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BOOK REVIEWS

**ARTS & ETHNOGRAPHY IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD: FROM
LEARNING TO SOCIAL PARTICIPATION, LIGIA FERRO
AND DAVID POVEDA (EDS) (2019)**

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Reviewed by Shari Sabeti, University of Edinburgh

This excellent collection is the outcome of a unique and timely conference that took place in Porto, Portugal in the summer of 2017, focused on ethnographic explorations of the arts and education. Co-organized by the editors, based respectively at the University of Porto, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, and Pat Thomson from the University of Nottingham, the conference brought together an international field of researchers, educators and arts practitioners to explore issues of learning, collaboration and participation in and through the arts. The selection of essays here is a fitting tribute to the diversity of those presentations, focusing on a range of contexts (large urban museums; rural classrooms; prisons), arts practices (jazz improvisation; murals and street art; theatre) and topics (homelessness; the loss of indigenous knowledge; the nature of children's play). All the contributions extend and play with our understanding of what it means to 'participate', to limit and exert agency, and the role that the arts – understood broadly and anthropologically as a set of relations between people and things – play in these processes. At the same time, taken together, these chapters also represent a thought-provoking meditation on the nature of ethnography in its many permutations, as a way of coming to know the world for researchers and practitioners alike.

Ethnography and the writing process are one of many links between Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 1 Thomson, McKelvie, Turvey and Walton, collaborators on a summer programme for teachers at Tate Modern in London discuss their production of *The Lexicon*, a combination of written text and

photographs that attempts to resist conventional social science modes of directive writing normally hinged on argument and persuasive rhetoric. Instead they experiment with something more dialogic and montage-like; evoking Walter Benjamin's *flânerie*, they invite the readers' participation through 'browsing, inbetween loitering' (27). In reading their extract in the middle of the chapter, I found myself doing precisely this; at once disruptive, liberating and disorientating, such ongoing experiments in writing/research are deeply worthwhile, particularly in working out how to include collaborators and participants in the outcomes and outputs of research. Frank's contribution in Chapter 2 is based on a similarly 'active, dialogical role' played by curators at the Serpentine Galleries in a community arts project called 'Changing Play' aimed at 3- to 4-year olds. Franks, who brings decades of experience as both a drama teacher and teacher educator to bear on his research process, argues for the alignment of drama, 'the most explicitly social of all art forms' and ethnography. Unlike Thomson et al. who evoke experimental ethnographic work such as Michael Taussig's (1997, 2012), Franks situates himself in classic ethnographic literature (notably Geertz 1993) and employs a series of thickly descriptive ethnographic vignettes and interview extracts with the artist and curators involved in the project to put forward a convincing argument for the complex inter-relationships between the social, contextual and material that contribute to learning through the arts and artists' practices.

The relationship between drama, play and ethnography is further explored in Chapter 6 in which Salgado discusses his ethnotheatre project in a prison context. Ethnotheatre, 'a method to dramatize personal, cultural and social observations and arguments of real life in a given context' (109) is laid out at the start as a highly collaborative endeavour and as an expansion of the notion of 'participant observation'. Following a discussion of different approaches to ethnodramatic writing as outlined by Saldana (2011), we arrive at the most engaging section of the chapter which focuses on the prison project. Salgado provides the reader with a fascinating example of the kind of data and 'hidden transcripts' that theatrical practices can yield (in this case about implicit and invisible social hierarchies and structures amongst prisoners through the ways in which they respond to drama games), something that more conventional ethnography might miss (120). He also touches on the role of the ethnographer in the field in literal and metaphorical ways, distinguishing between 'character' and 'persona', researcher and theatrical director. Bright and Hunter's highly enjoyable and clearly written contribution to the book in the next chapter is the only one that focuses on music, and on jazz improvisation in particular. Part of a large-scale Horizon 2020 project on youth participation across eight different European cities, Bright and Hunter focus their ethnographic case study on the Manchester Improv Collective, a mixture of amateur and professional musicians who come together regularly and in an egalitarian spirit to improvise and perform. Both authors are also members of this Collective and their writing successfully conjures the rich 'sensuous array' (Bagley 2009: 251; cited 127) and 'affective ethnographic attention' (128) encouraged by ethnographers such as Kathleen Stewart (2007, 2010). Taking Born et al. (2017) notion of 'empractice' and their term 'social aesthetics' the chapter explores the potential of differently organized improvisations to change social relations and structures. However, in conclusion the authors also reflect on the broader social context of the Collective that determines the demography of those that participate, highlighting this as a barrier to enacting wider social change.

Three of the chapters take us out onto city streets: Northampton (Hewitt and Jordan's Chapter 5), Manchester (Rowley's Chapter 8) and to the periphery of Lisbon (Raposo's Chapter 9), in order to explore the relationship between art, city inhabitants and public policy. Through his rich ethnography of the Quinta do Mocho social housing estate turned 'public art gallery', Raposo shows us the tensions and controversies at the heart of such 'culture-led regeneration' projects (Hewitt and Jordan: 100). In particular, he explores the changing relationships between the residents, the artists involved in murals and other works, the municipal council responsible for the project and two residents-turned-tour guides, Kedy and Kally. Raposo's chapter shows us how what appears to be both participatory and beneficial for the local residents of a deprived area, still leaves them marginalized in social, structural and economic terms. The project described by Rowley in her chapter, another ethnographic case study from the Horizon 2020 project referenced earlier, also involved local participants taking on roles as tour guides. In this six-month-long arts-based 'Lost and Found' project, young men forming part of Manchester's increasing homeless population created a series of 'viewing boxes' in planters strategically placed around the city in order to give the public insights into the lives and issues of the homeless. While the process was posited as a 'democratic and inclusive participatory' one, Rowley's discussion reveals some of its ethical and practical limitations in a refreshingly honest way.

Hewitt and Jordan, writing as both academics and artists in the central chapter, take Hal Foster's famous 1995 essay, 'Artist as ethnographer?' as the starting point for their discussion of the relationship between art and anthropology, and in particular the current prevalence of research collaborations between social science academics and artists driven by particular funding initiatives. They consider two projects from the AHRC's 'Connected Communities' programme, including their self-presentation and reporting. In such examples, they argue, the lead researchers become the equivalent of the 'commissioner or patron of the artistic work thereby setting the parameters of the art production despite not being an art specialist' (101). What, they ask, are such projects doing for art practice, emerging art forms, or the discipline of art history? Art and artists become instrumentalized by governments (as in Raposo) and researchers (as perhaps in the examples of other projects in this volume) as a means to a social end, without doing either art or the local communities they purport to be supporting, any real good. In contrast, they detail an initiative involving the Freee art collective, of which both Hewitt and Jordan are members, and the Centre for Democratic Practices at the University of Northampton. The collaborative work that resulted, and which explored peoples' voting decisions in the recent EU referendum, was a 'partnership based on agreed objectives and content' and demonstrates an example of how artists can be 'key agents in an antagonistic project that they design and perform' (105).

Chapter 4, one of only two contributions that has school as a research context, takes us to the Chilean island of Apiao. Bacchiddu, an anthropologist who has carried out long-term fieldwork with the community, along with artist, Education Ph.D. student and co-author Schwember, came together as part of the 'Dialogues of Recognition' project, which sought to address the marginalization and stigmatization of indigenous populations in Chile. The chapter explores the role of schools and national curricula in bringing about the loss of indigenous, local knowledge practices and even in breeding passivity and uncharacteristic behaviours. Indeed, a walking trip to the countryside resulted

in the children recovering 'their usual personality, freedom, confidence, and autonomy and this was evident in their body posture, facial expressions, and general attitude with respect to space and place' (79–80). This chapter picks up a theme in Vigo Arrazola and Beach's Chapter 3, also based in a rural school setting, this time in Aragon, Spain, concerning the ways in which arts and creative practices in such settings appear to promote democratic and inclusive pedagogies. The chapter includes ethnographic field notes and some examples of pupil/teacher interactions which testify to those teachers' values and pedagogical skills. Despite the use of 'art as a strategy' (71), however, Vigo Arrazola and Beach (like Bright and Hunter in Chapter 7) are not hopeful of any broader changes in society beginning here. The pupils discussed will continue to become 'failures despite their abilities, despite their responsibilities and despite the commitment of their parents and teachers' (70) because of dominant discourses and structures in the society of which they are a part.

In the Introduction the editors explain that they have structured the book into two halves: the first four chapters focus on how learning through 'arts practice can impact a diverse group of protagonists', as well as 'the interconnections with the wider community in which the projects are implemented'; the remaining five chapters turn to a deeper focus on 'the methodological process and its implications for data collection and the analysis of results' (3). They highlight two cross-cutting themes: '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?' (3). While *Arts & Ethnography in a Contemporary World* does not fail to explore these questions, it also does much more. Hewitt and Jordan's chapter, 'Misrecognitions in the practice of art and ethnography' (92–108) sits pertinently at the centre of this book raising important questions about the nature, value and politics of collaborative research involving social scientists and artists. How, and to what extent, can art enact social or educational change (if at all)? What is the role of arts practice and artists in social science research? How do we work together across disciplines in ways that both respect and push at disciplinary boundaries? What are the limits and potentials of participation, collaboration and agency in such projects and practices? These are important, timely and difficult questions to answer but they are explored in a variety of ways through these chapters. And while each chapter is stand alone, the book also rewards a complete reading for the ways in which the contributions speak to, and through each other, in nuanced and productive ways.

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