

**Arts and ethnography in a contemporary world:
From learning to social participation**

edited by
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Introduction

Arts and ethnography in a contemporary world: An introduction

Lígia Ferro and David Poveda

1. Presentation

The story behind this book begins in the 2015 Oxford Ethnography and Education Conference. Several of the presentations there and more or less informal discussions, in and outside the conference sessions, pointed to an interest in and a need to discuss and put into dialogue different perspectives on the role of ethnography when approaching arts practices and learning. A first step, taken alongside Pat Thomson (University of Nottingham), was a proposal for a special issue of the Journal *Ethnography and Education* entitled *Ethnographic Explorations of the Arts and Education*. The response to the Call for Papers for the special issue was overwhelming with more than thirty very interesting proposals (many more than can fit in a journal special issue) that culminated with the publication of the special issue in 2018 (Poveda, Thomson and Ferro, 2018). The reaction suggested that generating a discussion space in the field by organising a scientific meeting, in which the colleagues participating in this publication and others interested in the discussion could meet, would be well received.

Thus, we decided to organise this meeting at the Faculdade de Letras, Universidade do Porto, Portugal from 21st to 23rd of June, 2017. The *ETHNOARTS—Ethnographic Explorations of the Arts and the Education Conference*¹ received seventy proposals for oral communication, fifty-five of

1. For more details please see www.facebook.com/ethnoartspporto/ Institutions involved in the organisation: Instituto de Sociologia, Universidade do Porto, IS-UP; Departamento de Sociologia, Universidade do Porto, DS-UP; Centre for Research in Arts, Creativity and Literacies, Nottingham University; Facultad de Psicología, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, UAM; Ethnography and Education, E & E; Centro de Investigação e Estudos em Sociologia, CIES-IUL, ISCTE-IUL; Centro de Investigação em Psicologia da Música e Educação Musical, CIPEM, INET, IPP; Centro de Estudos de Sociologia e Estética Musical, CESEM, FCSH-UNL. The organising committee was composed by Lígia Ferro, João Teixeira Lopes, Pat Thomson, David Poveda, Natália Azevedo, Irene Serafino, Ana Veloso, Gil Fesch and Rute Teixeira. The keynote speech was delivered by Carl Bagley, to whom we

which were selected for presentation in a small-scale conference aimed at fostering as much discussion as possible. The meeting included PhD students, post-doctoral researchers, university faculty and artists from twelve countries. Feedback from the event was very positive and colleagues in the final session suggested organising a publication drawing from a selection of the papers presented at the meeting.

This edited volume draws from contributions to the ETHNOARTS conference and captures the growing international attention to research developing at the juncture of various disciplinary concerns. On the one hand, educational ethnographic research has turned its attention to learning, teaching and educational practices around art across a variety of institutional and community settings. On the other hand, artists and art researchers have turned to the methodological toolkit of ethnography as a more productive approach to their research aims. In this field, ethnography interconnects to various disciplines beyond Anthropology and showcases its dynamic and multi-faceted nature but also several of the tensions and uncertainties that emerge as researchers experiment with ethnographic approaches and extend conventional research practices. Artistic practices and art settings in the contemporary world are also a social field in which definitional issues around learning, education, social participation, expressive practices or the various manifestations of art are constantly re-examined.

Ethnography is a methodology historically linked with Anthropology but nowadays is used by a diversity of academics and professionals. The use of ethnography in a wide range of disciplines and contexts makes it a dynamic and challenging method. Studies on and in the arts often blur conventional disciplinary borders, allowing for new insights to arise from interdisciplinary dialogues. By combining the study of social practices and discourses related to art-making, and by applying ethnography as the main methodological approach, researchers bypass frontiers, a condition for a stimulating intellectual debate. The nine chapters in this book capture this diversity of issues by presenting detailed ethnographic studies of artistic practices, art contexts or artistic interventions in settings across locations in Europe and Latin America. The book includes

would like to thank for providing an extraordinarily stimulating starting point for the conference discussions. Funding: Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Reitoria da Universidade do Porto and Instituto de Sociologia da Universidade do Porto. The book of abstracts is published and available online: repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/105895/2/202484.pdf

texts written by colleagues working in the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Chile. All chapters are firmly grounded on ethnographic research and present a balance of methodological discussions around ethnographic methods stemming from the examination of artistic practices and settings, detailed accounts of how art is experienced in local settings or critical accounts of how art emerges as a methodological and conceptual tool for social intervention, promoting social participation and educational change.

As we see it, the book is structured in two parts. The first one focuses on arts, ethnography and learning in different settings and comprises the first four chapters. These texts focus on how learning through the arts practice can impact a diverse group of protagonists of art projects in museums and galleries and in schools, taking into consideration, with more or less emphasis in each of the chapters, the interconnections with the wider community in which the projects are implemented. The interactions between professionals with several disciplinary backgrounds are taken seriously by all of the authors, who try to analyse how different professional knowledges (cf., Mercado, 2002) and experiences have implications for practice in such kind of projects. The second part of the book includes the following five chapters. Here ethnography and arts practices turn to the examination of the methodological process and its implications for data collection and the analysis of results. The concept of participation is, with more or less emphasis, at the center of the five contributions. At least two cross-cutting questions emerge across chapters: How can arts practice promote or constrain social participation? How can ethnography help (if it can) deepen our understanding of the processes involved in artistic practice and learning?

2. Outline of the contributions

The first chapter of the book, authored by Thomson, McKelvie, Turvey and Walton, is an experimental text consisting of a dialogue between the Tate Modern teachers—McKelvie, Turvey and Walton—and the anthropologist/researcher—Pat Thomson. Starting from the notion that ethnographers are engaged in *co-constructed research* (e.g. Holland, Renold, Ross and Hillman, 2010; Spindler and Hammond, 2006) and in ‘research which takes up new materialist and/or queer positionalities’ (e.g. Aarsand and Forsberg, 2010; Fenwick, Doyle, Michael and Scoles, 2015; Hickey-Moody, 2012; Maclure, Holmes, MacRae and Jones, 2010), the authors reflect on rich description, text, writing and representation. They consider writing as an important part of the ethnographic

method, but also as thinking and, thus, a way of producing reality. Writing is seen as 'doing work in the world, rather than as an object to be categorised and codified'. The authors have been working together for six years and the dialogue established in this text reflects the results of the regular joint work revealing interesting insights of the interdisciplinary dialogues established between them. The Lexicon is a long text co-written by the authors starting from their experience at the Tate Summer Schools, where they developed a *shared language* to talk about understanding of gallery pedagogies. The authors recur to the Lexicon to go deeper in the analysis. Writing is then seen as emergence, in the logics of an experimental ethnography, and art is seen as a happening 'in between the viewer and the work'. This chapter is an effort to go further beyond the work condensed in the Lexicon.

Chapter two by Franks brings to the debate the potential of an arts education project carried out at the Serpentine Gallery in London, for individual, social and cultural change in the city. The reflections on learning try to focus on the perspectives and experiences of all the project participants (children, artist, curators, researcher and staff of the Portman Early Childhood Centre). Also by developing a rich ethnography, the author tries to grasp 'patterns of playful activity in developing emergent aspects of personhood'. Starting from the definition of culture drawn by Williams (1992), the researcher analyses the ways in which the developed project 'acknowledges and facilitates' children's 'sense of agency' and 'offers resources' in the 'free-wheeling creativity of their play with materials and the narratives that they construct'. Learning through 'stuff' that 'makes people as much as people make stuff' (Miller, 2010) reveals certain patterns of activity in which interferes the ways how adults assist the children's play. Franks' work shows clearly how classifications are built by adults and are questioned through children's play, what becomes (or should become) a central part of the learning process.

Vigo and Beach, in the third chapter, build from the work developed by Beach and Dovemark (2007) in which creative teaching practices are seen as a part of material reality and set out to contribute to understanding the 'sense of art connected with an education for all' and the 'complexity of lived educational situations'. The school where the research was completed is located in a peri-urban small town in Aragón (Spain) and works according to a 'creative teaching perspective' (Vigo and Soriano, 2014), which gives emphasis to the mediations between the learning process in the classroom and the events outside this space. The researchers worked in a quite challenging environment in terms of

educational circumstances, especially because the children's parents are migrant unskilled agricultural workers with very different cultural backgrounds. Vigo and Beach use an ethnographic research method to 'identify, describe, explain and define teaching practices' and children's involvement in learning, where art is used in different subjects in the school curriculum. More than a way of expression, here art is a 'tool of mediation' because it served to 'overcome social distance and linguistic difficulties/complications', particularly when the creation of 'personally meaningful learning experiences' takes place. Following Freire's (1972/2000) thoughts on art, the authors found out that art practices allowed giving space to children's culture and supported their emerging subjectivity and school based formal and informal learning. The authors suggest that education through the arts should be considered in the formal curriculum in order to 'enable more positive social relations between teacher and pupils'.

The fourth chapter presents Bacchiddu and Schwember's analysis focused on the process and results of a multidisciplinary project led by an anthropologist and an artist in a rural school, located in an indigenous area of southern of Chile, the island of Apiao. The text builds from both perspectives, that one of the anthropologist and the one by the artist, trying to reach a common point of understanding of the project process and results. In particular, they note that the children are very independent at home but that dependency on the teachers' instructions is promoted at school. Also, they realised that students are interested in activities resembling their regular home activities and that there are obstacles to recover 'traditional aspects of knowledge' like local cultural traits. The authors underscore that the focus of the national school curriculum on 'national requirements' treats the schools as if they were part of an homogeneous universe, ignoring cultural and geographic specificities. By implementing the project *Territorios Alternos*, the authors could 'integrate knowledge originated and managed by the community itself' and, simultaneously, involve the community as an active part of the creative and research process, using arts as a fundamental tool. By discussing contrasts between children's behaviour inside and outside school, this chapter highlights the interconnections between learning and social participation and can also be seen at the intersection of the two major themes we have identified as organisers of the volume.

The second part of the book includes five chapters where arts are also analysed from an ethnographic perspective but in which the concepts of social and, sometimes political, participation arise more clearly as food for thought. In chapter five Hewitt and Jordan take Hal Foster's essay *Artist as Ethnographer*

(1995) as a starting point to examine some recent UK research projects in which artists and sociologists have collaborated. The variety of ways of interdisciplinary collaboration frequently fail to acknowledge the 'critical function of art and its relationship to politics'. By analysing a collaborative project by the *Free* art collective and the Forum for Democratic Practices, the authors conclude that it is crucial to understand the 'antagonistic aspect of each field' to attain a successful interdisciplinary collaboration. Ethnography, arts practice and participation are key concepts of Hewitt and Jordan's chapter to understand some fundamental misrecognitions and their contribution will certainly help to overcome them.

Chapter six titled *Ethnotheatre: expanding participant observation* by Salgado brings the reader to research using ethno-theatre, an art-based methodology built from ethnography and theatre. By dramatising personal, cultural and social perspectives of real life, the author argues that this tool expands the possibilities of fieldwork. Salgado proposes a kit to apply the ethno-theatre methodology taking into account many aspects such as the researcher's entrance and roles in the field, involving a more collaborative posture, a new perspective of the ethnographic interview and the processes by which ethnographic fieldnotes and other registers are replicated in the texts and performances and pour into different modes of expression. In order to explore this methodological tool, the author discusses data from two ethno-theatre research projects: one carried out inside a Portuguese prison and other developed within the city of *Coimbra's Academy Theatrical Initiation Circle (CITAC)* project.

In chapter seven Bright and Hunter start from the concept of 'social aesthetics' of improvisation (Born, Lewis and Straw, 2017) to analyse the performance culture of a Manchester collective called *The Manchester Improv Collective*. Art performance practices, including the musical expression, are 'immanently social' and can, in improvised arrangements, *empractice* 'novel realms of social experience, new modes of sociality' (Born, Lewis and Straw, 2017: 9). By analysing the participation of social actors who are mostly under thirty years-old, Bright and Hunter discuss how *empractice* shows up in the settings of diverse playing formats at *The Manchester Improv Collective*. This framework corresponds to a renewed interest in the articulations between politics, aesthetics and ethics in arts-based practice. Ethnographic methodological boundaries are shifted, following the challenge proposed by Bagley (2009), as the authors think about how well are we, as ethnographers, equipped to collect and analyse 'the sensuous array of sights, sounds, and smells as well as represent the traumas, passions and emotions, of twenty-first century lived experiences'. The authors draw

upon Pink's (2009) *sensory ethnography* and Stewart's (2007) approach to the contingent *worlding of ordinary affects* to answer some of these challenges.

In *Lost and found: Ethnographic researcher and arts practitioners getting lost and coming home* (chapter eight) Rowley leads us to think about participation and representation related with democratic practice by discussing the results of an ethnographic study carried out at an arts and social care charity for homeless men in Manchester, United Kingdom. The broader frame of the research is an *EU Horizon 2020* project, PARTISPACE, where spaces and styles of youth participation across eight European cities are analysed. The particular case here highlighted by Rowley, consisted of a series of installations formed as planters with light boxes, including walking tours to the sights where these installations were placed and a film documentary. The author seeks to find the communicative possibilities of art practices when used in articulation with ethnographic techniques 'to explore what is made visible or heard, which might not have otherwise been possible'.

Last, but not the least, in chapter nine Raposo presents research carried out at Quinta do Mocho, in the city of Loures, part of the metropolitan area of Lisbon, Portugal, where an urban art project was implemented. Starting from an originally illegal and subversive practice, graffiti, the author mentions how it is being legitimised in the art field, but more than that, Raposo shows how urban art is a tool for promotion by the municipality, that is trying to change the social image of Quinta do Mocho. The young residents of this suburban and poor neighbourhood were turned into community guides of this open air art gallery visited by a large number of tourists. The researcher developed an ethnography, namely by following the guided tours, seeking answers to rethink urban segregation policies, participation and the role of art in the processes.

In short, by crossing several sights of research where arts practices and ethnography are at the core of the analysis, the authors of the nine chapters make a valuable contribution to our understanding on the way ethnography can grasp the roles and reconfigurations of arts in a contemporary world. This edited book should be of interest to scholars and practitioners across a number of social and human disciplines (Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Education, etc.), artistic disciplines (Theatre, Music, Dance, Visual, Plastic Arts, etc.) and work settings (Schools, Academia, Museums, Associations, Community Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, etc.) interested in methodological questions and substantive research emerging at the intersection of ethnography, art, learning and participation in a changing world.

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Anton Franks is a Research Associate at the School of Education, University of Nottingham, currently researching community-based arts projects attached to the Serpentine Galleries in London. A teacher of drama and English in inner London schools, he was then a teacher educator and researcher at the Institute of Education, London and Associate Professor in the area of creativity, arts and education at the University of Nottingham and the University of Warwick. Recent publications include *Teachers, arts practice and pedagogy* in *Changing English*, *Drama and the representation of affect...* in *Research in Drama Education*, and *Drama and Learning* in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.

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Anton Hunter is a PhD candidate in music composition at Manchester Metropolitan University. Active in the field of free improvisation and contemporary jazz, Anton performs regularly around the UK and Europe, and has been running jazz and improvised music events in Manchester for around fifteen years. His doctoral research is a practice-as-research enquiry into composing for large groups of improvising musicians. More information: www.antonhunter.com

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Amy McKelvie is Curator for Schools and Teachers programmes across Tate Modern and Tate Britain. She is interested in the role of affect in art and learning, as part of her MA in Contemporary Art Theory at Goldsmith she has looked at the productivity of embarrassment as a response to performance art.

David Poveda is an associate professor at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). He has training in Psychology, Education, Social Anthropology and extensive experience in sociolinguistic/linguistic ethnographic research. His research interests include children's linguistic and semiotic practices and the

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Harriet Rowley is a lecturer in Education and Community at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). Her first degree is in Philosophy, she is a qualified secondary school teacher and was awarded her PhD from The University of Manchester in 2013. She is an experienced ethnographic researcher predominantly working in education, social care and community-based settings. She has co-produced arts-based projects with young people and adults leading precarious lives both in the UK and internationally.

Francisco Schwember is an artist, professor and curator. He has a Fine Arts degree (2001), an Art Teacher Training (2002), Master in Fine Arts (2010), PhD in Education, from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. He has participated in more than sixty exhibitions, both in Chile and abroad (New York, Madrid, Buenos Aires, Lima, Havana, Cape Town, Quito, Berlin). In addition to developing a research and creation proposal linked to Arts-Based Research and Interdiscipline, he has worked as a Professor in Fine Arts since 2002 at the Fine Arts School of Catholic University of Chile, teaching in various courses, both in the areas of Painting and in Workshops of Creation. He is also a professor of the Master's program in Cultural Heritage of the School of Architecture. His work focuses on the relationship between art, education and first nations, based on a transdisciplinary approach that addresses action research as a collective work methodology.

Ricardo Seiça Salgado is an anthropologist and a performer, integrated research member at CRIA – Centre for Research in Anthropology (Portugal, University of Minho). He develops a research project in between ethnographic and artistic research methodologies, particularly ethnotheatre as research action and radical pedagogy. He has training on performance studies, focusing on the behaviour of alternative resistance in contexts of marginality, and the mechanics of dramatic play as a way of producing worlds of being. As performer, he recently develops independent solo performances. He is curator and cofounder of *baldio*—performance studies, an independent Portuguese research group.

Pat Thomson is Convenor of the Centre for Research in Arts, Creativity and Literacy (CRACL), University of Nottingham. She is known for her interdisciplinary engagement with questions of creative and socially just learning and change. Much of this work has been in collaboration with Professor Christine Hall. Pat

has had a long term research partnership with Professor Barbara Kamler with whom she writes about academic writing. She is an Editor of the international peer refereeschoolsed journal, *Educational Action Research* (Taylor and Francis). Her current research focuses on creativity, the arts and change in schools and communities, and postgraduate writing pedagogies. She has expertise in policy, sociology and cultural geography and has a particular interest in text-based and arts informed research methods. She frequently uses visual research methods in her work.

Leanne Turvey began curating Schools and Teachers programmes at Tate Modern in 2008, becoming Convenor for Schools and Teachers programmes at Tate Modern and Tate Britain in a collaborative job share with Alice Walton in 2010. In this role they head a large cross-site team, developing artist-led programming for teachers and students. Leanne has previously worked as Education Coordinator for Camden Arts Centre and Chisenhale Gallery, as Youth Arts Programmer for Look Ahead Housing and Care and as an art teacher in Camden schools. In 2017 she worked as part of the Faculty for *aneducation, Documenta 14*.

Begoña Vigo Arrazola is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education in the University of Saragosse (Spain) and she is a member of the consolidated research team *Education and Diversity (EDI)*. Much of her work has been conducted in relation to these issues including coordination, participation and supervision of different national and international projects. The analysis of inclusive educational processes and practices in rural and urban spaces and its conceptualisation in educational policy combined with critical ethnography have been published in different journal articles and book chapters.

Alice Walton started working within the Learning department at Tate Modern as the Teachers Curator in 2007, becoming Convenor for Schools and Teachers programmes at Tate Modern and Tate Britain in a collaborative job share with Leanne Turvey in 2010. In this role they head a large cross-site team responsible for developing artist-led programming for teachers and students. In her capacity as a practising artist, Alice has worked with numerous galleries and organisations to implement learning programmes designed to support teacher and student engagement with contemporary artists.