

Richard Nonas from *NO-WATER-IN*, 2011,
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For my dreams change.

I am no longer an anthropologist. An important part of my life has gone without my realizing it.

Anthropology was my friend, my serious companion. Anthropology was what took me out of myself, stretched me, and kept me seeing. It opened the world for me. Not just the geographical world, but the actual world of gaps and edges, of contradiction and paradox and constant change. Anthropology destroyed the certainty of my upbringing; it taught me to play with difference. It taught me to dance. And anthropology's dance was thought itself; its music was ambiguity: the rhythm of clarity slipping away. Anthropology gave me the gift of sliding thought.

I do not mean the academic discipline, or even the theory of anthropology; I do not even mean my own fieldwork. I mean being an anthropologist. I mean doing anthropology. I mean the ingrained habit of positive and powerful uncertainty that the actualities of other people's lives forced upon me. The inescapable habit of doubt: doubt of what is most obvious, doubt of what is most pleasant, doubt of what is most useful and self-serving, doubt of what is obscure and difficult, doubt of what is painful, destructive or useless. Doubt, I mean, of everything; even of anthropology. That is the anthropology I mean. The anthropology of doubt.

Anthropology gave me doubt as the definition of human life. It gave me doubt as its own justification: a ringing, all-encompassing, energizing, positive doubt as the ongoing justification of life. Anthropology gave me the gift of continual doubt.

But sculpture forced me to use it.

I began to make objects; objects specifically meant to be unclear, meant to be ambiguous, meant to be resistant to the limitations of language and explanation. I made my doubt into sculpture. I grabbed and held the inverted space that anthropology pointed at and turned it immediately and concretely back onto the world as art; physicalized doubt itself.

Anthropology gave me the gift of roiling doubt. But sculpture forced the doubting home. Sculpture spoke, shouted, stabbed the actual language of doubt back into the world. Sculpture was doubt inverted, turned in as well as out. Sculpture was anthropology inverted: the seer seen in his seeing, the doubter doubted in his doubting, the knower known by the impossibility of his own self appointed but culturally sanctioned task. Sculpture identified me myself as the embodiment of clarity slipping away. Sculpture transformed me into that sliding thought. Sculpture stole and swallowed the anthropological gift that had sustained me.