynamics*. The elaboration of these ideas defines the broader scope of this article.

Specifically, I present ethnographic fieldwork that was formulated within the problematization of ethnography just outlined. The particular task of this article is to describe and analyze aspects of a three-year, collaborative research project on contemporary Maya art from Chichén Itzá and Pisté, Yucatán, México, in relation to the following issues in the “critical ethnography of art”: first, the expansion of the

object of study from a detached, “external” reality to one that includes both researcher and *research* positioning; second, the reconceptualization of ethnographic research on art as an art-writing that intervenes in the making and negotiation of the meanings and values of art; and third, the examination of the nature and possibilities of “critique.” Underlying and linking these issues is the principle of transculturation. Thus, the presentation of this critical ethnography of modern Maya art aims to demonstrate the application of transculturation as methodological strategy, research and analytical tool, and object of study.

The object of study of this ethnographic account is, therefore, not simply the Pisté Maya art world of Chichén but also the ethnographic fieldwork intervening in that world. In negotiating this double task of ethnographic description—that is, in examining aspects of both the art world and its ethnographic study—I aim to offer an encompassing account of a project. By this, I mean to forewarn the reader that my emphasis is not the representation of fieldwork-produced “data” and their analysis in terms of the cultural or experiential meanings for those who might be regarded as the traditional subjects of study. Instead, this writing resonates with an older monographic genre of reporting research-in-progress. The overarching objective of this presentation *as an ethnographic article*, then, is not solely the analysis of ethnographic evidence produced in fieldwork but also the general description of how a conception of experimental fieldwork was put into practice. The itinerary moves from an account of the origins of the art to the contexts of tourism that situate the artisans, then to the aesthetic development of the art, and finally to the ethnographic research with the artisans, especially focusing on the use of transculturation and installation as strategies of experimental fieldwork. Although this ethnographic description of the modern Maya art world of Chichén contributes to various fields (Maya studies, anthropology of tourism, and politics of anthropology), the value of this essay might be primarily assessed as a description of work in progress and as a polemic that contributes to current discussions of ethnographic methods.

The Pisté Maya art world of Chichén Itzá

Many villages in Yucatan have some industry like hammock or hat making, the manufacture of pottery . . . , baskets, candles, or chocolate mixers, but Pisté has none of these. Some communities specialize in cattle-raising or henequen growing. Pisté grows no henequen and raises only a few cattle. It is primarily a corn-growing community, and nearly every man owns a cornfield. Pisté people who do have special trades have all come from other towns. Of

the two merchants, one is from Dzitas, the other from Merida. . . . During my observations in the village, I have never seen any evidence of hobbies among the men. No one carves stone or wood; no one is interested in learning to play a musical instrument well. . . . No one seems to feel the need of such diversion. It is true that the women care for flowers under all the adverse conditions of Yucatan, and they do embroider tablecloths and dresses purely for enjoyment. But there is an apparent lack of interest, as far as the men are concerned, in most forms of recreation. [Steggerda 1941:22, 24–25]

It seems prudent to accept Morris Steggerda’s claim that in the Pisté of the 1930s “no one carved wood or stone” or made other handicrafts, with the exception of women who produced embroidered textiles.² Steggerda’s view of the Pisteleños as rather insipid and uninventive, however, was dispelled 40 years later, in the mid-1970s, when a *guardian* at Chichén Itzá (a “park warden” employed at the site by the National Institute of Anthropology and History [INAH]) invented a unique tradition of carving stone and wood.³ The guardian decided to carve little wooden idols, modeled on the images of Maya gods found in hieroglyphic books, to sell to tourists. In the spirit of Steggerda, who collected data on internal migration, it should be noted that the man, Don Chablé, was not originally from Pisté but, rather, Oxkutzcab, and that he was later compelled, in part because of the *envidia*, or jealousy, he stirred up among his coworkers through the sale of his artwork, to transfer from Chichén to INAH’s archaeological zone at the Caves of Loltún, near his hometown. Nonetheless, what some anthropologists and collectors had come to call by 1999 *arte pisteño*, or Pisté Maya art, was truly a local development, emerging within the context of anthropological fascination with the ancient Maya as well as of the touristic marketing and consumption of that fascination. It was intrinsically a transcultural phenomenon in which an individual reappropriated his cultural past, both approximating that past as properly belonging to him and using it to mirror an identity for the Other to consume, all in a contact zone of archaeological tourism.

In the 1980s perhaps four hundred *vendedores* of handicrafts sold their merchandise to tourists at Chichén, and among them, at least 200–300 persons worked as artisans on a part-or full-time basis. Pisté figure carving was an “invented tradition” that had little local respect, but by the 1990s, it had solidified into a distinctive and varied artisanry. Producers of this artisanry began to participate in regional tourist fairs in México City and in state-sponsored handicraft competitions in Mérida; a Pisté artist (Gilberto Yam, discussed below) was awarded first place in the 1995 competition for one of his *ídolos*. Another expression of the maturation of the tradition occurred in

1997, when a three-year ethnographic project, the Ah Dzib P'izté' Project in Maya Art and Anthropology, was initiated and collaboration began with artisans and community authorities in the organization of a summer art exhibit.

Chac mooleros and the invasion of Chichén: A political history

When people from Pisté realized that Don Chablé's carvings quickly sold to visiting tourists at Chichén, many sought to copy his artisanry. Don Chablé, however, initially hid his artwork to prevent it from being copied. Eventually, under persistent pressure, he took on some young male apprentices, and the rather rudimentary techniques and styles he employed soon spread to an ever-increasing group of men. Those in the first generation of artisans were called *chac mooleros*. Locally, everyone understood that their carvings, which were being bought, if not exactly sold, as traditional handicrafts, comprised a "false" tradition or, to use the academic terminology of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1985), an *invented tradition*. The usual interpretation is that the name *chac moolero* was derived from the figure that was most commonly carved, that is, the Chac Mool. The name, however, might have been used in sardonic reference to the archaeological misnaming and misinterpretation of that most famous of sculptures.⁴ The *chac mooleros* were mostly young men who combined handicraft production with agricultural production, engaging in the latter activity most intensively during the tourist off-season (September to mid-December and mid-May through June). In the context of a booming tourist economy and an increasingly calamity-ridden agricultural market, these men turned increasingly to the tourist sector, which gave them greater autonomy and, as it turned out, quick and high profit.

These *artesanos*, or artisans, were both producers and sellers. Initially, they established a relatively amicable relationship with the INAH wardens of Chichén. Prior to 1983, when the artisans were still few in number, the wardens, who lived in an *encampamiento*, or camp-settlement of houses constructed inside the legally defined archaeological zone, allowed the *chac mooleros* to sell inside the zone near the gated entrances to the ruins (see Breglia 2003). This arrangement was allowed, no doubt, for several reasons: The wardens and *artesanos* were friends or, at least, acquaintances; and the *artesanos* were few in number and the products they sold did not compete with the tourist commodities (such as food, beverages, maps, books, postcards, and selected handicrafts from México and the Yucatec region) that the families of INAH employees sold from their homes.⁵

In the period 1980–83, Pisté was still a relatively small community whose economic base was soon to be transformed from its primary focus on agriculture to full-blown dependence on tourism (see Castañeda 1996:68–93, in

press b). Several things happened to bring about this transformation. First, the end of a construction phase in the Cancun development project led to an increase in unemployment. Many Yucatecans, including males from rural communities, who had been commuting to the coastal tourist destination in the state of Quintana Roo, returned to their hometowns in the state of Yucatán in search of work. Second, the state government of Yucatán began to intervene more directly in the tourist sector of the economy with infrastructural development, planning, investment, and, in 1985, with the ownership of a tourist regulatory agency and business. Third, a new entrance was constructed at Chichén, which entailed the relocation of INAH families to Pisté as well as the concentration of all tourist businesses to the new entrance area. Fourth, the Mexican debt crisis began in 1983 and continued to the presidency of Salinas de Gortari in 1988. Locally, these factors led to the dramatic expansion in the sale of all types of tourist products; the number of *vendedores* increased from half a dozen to over 400 within a year. As they became more numerous, vendors came into increasing conflict not only with each other but also with the INAH wardens, whose mandate to protect the site served as a cloak for their own collective and individual economic interests; with handicraft store owners throughout the region; and with tour guides, who earned commissions from handicraft stores by bringing in charter groups. This incredible increase in tourist vending was only physically possible because vendors began to illegally invade the archaeological zone in search of strategic spaces and opportunities to sell to tourists (see Figure 1).

The invasion became a crisis of multiple dimensions that has ebbed and flowed from 1983 to the present day (e.g., Castañeda 1998; Himpele and Castañeda 1997). As an urgent project in applied, or practicing, anthropology, the invasion was studied by a team of social anthropologists from the INAH-CRY (Morales Valderrama et al. 1989; Peraza López and Rejón Patrón 1989; Peraza López et al. 1987). Their published report included an analysis of the economic causes of the invasion, which the anthropologists viewed as resulting from the decline in construction work for rural commuters in the early 1980s and from a decline in agricultural productivity. Their study, which offered a brief description of the sociopolitical organization of vendors in a dozen loose and contentious factions, concluded with a set of recommendations for the resolution of the invasion. Most significantly, these included the construction of an *ejido*, or collectively run, handicraft market and hotel.⁶

For present purposes, the significance of this state-sponsored project in social anthropology is not the recommendations themselves or whether or not or to what degree they were actualized. Rather, what is significant is that the fieldwork and analysis were conducted in full



Figure 1. Invading vendors inside the archaeological zone at Chichén Itzá at an intersection of paths near the homes of the INAH wardens, March 20, 1995. The teenagers in the foreground, third-generation artesanos, are seated behind a display of finished, painted ídolos. In the background to the right, a row of mascarones carved on tabla, or flat boards, and a row of ídolos can be seen.

realization of the inextricable involvement and complicity of anthropologies in all dimensions of the sociopolitical and economic problem of the invasion. Analysis of this entanglement would be intricate, for even though the form of anthropology that was involved was that of the institutionalized INAH, this agency is structurally segmented and is extremely fractured along lines of unions, work locations, areas of investigation, technical specializations, structures of authority, bureaucratic relations with diverse governmental institutions, and internal political factions and networks. Thus, one must understand the anthropology of the INAH, which is both governmental science and state bureaucracy, to be intrinsically plural and heterological. The implication here is that one cannot analyze the situation in terms of the impact of anthropology as something that intervened in the social events and relationship from some “external” location; anthropologies were already a historical part of the situation and, indeed, constitutive of its very context and dynamics.

At the height of the crisis in 1985 the state government of Yucatán negotiated with the INAH, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), and the Secretaría de Turismo (SECTUR) to create a state-run agency that would invest in, own, operate, and regulate the touristic dimensions of the archaeological sites of patrimony that are open to the public. This agency, called Patronato de las Unidades de Servicios Culturales y Turísticos del Estado de Yucatán (CULTUR), is under the direct control of the governor,

and it became critical not only in resolving the invasion but also in shaping and structuring the future of tourism in Yucatán. CULTUR, with Fondo Nacional de Turismo (FONATUR) funds, programmed a new entrance complex, or *parador*, at Chichén that included a traditional handicraft market, called the Tianguis, to which all of the invading vendedores were to be relocated.⁷ The *parador* opened in 1987 in time for the spring equinox (a major state-sponsored tourist ritual) and permanently changed the dynamic of the tourist marketing of handicrafts at Chichén (see Castañeda 1998).

Over the next decade Chichén and the streets of Pisté continued to be invaded by disaffected vendors (see Himpele and Castañeda 1997). In the political landscape of the state of Yucatán, Pisté represented an ongoing problem for the operation of the most important tourist destination among Maya cultural attractions. Further, although some sectors of the community were clearly prospering from the tourism economy, the artisans and artisanry of Pisté were excluded throughout the 1980s and 1990s from various governmental projects that targeted the development of folk and Indigenous handicrafts. Thus, in the institutional landscape, Pisté Maya art was a kind of culturally and socially illegitimate child if, nonetheless, also a highly marketable product. Despite the high potential and suitability for (state and private sector) appropriation of Pisté figures as iconic symbols of Yucatán, Maya culture-folk society, and traditional México—and even of one’s restaurant or travel agency—this artwork has remained outside of, and excluded from, the processes of hybridization and reconversion of cultural capital that García Canclini (1995) has analyzed (see Castañeda n.d.a for a discussion of the sociocultural and aesthetic value of Pisté art). For whatever reason, the institutions of art and anthropology in Mérida that interface with artisans locate Pisté artisanry as an invented, false, deceitful tourist kitsch. Thus, the market value of the work is wholly dependent on the tourist consumption that occurs in the market at Chichén and, to a lesser degree, the ancillary markets (for this artwork) of Mérida, Cancun, Cozumel, and Isla Mujeres. It was in the context of this political history and of the tourist marketing of the art that I shifted my research focus from the politics of tourism to initiate ethnographic research “on” the art and with the producers. These prior analyses and understandings of the art, however, compelled the design of a project that would not only make methodological use of the transculturation processes that shape the Chichén art world but that would also take as its object of study the diverse transcultural dynamics that inhabit the artwork.

The work of art in Pisté, from chac mooleros to artesanos

At the start of the second field season in 1998, the Ah Dzib P’izté’ team of researchers held a meeting with artisans

who had participated in the 1997 exhibition and with all other interested artisans of Pisté. The purpose was to present our research plans. The agenda included a focus group, organized as an artisan workshop on Classic-period Maya hieroglyphs and iconography, and a second exhibition in the town hall. We also presented our long-range goals of establishing an annual exhibition in collaboration with artisans and authorities and of writing both academic and commercial art books. Among the writing projects, we envisioned a species of ethnographic art catalog that would highlight specific artisans, their individual artwork, and the aesthetic and social development of the art. During our dialogue with them, the artisans questioned our reasons for doing the project. What were our economic motives, they asked, and why should they participate? What real immediate and future economic benefits would result for them?

Our aims were academic—to develop an experimental ethnography that did not merely study but also engaged the transcultural processes involved in the creation and marketing of the art—cast within a moral vision of anthropology as a critical and ethical engagement: We wanted to do an ethnography that was relevant to and beneficial for the collaborating subjects who chose to participate in the research. This was not, however, an “action research” project that was instigated, designed, and conducted by locals. On the contrary, we on the research team designed it and sought collaborators. Naturally, some artisans ignored or thought ill of the project, and others sought to participate in diverse ways. (Self-selection by possible

informants to participate in research in different ways and to different degrees is a fundamental principle of all fieldwork.) Recognizing that an ethnography of the art could not assume a value-free, objectivist, and detached position, we wanted to develop a project that would actively and conscientiously participate in the political economy of the aesthetic, sociocultural, and commercial values of the art.⁸ Given its power to effect revalorizations of exhibited objects and creators (Greenberg et al. 1996:2), we chose exhibition as the dominant strategy of fieldwork. One goal of such a strategy was to introduce at the local level more positive attitudes toward and appreciation of both the artisans and the artwork.

In the context of this meeting, one of the artisans, Wilberth Serrano, recounted an anecdote. He explained that throughout the crisis of the invasion, from 1983 to 1987, various state, federal, and union authorities had held meetings with all of the invading artisans and vendors. Many of these authorities, especially from the unions, had little respect for the *chac mooleros* and *vendedores* or their work, and they exhibited little sympathy for illegal acts of invasion and disruption of tourism at Chichén. At one meeting, however, the director of the INAH, Alfredo Barrera Rubio, sought to convey that the institute was seeking an honest and equitable resolution for all parties. He told those assembled that they, the invading handicraft producers, should stop calling themselves “*chac mooleros*,” that they were legitimate *artesanos*; not only should they recognize themselves as such, but they should also insist that others treat them with respect. Wilberth asserted that



Figure 2. Traditional and second-generation carved figures, 1989. The four figures on the left include (from left to right) two mascarones (one in profile and one full frontal), a *tabla* figure of a Maya king-warrior, and a Corn God (note corncob between legs) who bears a Chac Mool on his head. The middle set of five figures includes a Feathered Serpent in front of alternating Corn God *ídolos* and Young Corn God busts. The three figures on the right are (from left to right) Ixchel (note emerging child between legs), the God of Medicine, and the Corn God. All except the God of Medicine are carved from pich wood.

this speech was a significant moment for many artesanos because the director's comments instilled in them a new sense of pride and feelings of legitimacy. The director's remarks signaled that the work of the *chac mooleros* had finally been transformed, at least categorically, from a "false" or invented tradition to a real, legitimate, and respectable form of artisanry and that the work was recognized as such by a governmental and anthropological audience based in Mérida. Given the seven years of antagonism between the invading artisans and vendors, on the one hand, and the INAH and its employees at Chichén, on the other, Barrera Rubio's statement was a significant public acknowledgment. Beyond the effective performativity of this speech act, the artwork had indeed come into its own in the decade since its invention.

Initially, Chablé and the first generation had created a limited set of figures using the soft and then-abundant wood of the *chaká* and *pích* trees. The primary figures were the Chac Mool, the Corn God, and Ixchel; other figures that were added to the repertoire early on were Feathered Serpents and the Young Corn God of Palenque (see Figure 2).⁹ Although it is clear that the Chac Mool, Feathered Serpent, and Young Corn God ídolos were copies of original works of art, the Corn God and Ixchel were not so obviously mimetic copies, as they were based not on sculptures but on painted figures of gods from the *Dresden Codex* (a Maya hieroglyphic book). All, nonethe-

less, were forms of kitsch in that they translated originals into another medium; they extended or expanded the notion of kitsch, however, because they were neither parodies nor pretentious replicas. In the late 1980s new figures (e.g., the God of Luck and the God of Medicine) were invented that took the Ixchel–Corn God figure as the base form. New forms were also added, such as the *mascarón* (mask), based on a contemporary ceramic figure from Tehuacan that portrayed an Aztec face with feathered headdress. Bas-relief carving of boards, or *tablas*, was also developed, in part because of the exhaustion of local trees and the need to buy wood from carpenters.

In addition to the elaboration of woodworking, local artisans began to carve "stone," or *piedra pisteña*. Over time, such carving increasingly became the domain of school-age male artisans; this artwork (see Figure 3)—the stone is actually a mix of cement and limestone powder molded into a block that is "carved" by scraping—is limited in terms of the price it can fetch, because of its weight/size ratio and the low-level technical aspects of its production. Further, introduction of mold-made *piedra* copies of wood carvings was negatively marked among Pisté artisans, who viewed this medium as technically "cheap" and as a kind of aesthetic robbery. Nonetheless, in the hands of children aged six to 17, "stone" carving sustained a bit of aesthetic renovation. In contrast, throughout the 1980s, the aesthetic style of the wood



Figure 3. A vendor's display of *piedra pisteña*. Front row: Chac Mool and pyramids; middle two rows: Chac Moos (note some with feathered serpent heads instead of feet); back row: Ixchel and Corn God ídolos.

carving remained *rústico*, that is, rudimentary and rustic, and can remind the viewer of a generic primitivism.

It was not until the third generation of *artesanos* began working that a strong aesthetic revolution occurred. Several factors were involved. First, the sociopolitical climate of Pisté and Chichén had calmed down significantly, and artisanry production and sale had settled into a routine lifeway. In this context a new generation of artisans had come of age; they had spent their youth “carving stone” and were motivated to create new forms, figures, models, techniques, and tools.¹⁰ Second, market competition and personal or individual competitiveness began to propel a general tendency toward creative innovation among the newer, though not the older, generations of artisans. For many years competition had simply reflected an economic motivation to copy the forms or designs of one’s neighbor if they were obviously selling well. The third generation, however, introduced an aesthetic-technical competitiveness to their artistry and in challenging themselves to create more complicated pieces, they spurred much innovation, especially, at first, in the realm of the *tabla* and the *mascarón* headdress, in which the technical skills needed to cut deep and accurate bas-relief were greatly appreciated. Third, the exhaustion or near-extinction of the local supply of *chaká* and *pích* led to the use of milled lumber purchased from carpenters as well as to the use of cedar. The change in material from the soft to the hard woods fueled a certain competition for mastery of technique.

Fourth, one artist, Gilberto Yam, began a yearlong search to develop a finishing process, or *acabado*, that included not only a kind of “varnish” but also the painting of the wood (see Figure 4). This innovation was the result of a series of conversations I had with Yam, during which, recalling the “authentic primitive art” from Africa as studied by Jules-Rosette (1984), Steiner (1994), and Taylor and Barbesh (1992), I suggested the need to “antique” the otherwise untreated carvings. The lack of finishing had not been an aesthetic concern for the first generation of carvers, because the wood that they typically used had a natural red color or was often striated or striped in red and white; the depletion of the species of *pích* tree that yielded such wood forced the increasing use of the *chaká* (a kind of acacia), which has butter yellow or white wood. Gilberto’s experimentation with oil and water paints, as well as with tar, gasoline, and other synthetic materials, resulted in a very successful *acabado*. The initial effect of Gilberto’s *acabado* was to spur intense competition among other carvers, who began to paint their carvings with an oil or water base, producing “cheap”-looking imitations. After a few years, the secret of Yam’s technique was successfully copied, developed with variations, and is now used on all wood carvings, except carvings of rich-colored wood such as red cedar.



Figure 4. Ixchel made in 1993 by Gilberto Yam and included in the 1999 exhibition at Lake Forest College. The figure exemplifies Gilberto’s *acabado*, or finishing technique, which involves the use of tar and gasoline. Photograph by Claire La Groue, used with permission.

The *acabado*, significantly, triggered a change in the gender and social relations of production, and females began to participate in what had been a purely male activity. Some men, especially single males, continued to work on all aspects of production. In families where the primary economic activity of the domestic unit was artisanry production and sale, however, women (wives, daughters, nieces, cousins, and affines) who were not otherwise employed in the service sector could become involved. Tasks that women began to assume included the preparatory drying of the wood, sanding, application of the *acabado*, and the final painting and polishing. Carving has remained an essentially male activity, primarily because of

its dangers. Any artisan can display a myriad of cuts and stabs on hands and arms and even quite serious puncture wounds in his thighs. The risk of such injury is simply not an interesting proposition for women, or for many men; the gendering of labor, therefore, is not an imposition of gender norms but, rather, a function of personal choice in relation to socioeconomic class and lifestyles. Selling, whether of home-produced handicrafts or nonlocally manufactured goods and handicrafts, has always been an activity in which either gender can participate. Other aspects of the class, racial-ethnic, and gender dynamics and ideologies at play in the work of selling in the tourist market of Chichén are discussed in Castañeda 1998.

The art of work, from artesanía to arte pìsteño

Johnson (1998:132) notes that the humanist varieties of anthropology rarely discuss, much less theorize, research design issues. Although this may have been valid in the past, a burgeoning literature is now concerned with increasingly precise definitions of the appropriate research methods and their use within humanist frameworks. Nonetheless, research design continues to be an underdeveloped area: From the quantitative side of theoretical traditions, research design is framed primarily as a question of specifying methods and procedures, for example, experiments (Bernard 1995:51–70; Johnson 1998); from the humanist-qualitative side, research design is framed as developing an approach, orientation, or sensibility to certain kinds of information (Denzin 2001:1–55). In either case, the definition of the research problem (and the problem of how to define research problems) as the substantive investigation of issues is often left as an implicit, a priori process that derives from theoretical, “real-world,” or scientific-empirical concerns. The overwhelming tendency in texts on methods to “show”—instead of directly explain—how research is conceptualized and designed, by way of a series of examples, vignettes, case studies, and so on, is evidence of this fact.¹¹ This context and this article’s stated goal of contributing to methodology debates make it necessary for me to more precisely define the research problem of this experimental ethnography.

The Ah Dzib P’izté’ Project was part of a larger program called the Field School in Experimental Ethnography. This program explicitly sought to put into practice new conceptions of fieldwork. As its name suggests, the program combined the agendas of research and pedagogy; it was open to undergraduate and graduate students who sought training in anthropology and fieldwork methods.¹² Students took seminars on predictable topics of interest and participated in one of three research projects, all of which were designed to investigate processes and dynamics of transculturation in different arenas of life.¹³ Further, all of the projects were conceived as “experimental fieldwork” in the sense that the very practices, processes, and

dynamics of the fieldwork were defined as objects of study; in other words, the principle of experiment resided, as discussed above, in the expansion of the ethnographic object of study to include the very practices of ethnographic research. Thus, not only did the subjectivity of researchers and the position of research in the history of entanglements between “subjects” and “objects” of study become elements of research design (i.e., criteria for formulating research problems), but so also did the actual practices of research that constitute fieldwork as an ethical engagement with subject communities.

Further, as conceptualized in this vision of an ethnographic project, the experimental principle has two corollary forms of “practical experimentation.” First, strategically incorporated into ethnographic fieldwork are tools, methods, procedures, and concepts borrowed from diverse fields of art, such as performance studies, installation art, museology and curation, scenography, street theater, performance art, and theater anthropology. Second, the development of innovative combinations of these borrowed “techniques” and the already existing methods of ethnography (inherited from the history of anthropology and related fields such as sociology) create “new” dynamics of fieldwork and understandings of fieldwork processes. The formulation of research is not governed by the teleological objective of the production of new knowledges and analyses regarding an object of study but involves deploying already given understandings and knowledges in ways that have more direct and immediate relevancy for the communities in which the fieldwork is conducted. To clarify, “new” knowledges are *certainly* produced in the conduct of fieldwork oriented toward ethical engagement. But knowledge (in either quantitative or qualitative-humanist forms) and its accumulation, as well as its representation, are not the ultimate, overriding principles, criteria, and values of experimental ethnography: Ethical engagement through the experimental practice of ethnographic fieldwork marks the horizon of value in this conception and vision of the ethnographic project. The possibilities of “critique” or “critical ethnography” are then, in turn, predicated on this value of ethical engagement—a concept that includes within its purview the reflexive treatment, however specifically formulated by research design, of research and researcher positioning.

Thus, the experimental principle and dimensions have nothing to do with either “experiments in writing ethnography” or the concept of social scientific “experiment” as developed, for example, by Bernard (1995:51–70; cf. Johnson 1998:143–153). Instead, the principle derives from the etymology of the word *experiment*—“putting out into peril.” This “peril” refers to the mundane risks of failure, miscalculation, ignorance, lost opportunity, creation of antagonism, misunderstanding, deceit, failed or false report, and so on, to which all ethnography is subject *and*

on which all ethnography *must necessarily build*. But peril is more often than not eliminated from (the written) ethnography, dismissed as those “improprieties” that are necessarily “overcome” to produce anthropological knowledge (Castañeda n.d.c).¹⁴

Although, “methodologically,” the research I describe was designed (and theorized) as a project in experimental fieldwork, the ethnography (considered holistically) was designed as a study of the problem of transculturation. Or, to phrase it differently, transculturation in Pisté Maya artwork, including the researchers’ ethnographic involvement in that art world, was the object of study and the primary strategy governing the use of specific fieldwork methods. Transculturation, then, was the concept bridge that linked the definition of the objects of study, the methods of research, the (theoretical) frameworks of and for analysis, and the substantive (content-specific) issues of investigation.

Fieldwork 1997: Research design in experimental ethnography

The Ah Dzib P’izté’ Project was initiated in the summer of 1997. The research team in 1997 consisted of six persons: three undergraduate students, the graduate research assistant, and the two codirectors of the field school. The project was motivated by, and conceptualized and designed on the basis of, understandings and prior analyses of the Pisté Maya art world of Chichén that I had accrued over ten years of fieldwork (partially represented above). Proposing the analysis (and, thus, assuming the existence) of a “field of cultural production” (Bourdieu 1993) that structured, contained, and sustained the Pisté Maya art world, we designed the ethnography as a long-term, collaborative project that would consciously and conscientiously intervene in that world with its own research activities.

The research problem incorporated four objectives: (1) conceive and operationalize experimental practices and methodological strategies of ethnographic fieldwork that are linked to quotidian processes of cultural invention, intercultural exchange, and transcultural interaction; (2) contribute, however modestly, to the opening of the conditions of production and commercialization of the aesthetic work of producing Pisté Maya art and artisanry through diverse processes of experimental ethnography (specifically using fieldwork, art exhibition, installations, and print and video publications); (3) foment new and positive perceptions of the artisans and increase aesthetic appreciation of the artwork within the local community of Pisté; and (4) facilitate cross-cultural understanding of the Yucatec Maya and transcultural exchange between them and the different cultural groups that come into contact with them via tourism or other transnational processes. We chose the practices of exhibition and ethnographic installation as the primary fieldwork strategies by which

to realize these objectives. Specifically, the research problem involved organizing and installing exhibitions of arte pisteño for local-community, regional, tourist, and international audiences not only in the community of Pisté but also in international sites to (1) positively shift local community perceptions of the artwork and artisans; (2) facilitate cross-cultural understanding and transcultural exchange involving Yucatec Maya people; and (3) experiment with exhibition as a form of ethnographic art-writing. Specifically, the research problem involved organizing and installing exhibitions of arte pisteño for local-community, regional, tourist, and international audiences not only in the community of Pisté but also in international sites to achieve the objectives enumerated above.

In the course of three summer field seasons, three exhibitions were organized in the community of Pisté around which other research activities were conducted. A fourth exhibition was held, in the winter of 1999, in the galleries of a small liberal arts college in the United States. The first Pisté Maya art exhibition was initiated halfway through an eight-week field season in 1997 with an open call to artisans to participate. With the support of both the civil and agrarian authorities, the exhibition was scheduled for August 11–13 in the town hall, and a two-day registration period was conducted two weeks prior to the event.¹⁵ Artisans were asked to register and to describe the pieces they would complete for the exhibit. The registration involved both an explanation of the ethnographic project, including aspects of the exhibition and broader project goals, as outlined above, and a structured interview with each artisan. Student researchers conducted follow-up interviewing and participant-observation of production and sales with selected artisans.

Student researchers formulated the interview questions. The questions covered an individual’s work history, especially in terms of his activities as an artisan and his learning/training in the art; the organization of production, whether realized individually or within a group such as a household unit; the aesthetic–technical aspects of an individual’s artwork, that is, the kinds of pieces that he typically carved and the tools and techniques he used; and the mode of selling his artwork, whether by the artisan himself or as a family enterprise and whether directly to tourists or to a *comerciante* (vendor) who resells a variety of handicrafts to tourists at Chichén. Although there were perhaps two hundred artisans in Pisté in 1997, only 40 registered to participate in the exhibition. Of those who registered, only 19 persons completed pieces that were submitted on the designated day.

This self-selection of artisans who participated is one aspect of what can be called “emergent audience” in ethnographic fieldwork.¹⁶ The idea of emergent audience also refers to the fact that fieldwork is intrinsically a collaborative endeavor. Fieldworkers do not in any simple

sense impose themselves and their projects on people; rather, members of the subject community exercise their own agency and control over the extent to which they engage the fieldworker and participate as subjects, distant or disengaged observers, active or occasional participants, collaborators, interpreters, critics, publicly or privately vocal naysayers, or assistants in the research process. This pervasive microlevel of collaboration, collusion, and complicity is obvious and apparent to all fieldworkers, but it is not necessarily or usually scrutinized as a principle of fieldwork itself.

Although the research team imagined, in our naïveté, that more artisans would participate in the exhibition, there are clear economic reasons why the majority of the artisans chose not to engage the project. On the face of it, there were no “real,” that is, immediate benefits to be gained by participating. As project director, I promised to purchase most of the pieces, even at higher prices than usual, in part as a means to offset the expected reticence of artisans to produce pieces far in advance of sale. Although an artisan cannot be sure that a tourist will purchase a piece, thousands of potential buyers pass through the market at Chichén, offering greater odds of sale than in a “market” of 13 field school members. Further, some artisans thought that in their ignorance tourists might pay two, three, or four times “the price” that the ethnographers would pay.

We also naively thought that the promise of higher prices than could be obtained in the tourist market might stimulate recognition of the aesthetic value of the artwork.¹⁷ Instead, this promise stirred conspiracy theory-style gossip. One student researcher was acutely aware of this discourse, as she had made friends with individuals from Pisté who maintained an antagonistic attitude toward me. Although the source of this attitude was never precisely identified, it was clear that in the course of 15 years of research in the community, I had become a controversial figure, in part because of my participant-observation of a local political movement.¹⁸ That research necessarily entailed my establishing personal ties to several of the movement leaders, some of whom had been thrown in jail, had died, had been blackballed from political life in the community, had competed for office, or were otherwise controversial figures. Thus, although during earlier periods of research (1987–91), I was “universally” accepted in the community for my engagement with and participation in local politics (see Castañeda 1996:232–297, 1998, in press b), conflicts and factionalization of the community between 1992 and 1995 (Himpele and Castañeda 1997) stirred ambivalent and at times openly antagonistic attitudes toward me. This had much to do with the fact that a set of friends with whom I was closely associated in the 1980s broke from the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) to join the political opposition party (Partido de Acción

Nacional, or PAN) in the mid-1990s. In 1997 this PAN leadership was in its third year of control of both the civil and agrarian governments, and politicking against the PAN authorities had already begun in anticipation of the summer 1998 elections.

Regardless of specific artisans’ personal views of me and of the insertion of the ethnographic project into local political gambits, the key question for artisans remained: Why would one offer to pay higher than market prices for pieces not yet produced? A persistent idea reported to me by student researchers was that “we” were going to “cheat” the artisans by buying Pisté art at low cost and reselling it for high prices in the United States. In other words, the ethnographic project was understood by some in the community simply as a facade for a commercial project. To other artisans and locals with whom I talked, this logic made no sense. First, no one could force an artisan to sell a piece for less than he wanted to charge, especially in the context of the information we circulated that high prices would be paid. Second, if an artisan got the price he wanted for a piece, what difference did it make if the buyer resold that piece at a profit? One can assume either that such reasoning was naive and demonstrated the lack of *preparación* (education) of the artisans or that it was a smoke screen and an idiom for expressing some other dynamic and reasoning. Indeed, the local economy included intermediary buying from producers for resale at Chichén; it was a common, everyday practice. Yet it is also true that such intermediaries, or *comerciantes*, are regarded with extreme *envidia*, or jealousy.¹⁹ Further, in traditional Maya culture special kinds of “bad” persons exist whose negative qualities derive from their commercial prowess; such nonworking merchants who accumulate wealth are called *uay k’ot*. Although I have no knowledge of anyone calling members of our research team *uay k’ot*, even jokingly, the logic of *envidia* is a particularly powerful cultural force. In transcultural terms, then, the fieldwork incorporated a common, everyday practice of buying artwork that “naturally” lent itself to negative criticism and blackballing *chisme* (gossip). We could offer no proof that there were no commercial interests underlying the ethnographic project and, therefore, no defense against this kind of conspiracy-theory gossip and *envidia*.

With absolutely no budget for mounting the exhibit, the display relied on the materials that were at hand and that were offered by the authorities. Thus, the “curatorial style”—if it can be redeemed with this label!—was one that “simulated” the display style of the artisans themselves: Pieces were placed on scrap boards suspended by chairs or fixed to the walls with nails. As archaeologists sometimes do when opening a cave or starting an excavation, we hired a local *h’méen* (traditional curer–shaman) to cleanse the space of the exhibit on opening and closing nights. I even requested that the *h’méen* make a barrel of

balché, traditional honey mead used for rain ceremonies. Later, my friend Yoli Pat told me that some people had complained about the h'méen's activities, which strengthened their views that the artwork was a form of idolatry.²⁰ Even though the Protestant artisans of Pisté do not consider their artwork to be idolatry, they may have regarded the presence of the balché as signifying a lack of respect for their religion or, more benignly, as one of those mindless acts typical of anthropologists and archaeologists who insist on staging out-of-context "traditional" rain rituals for the camera. Thus, although bad weather on the second and third nights of the exhibition made attendance drop (as well as forcing us into an indoor space), the question persisted as to whether the introduction of the h'méen had been appropriate, and some even wondered if it was the cause of the decreased audience. Nonetheless, despite the makeshift display, bad weather, change in location, and the presence of the h'méen, the exhibit generated significant attention as persons strolled in and out as part of their evening socializing in the park.

Although this descriptive summary may raise more questions than it answers, it is necessary to briefly consider the value of the exhibition as ethnography. On the one hand, as the central strategy of a methodology of participant-observation, the exhibition served an important pedagogical-training function not only for the students but also for the project directors. As I discuss below, the successes and failures were carried forward into subsequent fieldwork. On the other hand, the value of the exhibit as critical ethnography cannot be measured only by the academic criteria of knowledge production—or adequately captured in ethnographic representation.

In the tradition of humanist anthropology, the first and foremost value of ethnography is the lived, intersubjective experience of the fieldwork itself as an ethical engagement. In his statement on postmodernism, Tyler defines ethnography as therapy, and therapy, in turn, as a "restorative harmony" that "departs from the commonsense world only in order to reconfirm it and to return us to it renewed and mindful of our renewal" (1987:211). Although Tyler ostensibly was speaking about ethnography as writing, I note that fieldwork in general has the therapeutic function of reintegrating the self in society and restructuring the conduct of everyday life within a conscious restoration of common sense (Tyler 1987:211–213). Although they do not use this concept of therapy, Fernandez and Herzfeld (1998:100) discuss the effect of showing ethnographic video to the subjects who were filmed. This technique of visual ethnography, first used fortuitously by Flaherty and then consciously developed by Rouche and others, not only exemplifies the therapeutic function of ethnography but also compels the radical suggestion that the very ontology of fieldwork is premised on the micro-operation and dynamics of this conception of therapy.

In general terms, then, the project of a transcultural ethnography focuses on the therapeutic operations of fieldwork. Specifically, the exhibition of Maya art discussed here was conceived as therapy: It was both a rupture of everyday life and its assumptions and a restoration of the lifeworld, but with a difference. The exhibition represented to the community a conception and valorization of the artwork that had not previously formed part of the everyday commonsense world. The art and its producers are a pervasive and inescapable dimension of everyday life in Pisté; and the quotidian, public, and private experience of the artwork has always connected it to the field of power relations that constitute the market of Chichén Itzá. Yet, simply because it took place outside of the tourist market, the exhibit was a completely unexpected way of viewing, appreciating, and valorizing the artisanry. The exhibit itself constituted a change in the perceptual, cultural, and political framing of this quotidian art form. As such, it enabled the possibility of a new conception of (as well as a new relationship with) the art and of the producers and the community in which they live.

As an illustration of the therapeutic effect at the level of the dynamics of microinteraction, consider a transcultural exchange that occurred on the last night of the exhibition in 1997. Several hours into the evening exhibit, Ruben Briceño, a tour guide and a friend I had known since fieldwork in 1985, entered the "gallery space" of the ejido office. I offered to show him around the display. At one point three artisans were standing in front of the piece toward which Ruben and I were headed. The three artisans had been critically evaluating the artwork in front of them but became quiet when we approached, seeking to overhear our conversation without being noticed. Before moving on to the next piece, Ruben picked up the artwork before him and expressed some aesthetic wonder. As a guide who began working in the early 1980s, he had seen every possible kind of figure and the aesthetic output of almost every artisan in the community—or so he thought. Ruben, oblivious to the fact that the artist of the piece he held stood next to us trying to hear what we said, exclaimed that the artist of the work was exceptionally good; Ruben had never seen work of such aesthetic and technical quality. Ruben then stated that the *chavo* (roughly, dude) who had created the piece should be proud, that the piece constituted not just artisanry, but art. Looking for appropriate words to praise the piece and the exhibited artwork in general, Ruben went so far as to say that a figure of such beauty and technical mastery made him proud to be from Pisté, but also surprised and impressed that the artisanry had developed into something so beautiful. While Ruben spoke, I glanced at the artists, faces transfixed, as they pretended not to listen.

This fortuitous moment, although perhaps trivial in itself, is a priceless exchange mediated and pervasively

shaped by anthropology. This ephemeral moment does not carry the weight or value of evidence or the rigor of proof, yet it nonetheless encapsulates and illustrates a series of methodological, conceptual, and experiential criteria that we had sought to put into practice in experimental ethnography. As a transcultural dynamic of fieldwork, the exhibition offered “an object of meditation which provoke[d] a rupture with the commonsense world and evoke[d] and aesthetic [re-]integration whose therapeutic effect is worked out in the commonsense world” (Tyler 1987:211). In other words, this exhibition and the subsequent ones provided a new “lens” or perspective with which to rethink, reassess, and revalorize the everyday lifeworld.

Fieldwork 1998: Transculturation as strategy and object of study

The 1998 field season was structured by two overall strategies of fieldwork: a workshop focus group and the second Pisté exhibition. The student project codirector, Fernando Armstrong Fumero, conducted the workshop with a group of artisans. The workshop was a modified kind of focus group, in which a self-selected group of eight artisans met with Fernando one night a week to discuss ancient and contemporary Maya art and iconography. The strategy was to transform the focus group workshop into a fieldwork site in which the object of study consisted of the transcultural dynamics and processes of exchange between artisans and anthropologists. This framing was crucial to avoid both paternalism (“giving knowledge back to the natives”) and assuming the inherent superiority and power of the ethnographers, their institutional locations, and their knowledge vis-à-vis passive, agencyless, and even acculturated Maya. Because this component of the research is discussed in Armstrong Fumero’s master’s thesis (2000), I direct the reader to that work and here briefly focus on the methodological issue of artisan participation.

The organization of the second exhibition in the community took a dramatically different turn than the 1997 event. Only nine artisans responded to the call for participation. This poor response had much to do with the fact that the two-month field season overlapped with the two to three weeks before and after the town elections. For some artisans, the political uncertainty of elections in a factionalized community simply made participation in the project too high risk; there was more to lose in terms of political and social positioning than could be gained. Indeed, the word had spread among the artisans that the pieces to be displayed were not going to be purchased at the end of the exhibit; in turn, our research team was told that economic motivation was apparently the only reason artisans would want to participate. Despite an extensive campaign to inform artisans of the invitation and to

describe the goals and procedures of the exhibit, only a small group intuited that there was more to be gained by participation than a quick dollar from the supposedly rich anthropologist patrons. Specifically, we had communicated ambitious plans to publish catalogs and coffee table books of Pisté Maya art. Although initially disappointed by the turnout, we also recognized that the autoselection of persons to participate in field research is a fundamental principle of all ethnography.

Experimental ethnography is not an “action research” project in which a local community defines the research agenda and then finds an anthropologist to incorporate into the enterprise. Instead, such ethnography is conceived as a project with its own agenda, one, however, that is developed in relation to a prior understanding or analysis of a cultural community. And, as in the traditional manner of anthropology, the ethnographic research project is *installed* in the community, that is, strategically “staged”—designed and conducted in the community through the various degrees and modes of participation by those who would be called the subjects of research. Thus, instead of viewing the low participation as a determinative failure, we accepted the risk, the peril, of all ethnographic fieldwork, namely, that the participation of subjects is emergent.

We realized immediately that working with a small group of artisans had its particular benefits. The workshop participants were also the artisans who exhibited, and the workshop was the space in which they had been stimulated to develop new kinds of work. Thus, although the workshop and the exhibition were separate projects, they were conceptually and strategically integrated. I defer further discussion of this articulation, including the strategies of curation and display, for another occasion and continue this mapping of the ethnographic research project.

Fieldwork 1999: Ethnographic installation as critical ethnography of art

The story that Wilberth Serrano told us about the legitimization of the Pisté artwork was just part of what he wanted to communicate. At the organizational meeting in 1998, he said that what really impressed him was that the field school was taking the next step beyond Alfredo Barrera Rubio’s pronouncement. Whereas the INAH director had validated the *chac mooleros* as legitimate *artesanos*, the goal of the Ah Dzib P’izté’ Project, Serrano contended, was to “make” artists out of the artisans, that is, to recognize, promote, and respect the *artesanos* as *artistas*. The central methodological strategy for realizing this goal was the ethnographic installation, which allowed the experimental fieldwork to be a critical ethnography of art that both addressed conceptual–analytical issues in the register of “pure research” and intervened in the manner of an “applied” practice.

A central question in the 1999 season was how to more successfully incorporate both more artists and greater community collaboration in the exhibition. The decision was made early on to change the format of the exhibition to a *concurso*, or competition; this entailed the solicitation of prize monies from local businesses and the creation of a broader base of community group involvement in the planning and process of the exhibit. The 1998 season had been significantly hampered in this last respect because of the elections. The PRI faction, which had for several years promoted a negative attitude toward me, had won control of the *comisaría*.²¹ The 1999 season was significantly furthered by two circumstances: The new PRI authorities, after a year in office, sought reconciliation with the field school—which, after all, realized activities for the benefit of the general community—and with its director; and two young leaders among the INAH-Chichén wardens wanted to promote and support the field school activities as a way to further their own political agenda of fighting the congressional initiative to privatize all archaeological patrimony, that is, ruins, in México.²²

For these reasons, the 1999 season was dramatically successful overall. Over 50 artisans participated in the exhibition. Judges included Alfredo Barrera Rubio, the director of the INAH-CRY, representatives of INAH-Chichén, Chichén-Pisté tour guides, members of the field school, local businesspeople, and both the civil and agrarian town authorities (i.e., the *comisaría ejidal* and the *comisaría civil*). A majority of pieces were purchased by the field school for a late fall showing in the United States. Plans were made for other pieces to be created for the U.S. showing. In addition, five artists were selected to travel to the United States to participate in a program of activities that centered on a three-week exhibition in the galleries of Lake Forest College (LFC) in Illinois. The five were Gilberto Yam, José León Tuz, Jorge Pool Cauich, Wilberth Serrano Mex, and Juan Gutiérrez. Thus, the summer season extended into a second, fall season.

The continuation of fieldwork in the United States was conceptualized within the notion of transculturation or transcultural exchange. In this framing, the locations of fieldwork sites as “here” and “there” (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997) are *not blurred*, but the intrinsic intersections and reciprocal “cohabitation” of the sites are strategically revealed and used as an ethnographic tool. To reiterate, the sites of fieldwork are *not blurred*, given that the spaces remain quite distinct conceptually and are physically separate. Analytically, however, one cannot simply ask about the “effects” or “impact” of anthropological intervention “on” the Other without also substantively and conceptually dealing with the “effects” of the Other on anthropology, the anthropologist, the anthropologist’s lifeworld, and his or her practice of anthropology.

One aspect of experimental ethnography, then, is to figure out ways to methodologically exploit this insight.

The LFC event was conceptualized as doing so through the following elements. First, in an obvious and banal sense, the exhibition of Maya art and culture in the United States achieved transcultural exchange. The incorporation of ethnographic fieldwork materials into the display did not make this aspect any less mundane. Further, the participation of the Maya artists in the three-week-long set of activities in itself did not make the transcultural dimension of the event significant as a methodological strategy or conceptually. Rather, this aspect raised the issue of how to incorporate “natives” into a process that did not reduce them to “talking manikins” on display for purposes of exoticization, patronization, or alleviation of the anthropologist’s ethical angst over “being good to the native.” There are no simple or universal answers, only historically particular situations of negotiating these problems. Second, two correlated activities were organized. One was a “Forum on Maya Art and Anthropology,” organized with an art historian (Virginia Miller, University of Illinois–Chicago), a museum anthropologist (Alaka Wali, Field Museum), and a Cuban installation artist and art critic (Abdel Hernández, Transart Foundation, Houston) participating in a discussion of the exhibit. In addition, a set of workshops involving the Maya artists was organized for different groups of anthropology, Spanish, and art students from LFC as well as for a group of students from a prestigious private high school in the greater Chicago area. At the workshops students were able to have direct interaction and intercultural exchange with the artists while learning about Maya culture, *arte pisteño*, and issues in the anthropology of art. Third, a course was taught at LFC on the anthropology of art and museums in which the ten participating students put their textbook learning into “applied practice,” designing and creating the exhibition catalog, organizing the workshops and forum, creating the publicity program, and collaborating in the design and installation of the exhibition space.

A fourth element of the program that involved the sale of artwork became enmeshed in controversy. For the artisans to be able to afford the loss of a month of work and income, two sales were planned: A sale of low-cost artisanry was arranged in the LFC campus center, and a gallery auction of the “high-end” pieces was planned during the first night of the exhibition. This overtly commercial component of the program stirred up a controversy that eventually resulted in its truncation. The logic and rationale for the sale involved four important objectives: (1) It was a means to attain some of the objectives of the artists’ agenda, which naturally entailed pursuing economic self-interest in both the short term (for the duration of the exhibition) and in the long term (opening up alternative markets to the restricted space of Chichén–Pisté); (2) it was

a way for artists to avoid patronizing and exoticizing relationships in which they were simply seen as natives attached to the exhibit to legitimate the project; (3) it was a tactical element by which to actualize a “critical ethnography of art” that actively understood its practice to be enmeshed in the relations of institutional power that constituted the field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993) of the art world (Becker 1982; Danto 1964) under investigation; and (4) it activated the strategic principle by which the anthropological project would broach the divide between applied and pure research.

The dean of the college, who, in this small institution, was the ranking executive administrator, had reservations about the sale of the art. A mathematician trained in hard science philosophical positions, the dean considered selling the art to be a commercial endeavor that put all of the intellectual, pedagogical, educational, and research components of the LFC event into jeopardy. The ideological contradiction between education and research, on the one hand, and capitalism, on the other hand, was so entrenched and overwhelming from the dean’s perspective that he was compelled to withdraw LFC funding unless it could be convincingly explained how each activity, as well as the whole program of events, was both anthropological and educational (Dean of Lake Forest College, personal communication, October 1999).²³

Given that this article has already provided—and is in itself—an answer to the question of what counts as anthropology, it is only necessary to note the ideological sources of the LFC dean’s understanding. The experimental ethnography explicitly sought to work across principles and domains in a search for a reconfiguration of practices. The “pollution” of this transversal working of categories became controversial because it broke the illusion of the ideological ideal of education and of the university as noncommercial, noncapitalist spheres.

Further, the dean’s question—how can something be educational and anthropological if it *explicitly* involves money and markets?—is somewhat analogous to the question of how critique can be possible given the complicitous entanglements of anthropology, art, and markets.²⁴ The strategy developed in this project of experimental ethnography was, first, to explicitly acknowledge and analyze these past and present entanglements and, second, to use these collusions and complicitous as the foundation for both doing the ethnography and re-envisioning how to do ethnography. But it is precisely here that the possibilities of critique can be reassembled, even reterritorialized, as an ethical relation of engagement. By rendering explicit these complicitous—a move or form of critique itself—the ethnographic project also left itself open to critical commentary, debate, and dialogical engagement.

In truth, the dean’s question continues to baffle me. He literally asked: “Despite all the intercultural exchange,

hands-on learning of other cultures, educational goals and cross-cultural teaching, anthropological methods, anthropological concepts, and ethnographic approach, what is ‘anthropological’ about this project?” (personal communication, October 1999). It could be that he was really asking a different question, one that was actually about the proper way to “use” and “display” other cultures. If so, perhaps, what was ultimately more disturbing for him was the manner in which this project did not exoticize the Maya artists or properly stage the Maya as romanticized, holistic objects for visual consumption and allochronic contemplation. That the artists were primarily motivated by economic interests to participate in the exhibition and that they could bring artwork for the express purpose of selling it to gringos may very well have upset both the generic Othering, or paternalist patronizing, of the anthropological subject as a subject in need and the particular romanticization of the Maya as a pre-Columbian artifact of mysterious civilization. Indeed, the exhibitionary style refused to ethnographize either the artists or the artwork. Instead, the project, as highlighted in the forum by Alaka Wali, was insistent on the aestheticization of the artwork as “art,” indeed, as *modern art*.

The aesthetic curation of the artwork failed to reference political struggles and politics. According to a view expressed in the forum, that the curatorial style of the exhibition did not link the tourist artwork of Chichén to Maya political struggles in Yucatán, Chiapas, and Guatemala was ethically problematic—especially for an ethnographic project that seeks to be politically and ethically astute. What is not acknowledged in this assessment is



Figure 5. Juan Gutierrez initiating a batik copy of the cover of a book about Maya artists. The piece was commissioned for the Lake Forest College exhibition to exemplify the Ah Dzib concept as referencing multiple forms of art-writing. Gilberto Yam’s uncle introduced batik to the Pisté art world in the mid-1980s; from a production shop in his home, he supplied the Isla Mujeres market.

that the specific history of the artwork makes the aestheticization of the art a thoroughly political act. Further, this view conflates all Maya within a single, homogenized category. In fact the lifeworlds of Maya in Yucatán have virtually nothing to do with those of Maya in Guatemala, and neither the Indigenous politics nor the Zapatista Maya politics of Chiapas has any resonance of identification in Yucatán. Chiapas is indeed a “world apart” from Yucatán, as is evident by an often-heard expression in both urban and rural Yucatán: “We are not Indigenous!” (see Castañeda in press c; Castillo Cocom n.d.). The Maya of Yucatán do not identify with the Maya of Chiapas, whom they recognize as even more *jodidos* (fucked) than they; and they are not, as a popular song of the 1980s went, from “Guate-peor.”

Similarly, that their “voices” are not represented here in “explanation” of their intersubjective lived experience in the United States might strike some readers of this article as a limitation. Instead of citing their voices, I should perhaps cite their silence in response to the question of how their artwork relates to the politics of Chiapas

and Guatemala. Because this ethnographic article is not about the artisans’ experience, quoting them here would only function as a ventriloquism that legitimates ethnographic authority to write in the name of the Other. The use of “voices” *here*, in this analysis, might only satisfy a voyeuristic curiosity about what “they” think about “us.”²⁵ The answer to that question is already inscribed in their artwork—inscribed in a “hieroglyphic” art of ethnography.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to address the idea that the portrayal of the lived experience would serve as a criterion for assessing the value of this transcultural ethnography. But such presentation would be justified mainly if the goal were to present an experiment in ethnographic representation—or to theoretically lay out the “entire” project of a transcultural (and experimental) ethnography. Instead, the goal, more modest, has been to trace, in general terms, the processes of an experiment in ethnographic fieldwork. The success or failure of these experimental methods in creating alternative dynamics of ethnographic research does not necessarily determine the use that others might make of



Figure 6. Juan Gutierrez’s finished batik. Titled “Ah Chuen and Ah It’sat,” the piece indexes the concepts of transcultural art-writing that the Lake Forest College exhibition sought to install.

such strategies; nor would it determine the value the strategies may have in such contexts. At the same time that it presents ethnographic data about the modern Maya art world of Chichén, this article has had the goal of provoking thought about fieldwork, not to assert certainties or to define a programmatic statement.

Art-writing ethnography

Exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known... Exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where the signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed. Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions—especially exhibitions of contemporary art—establish and administer the cultural meanings of art. [Greenberg et al. 1996:2]

The name of the Ah Dzib P'izté' Project in Maya Art and Anthropology can be explained as a way to highlight methodological issues in an experimental ethnography that is both an exploration of transculturation and a critical ethnography of art. The Yucatec Maya word for "writing" is *dzib*. With the prefix *ah*—as in *ah dzib*—the meaning becomes "writer-painter" or the person, role, or function of a scribe. The addition of the place-name,

P'izté', as spelled in colonial-period orthography, further indicates a scribe or the office of scribe of that specific community. Because writing in Maya culture seems to be viewed as creatively inspired inscription, carving, and painting of knowledge, the ancient Maya associated the scribe with the artist and the artist-scribe with sacred power; thus, the artist-scribe was the keeper of history and esoteric religious knowledge, or a kind of "priest"–historian. Artists were also known by other terms—*ah chuen* and *ah its'at*—that designated specific types and specialties of scribal artists and priests. Here I refer to the Pisté Maya artists as Ah Dzib P'izté' to accentuate the symbolic associations and interdependency of carving, painting, writing, and inscribing (see Figures 5 and 6). In Maya culture, writing is more than just marks or inscriptions on a surface. Maya writing is art in an aesthetic sense and as a communicative technology. Thus, Ah Dzib P'izté' references a Maya legacy in which art is writing and writing is art. The name also signals, in the context of this transcultural ethnography, the sociological notion of art-writing as constitutive of "art worlds" (Carrier 1987; cf. Marcus and Myers 1995). This art-writing is the apparatus of academic discourses and research, professional art critique and commentary, gallery and museum exhibitionary practices, and marketing of art that constitutes and distributes value of-and-for objects, producers, and



Figure 7. Main gallery, Lake Forest College exhibition, 1999. In the center foreground are two Scribano, or Ah Dzib Pisté', ídolos, interpretations of a Classic Maya piece. Behind them and to their right is a kitsch interpretation of the Young Corn God. On the floor along the right wall are three ídolos that are stylistically transitional between the rústico and acabado aesthetics. The participating artists painted the wall behind them with the two entwined feathered serpents. During the exhibition a photo of a display of Pisté Maya art on a dirt path at Chichén was hung on this wall, and Maya Cruzob music recorded by the Instituto de Indigenismo played in the background. Composite of two photographs taken by the author.



Figure 8. Second gallery, Lake Forest College exhibition, 1999. Large pedestal in foreground has been transformed to invoke a workshop table. On it are placed wood shavings, a partially carved mascarón, pencils, sandpaper, and a Maya art book opened to an image that inspired one of the pieces on display. A video of artists at work and teaching ethnographers how to carve can be seen projected on the wall in the background, framed above and below by mascarones. The room featured additional photographic and video presentations and a case containing the memorabilia of fieldwork.

consumers. In this sense, the ethnographic research with Pisté artists is also an art-writing of *arte pisteño*.

The art-writing of the Ah Dzib P'izté' Project is multi-dimensional. It includes not only the ethnographic fieldwork during which interviews with artists and artisans were undertaken, participant-observation of the production and selling of artwork took place, and focus group-workshops were conducted but also ethnographic installations and the literal writing about the artwork, including this article.²⁶ The exhibitions have been a crucial element of the anthropological intervention in the Pisté Maya art world of Chichén, and their use has evolved significantly and changed under different circumstances and conditions of funding. Whereas the 1997 exhibit was mostly a pedagogical process that communicated something for everyone—artisans, ethnographers, and audience—the 1998 exhibit was strongly marked by a strategy of curation informed by ideas of conceptual art; ultimately it was perhaps too esoteric in its transcultural idioms to have effectively communicated to its audiences the nature of

the event. In contrast, the 1999 exhibit was successfully conceived and orchestrated within the local cultural conception of exhibitions as a *concurso*, or art fair competition. Community participation was extensive and transformed the event into a positive celebration of the social whole. In turn, the LFC installation was a more ambitious program of several events, activities, and processes within a non-Maya cultural setting and for a non-Maya public. The LFC activities, including the exhibition, are examples of the sociological notion of art-writing and as a whole comprise a significant intervention in the field of power wherein value is assigned to the artwork of Pisté. The key to designing this program and its agenda was the principle of transculturation: Beginning from the assumption that anthropology and its object of study, the artwork and art world of Pisté, are transcultural phenomena opened a path to develop an ethnography that methodologically exploited—versus erased, corrected, and rectified—the transcultural exchanges and dynamics of research.



Figure 9. Wilberth Serrano (center) discusses the collaboratively produced centerpiece of the Lake Forest College exhibition, the “Ah Dzib Canoe,” with a class of anthropology students. This image captures the inversions of fieldwork that such workshops put into effect: Wilberth’s switch from informant to teacher entails a change in positional power, and a disruption in the institutional field of power is also signaled by him as a Maya Indian, dressed in Western clothing and standing in an art gallery, explaining artwork made possible by the Western fascination with “the Maya.” Framing the image are two material symbols of the double articulations of this experimental ethnography: a Pisté ídolo and a video-camera.

The curatorial practice was conceived as a critical ethnography of art, and the exhibition itself was designed as a staging and installation of ethnography. The strategy was to use one room for the display of artwork as art (see Figure 7), that is, according to the ideals of the Western aesthetic ideology of universal value, and a second room for the display, not of the ethnographic representation of the culture and community of producers, but of the “culture” of transculturation that doubly articulates the transcultural ethnography of anthropologists and the transcultural art-writing of Pisté Maya artists (see Figure 8). Thus, two rooms were installed in the stylistic opposition of curation that Stephen Greenblatt (1991) termed “aesthetic wonder” and “ethnographic resonance.” The critical twist of this binary is, however, that what is ethnographized is not the art but the ethnography. In addition, the transcultural ethnography displayed is not simply the activities of anthropologists and ethnographers but also includes the art-writing of arte pisteño, which is both an art form modality of “autoethnology” and an ethnography of the Western, specifically anthropological and touristic, fascination with the Maya. Third, returning from the room of resonance to the room of wonder, one sees the traces of the transcultural ethnography that stages arte pisteño as aesthetic object rendered into visibility as an ethnographic and an exhibitionary art-writing.

In other words, the problem of how to create a “critical ethnography of art” was “resolved” by strategically reformulating the idea of transculturation into a

methodological principle of fieldwork. The assumption and notion of transculturation, thus, guided the selection and use of fieldwork practices, such as ethnographic installation and exhibition. In turn, these methods made use of and revealed the already ongoing transcultural processes and dynamics of both the object of study and the methods of studying. Beyond the idea that all anthropology is already and always inherently transcultural anthropology (see Coronil 1995) is the double idea that everyday life is already a mode of ethnography or a generalized ethnography and that everyday cultural lifeways are always transcultural worlds. The art, artwork, art-ethnography, and art world of Pisté exemplify these double articulations of transculturation.

Finally, these ideas, curatorial styles, fieldwork practices, strategies, analyses, interpretations of artwork, and ethnographic experiments were condensed *and* elaborated in the notion of Ah Dzib P’izté’. Thus, in the tradition of conceptual art pioneered by Joseph Kosuth, Joseph Beuys, Hans Haacke, and others, the curatorial strategy was that of mounting in exhibition space an ethnographic installation of the concepts and substances of Ah Dzib P’izté’. Whereas some strands of conceptualism sought to dematerialize the object of artwork (in a kind of deterritorialization) by rendering it a concept, the conceptualism of this experimental ethnography inverts the process: Through the installation of specific pieces, the concepts of Ah Dzib P’izté’ were rematerialized or reterritorialized into forms that became literal symbols, metaphoric objects, and transcultural ethnographies within a rearranged field of power, semiosis, practices, critique, and commentary. The strategy of ethnographic installation was used, then, to install a variety of mutually implicated, transcultural modes and forms of ethnography, including cross-cultural exchange and dialogue (see Figure 9).

Notes

1. Anthropology, of course, assumes a diversity of forms (as institutions, disciplines, practices, and knowledges), of provenience and places of application (in regional, national, international, and transnational spaces), and of organizational sponsorship (in capitalist, philanthropic, community, educational, and state agencies). What specific anthropologies are involved in the particular art worlds of distinct cultural places and spaces is an empirical question.

2. As a physical anthropologist with specialties in anthropometry and genetics, Steggerda conducted eight years of fieldwork in Pisté as part of the Carnegie Institution Maya project.

3. The INAH is a federal agency located in Mexico City and has semiautonomous regional or state offices, such as the Centro Regional de Yucatán, or INAH-CRY.

4. The Chac Mool is the famous “reclining” male figure, which is found, for example, on top of the platform in front of the Temple of the Warriors at Chichén. The figure sits on his bottom with feet placed parallel on the ground, knees together, head turned at a 90-degree angle from the body; the hands hold a bowl

or basin over the stomach, which is theorized to have been a receptacle for the human hearts extracted during ritual sacrifices. The typical, but speculative, interpretation of the Chac Mool is that, through its use in human sacrifice, it mediated interaction between the worlds of humans and gods, fulfilling a kind of Hermes function. The name of the figure has nothing to do with its meanings, symbolism, or use. In Yucatec Maya, *chac* means “red” and *mool* means “paw”; the name was fortuitously ascribed to the figure by a 19th-century archaeologist when, during an excavation, he saw the red-painted stone poking from the earth.

5. See Breglia 2003 for a history of the INAH families at Chichén Itzá and the competing claims of proprietary and usufruct rights over the cultural patrimony of the ruins at the site.

6. *Ejido* refers to the collectively owned land granted to communities by Mexican agrarian law, to the community-based authority structure that regulates land use, and to the cultural “community” of user-owners (*ejidatarios*).

The model of locally controlled development was later borrowed by David Friedel, an archaeologist from Southern Methodist University, in proposing tourist development of the nearby archaeological site of Yaxuná. Friedel’s proposal generated a great deal of conflict, and the INAH authorities ultimately rejected his vision of tourism development. Today Yaxuná receives virtually no tourism, but the community has created an ejido hotel with the help of Anglo North American anthropologists. In contrast, Chichén, only 20 kilometers away by unpaved road, has received more than half a million visitors a year since the mid-1990s, and only a few collective businesses there have maintained solvency, such as the cooperative store owned by a group of 12 INAH wardens (see Breglia 2003).

7. FONATUR is the federal agency that facilitates loans with the IMF for tourism development projects, both large and small.

8. The economic benefits that researchers could gain were simply those that circulate within the university market structure of academic careers and statuses. Like the artisans of Pisté, some readers may find an answer that emphasizes intellectual motivations, moral desire to “do good,” and the economy of academic anthropology unsatisfactory. There is no dialogical means, however, of dissuading an insistent skepticism and distrust. In the political culture of Yucatán and Mexico, for example, actions in the name of the collective good are never naively viewed as altruistically “disinterested.” Everyone knows that the “good” that anyone does for the group comes at a price. The question then becomes, is the compensation that such persons “charge” a fair and honest reciprocity, or is it exorbitant and extracted with arrogance, pomposity, excessive favoritism, and false superiority?

9. In contrast to the horizontal form of the Chac Mool figure, the *Ixchel* (Goddess of Birth and Death) and Corn God figures are vertical. The latter two are homologous forms, differentiated from one another by substitution of parallel iconographic elements. For example, the corn cob between the legs of the *Dios de Maiz* (Corn God) is substituted for the head of a child emerging from between the legs of *Ixchel*.

10. This creative motivation contrasted with the generic conservatism in figures and forms among the first generation of artisans. Although one could attribute the development of new forms to a “cultural logic of capitalism,” the fact is that there are several cultural logics operating in the Chichén artisanry market. One such logic dictates that it is easier to continue to reproduce a figure and form that sells than to risk time, money, and energy to invent something new that may not sell. Yucatecos tell a joke about themselves regarding their conservatism: It is easier and more “satisfying” to copy somebody else’s success than to try to create one’s own success.

11. Marshall and Rossman (1995:15–77) offer an exception. They provide explanations of designing research (1995:15–29, 38–44) coupled with vignettes (1995:29–37, 44–77).

12. More than 30 undergraduates and eight graduate students from different fields of study participated in the program. Several undergraduate theses, three master’s theses, and two dissertation projects derive from the field school research program.

13. Seminar topics included anthropological theory, Maya history and culture, field methods, and Maya language. The research projects focused on the history of interaction between anthropologies and the community in the early part of the 20th century (Chilam Balam Project in Memory and History) and on the intercultural dynamic created by using Maya language and culture as tools for teaching English (for free) to Pisté children (School of Experimental Language Learning). See Castañeda and Breglia 1997–98.

14. There is, *of course*, a significant, strong, and theoretically heterogeneous movement of ethnographers working in the humanist tradition whose concern for experiential or intersubjective meaning(s) builds precisely on these “perils.” It is crucial to note that the “muddiness,” “subjectivity,” or “perils” of fieldwork have always been recognized, but different anthropological traditions and schools give this aspect of research different theoretical, interpretive, analytical, and descriptive values. The present ethnography belongs to the general humanist tradition that finds the “perils” of fieldwork fundamentally important; but, as the reader will note, this “experimental fieldwork” has a distinct position on the question of the *absolute* necessity of representing experiential meaning in the ethnographic text as the final criterion by which to judge an ethnography and as the ultimate arbiter of the value of the ethnographic project.

15. Rural life in México is structured by two sets of authority, one civil and one agrarian. The civil is the political structure of government (*comisaría*) headed, in the case of towns, by a mayor (*comisario*); the agrarian structure is the ejido office headed by the *comisario ejidal*.

16. I discuss this and other methodological principles of experimental ethnography in forthcoming work (Castañeda n.d.b, n.d.c).

17. I discuss the market constraints on the artwork in Castañeda in press a. Here I briefly outline the conjunction of factors that create a glass ceiling on prices. These factors include the inclination of tourists to buy several less expensive pieces to be kept or given as souvenir gifts rather than to spend an equal or greater amount on a single piece that is technically and aesthetically more elaborate. This fact of market demand causes most artists only rarely or periodically to spend the time and energy to create more difficult pieces. Further, the low-cost, makeshift display of handicrafts in the Tianguis and on the street creates a purchasing environment where tourists are not likely to feel comfortable paying high amounts, say upward of \$200–300 or more, for a piece that is sitting on the ground or hanging by a rope from a tree. Thus, the political economy of the pedestal is a crucial tool that was deployed in the exhibitionary practices of the Ah Dzib P’izté’ Project. In this regard, putting the artwork onto pedestals may not immediately have affected price or value structures in the commercial market, but it immediately and dramatically altered the local valorization of the artwork by both the artists–artisans and the Pisté community at large.

18. Although my explanation references community politics, I believe that the sources of the student researcher’s information were the siblings of a man who had held a personal grudge against me since 1988.

19. *Envidia*, or envy, is famous in the ethnographic literature of Latin America. Envy is often diagnosed by ritual divination to be

the source of witchcraft that maims, kills, or causes illness. In Pisté such envidia may very well have been “the cause” of a spring 2000 arson that destroyed a *palapa* (thatch-roofed) handicraft store and the millions of pesos worth of merchandise within it.

20. After 13 years of working with artisans in Pisté, many of whom are Protestants, I was surprised to learn that some people consider the artisanry to be a form of idolatry. Significantly, this idea is held mainly by Protestants from the nearby community of Xocpenpich and not by Pisteleños (see Castillo Cocom 2000).

21. The new mayor, Alfonso May, had been a friendly acquaintance and informant since 1985. During the 1998 election, however, he expressed hostility to the presence of the gringo ethnographers watching the vote. Interestingly, in 1999 he warmly received me and actively supported the exhibition project. In part, his role switch had to do with the fact that he himself was an artisan—indeed, a veteran invader of the archaeological zone beginning in 1983—but it also reflected a political context that had significantly changed from one of struggle between factions to one of seeking reconciliation between factions.

22. Fernando Burgos and Gaspar Burgos, cousins, were the leaders of this movement among the INAH wardens. At their request, the field school developed a study of the social history of INAH wardens as part of a strategy to protest privatization. Lisa Breglia directed the collaboration between the field school and the Burgos cousins, which led to an exhibition of historical photographs of and documents about INAH workers; this exhibition formed part of the 1999 Maya Art Concurso. Breglia extended that project into a comparative ethnographic study of the privatization of the archaeological patrimony in Mexico; the later study was based on research at Chichén and at another archaeological site in Yucatán (see Breglia 2003).

23. Major funding for the 1999 field season, including the LFC exhibition, was provided by a Cultural Studies Grant from the U.S.–México Fideicomiso sponsored by the Mexican Fundación Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Fundación Cultural Bancomer.

24. The comingling and complicity of anthropology, art, and commercialization are well documented and are inextricable in practice. See Clifford 1988, 1997, Price and Price 1992, Mullin 1995, and the articles in Marcus and Myers 1995 by Steiner, Marcus, Myers, and others for a sampling of the theme.

25. There is a “rich” if minor and, in my opinion, problematic tradition of bringing Natives to the metropolis with the purpose of extracting an ethnographic description (confession?) of how the visiting “natives” “see” “us” and “think” about how “our” “modernity” is “exotic.” This discourse began perhaps with Montaigne’s “Of Cannibals” (Frame 1948) and is indeed closely related to the idea of anthropology as culture critique.

26. A book-length ethnography and an art catalog are in progress. The LFC exhibition catalog (Castañeda et al. 1999) is available in several university libraries and on a Spanish-language website, www.uady.mx/sitios/mayas/exposicion/pizte/index.html. Also see www.osea-cite.org.

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