

**WORKSHOP REPORT  
ENCOUNTERING CONCEPTS IN ART AND ANTHROPOLOGY  
Universitat de Barcelona, June 11 and 12<sup>th</sup>.**

**A. Introduction and general framework of the workshop.**

The Anthropology of Art interest group within VANEASA was first launched in the EASA conference in Paris, 2012. We have had our first meeting in this last EASA conference in Tallinn, 2014. We organised this meeting as a Lab (L200 Anthropologies of Art). The rationale was to generate a group discussion on the objectives of the interest group. A central theme that emerged through our meeting were the uncertain processes of collaboration between art and anthropology. In the last years, many members of the interest group have participated in several different processes of cross-fertilisation, and experimental practice between both fields. While these experiences have often been very productive, there is also a sense of frustration on the uncertain grounds of these processes, the misunderstandings on which sometimes they are based and the precariousness of their outcomes. Some anthropologists feel that their opening towards art has not been fully acknowledged by artists. At this point, it is necessary to put together these experiences and discuss which are the reasons for these misunderstandings? Which concepts are we putting in play in these processes? Are we using the same concepts in different ways?

With this idea in mind, we generated a list of key recurrent concepts that are interesting precisely because of their ambiguity: “method/work”, “research”, “creativity”, “participation/exclusion”, “institutions” and “archives”. We organized the workshop “Encountering concepts in Art and Anthropology” to address these concepts. The objective was not to produce definitions, but to engage with the questions and problems they have generated- encountering the concepts, as it were.

Each concept has been addressed first by one or two members of the group, who will then open the room to discussion. In the following paragraphs I will make a short summary of the discussions of each panel on each concept or pairing of concepts.

## **B. Panels and discussion.**

### 1) Participation/Exclusion

Leaders: Weronika Plinska and Anton Nikolotov.

The first section of the workshop was dedicated to the discussion of the complementary concepts of participation and exclusion. The leaders of the panel started by acknowledging that these concepts have been used and discussed in other fields than art before, for example in development and social welfare studies (House, Mosse 2006), where participation was already highlighted as a solution to social exclusion, and as a tool of empowerment. The extension of this discourse of participation to the larger economic discourse of management, development and neo-liberal governmentality was also pointed out.

In the case of art and anthropology, the “imperative to collaborate” (Marcus, Howes 2012) has taken different shapes and forms, from activist projects that aim to engage with situations of social exclusion, through projects to reach out local populations and “activate” them, to more specific and focused processes of collaboration between different social agents and experts in particular projects or laboratories. This last case is what has been identified by Marcus as a “para-site”, or a site of research that exceeds the traditional definition of the field site, where anthropologists and artists

work collaboratively with other agents and experts, forming a particular site, not just working on or about them, but with them. The leaders of the workshop explained these concepts in regards to their own research, like in the cases of the Warsaw Rainbow by Julita Wójcik and the art-activist collective Ultra Red. The following discussion revolved around questions of ethics, and the politics of participation/representation. One issue that was particularly pointed out was the difficulty to assess the “quality” or “success” of participation from the artistic point of view, and if such questions actually made sense at all in this context. Another question that was raised was the possibility of thinking some of these projects in terms of self-organisation and autonomy rather than participation.

## 2) Work/Method

Leader: Roger Sansi

Most of the literature on the relationship between art and anthropology has engaged with the use of ethnographic methods, and how both disciplines could learn and exchange ideas about the uses of methods - visual and artistic methods in the case of anthropology, and ethnographic methods in the case of art. In this workshop however we extended the discussion beyond the “method” of research towards its outcomes: what is achieved in anthropological and artistic research? What are the outcomes and forms of objectification of this research? Contemporary art practice often experiments with transitive processes that do not result in definitive outcomes, as opposed to anthropological research, which is objectified in clear research outputs-articles and monographs. In recent years some authors have argued for the experimentation with processual forms of production in Anthropology, that do not result in formal academic outputs. But in more general terms, this experimentation

questions the very definition of what constitutes academic work: to withdraw from academic production is to question the academy as a mode of production. In these terms, it was pointed out how in art practice, the discussion on what constitutes artistic work has been much wider and critical than in Anthropology, and how it has been linked to wider discussions in political economy about precarious labor. An interesting discussion emerged on the differences in the mode of production in different regional traditions in Anthropology: how soviet anthropology was always designed as a collective work of gathering an cultural archive, as opposed to Anglo-American Anthropology, that has always been more individualistic, based on the model of the single ethnographer going to the field and producing a monograph. In these terms, Anglo-American Anthropology can also be more easily assimilated to the romantic ideal of the individual artist. Within western schools of anthropology, the French distinction between “ethnologue” and “anthropologue” was also remarked, as a hierarchical system of production in which the collective of “ethnologists” produces the archive that the single “anthropologue” will transform then in theory, through systematic comparison. The discussion of all these variations made us aware of the need for further discussion on the conditions of knowledge production in Anthropology, beyond the good intentions of proposing more experimental methods.

### 3) Creativity

Leader: Rodrigo Ferreira Nunes

In the section on creativity, the leader Rodrigo Ferreira addressed this concept in reference to Ingold, Hallam and Wilf’s recent discussions. As opposed to notions of individual creativity, anthropological approaches often underscore the collective dimensions of creativity, as improvisational events involving human and non human

agents in the context of preexisting genres, traditions, and skills. The practical, material and embodied nature of creativity is also stressed by these authors, as opposed to a more cognitive perspective that approaches creativity as a mental act. This notion of creativity and improvisation is intimately related to the more general concept of culture in anthropology since Boas, as an embodied set of dispositions than enables improvisation from a given register. Rodrigo explained the concept in reference to his own fieldwork on music making in Shetland islands. The discussion introduced critical notions of “creativity” as a buzzword in contemporary capitalism, as a form of transforming what is seen as raw human energy in productive potential, and as an extension of “art” and “culture” into a wide sphere of production ( as in the “creative industries”). The Schumpeterian notion of “creative destruction” was also invoked in this sense. This move was discussed within the larger trajectory of the transformations in cultural production in relation of property rights. The emergence of copyright in the eighteenth century is strictly linked to the emergence of the figure of the author as creator. Paradoxically, the emergence of new electronic media in the last decades has had the opposite effect, by enabling the emergence of a more collective notion of creativity (as in “creative commons”).

It was also pointed out that “creativity” seems to have lost its centrality in the last years in favor of the notion of “innovation”, more closely linked to science and technology.

#### 4) Institutions

Leaders: Lidia Rossner and Jonas Tinius

The section 'Institutions', explored several different ways in which institutions have been conceptualised by artists and by anthropologists. Focus of the session was to

mobilise some of the ways in which institutions function, or are constituted by artists, and to ask how these conceptual, ethnographic, emic notions of institutions can be productively theorised for further anthropological inquiry. Based on fieldwork conducted by the section leaders among public theatre in the German Ruhr valley and a state-funded project lab to rethink the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, respectively, the section proposed four different instances of the institution as concept between art and anthropology: a) as prism and mediator between different social spheres, b) as tradition with a coherent albeit potentially conflictive set of ethical and aesthetic values, c) as risk minimisers that allow for unprofitable projects, and for long-term planning, d) as sites for institutional critique that can provide internal ways of rethinking the nature of the institution.

#### 5) Research

Leader: Thomas Filitiz

Approaching the topic of research in the anthropology of art the leader of this section proposed to consider the framework within which we are investigating. As broad concept, the leader used the notion 'dialogue' as outlined by Schneider in his series of articles on the new hermeneutics between art and anthropology, a conversational situation of collaboration between artists and anthropologists being fully conscious of differences (Schneider 2013, 2015). This new agenda, according to Schneider, is positioned within participatory art. The leader of this section argued that this emphasis on participatory art is neglecting or marginalising art practices around the world that are not based on participation. In these terms, the question of a "global art" framework, that includes other local art worlds beyond the still Western-centric international contemporary art world.

One of the central questions raised in the discussion that followed was the role of curators and patrons in the production of contemporary art discourses. In particular, the latter are aiming at getting more influences on exhibitions (e.g. U.S.A. and Switzerland). That relates to their influence in producing the art-ness of the object.

On the other hand, there was also a common interest in engaging with current discussions on ontology, the (artistic) multitude and perspectivism to approach the multiplicity of contemporary art worlds.

#### 6) Archive.

Leaders: Giulia Battaglia, Fionna Siegenthaler.

The leaders of this section made three general points in relation to the concept of archive: First, the archive as something shared/collective that can be both, material and non-material. Second, the archive as an existing or potential place, as a subject and as an object of collaboration (for instance, between artists and scholars, scholars and community members, etc.). And third, the archive is process-based rather than a still repository; i.e. it is subject to practices, transliterations and transformations. The following discussion revolved around a set of questions. Is the collective/shared quality of the archive unique? How can it be further explored, and to what extent does it distinguish itself from other collaborative and shared practices, places and subjects? What does archive then mean for future ethnography as a discipline of societies and cultures? What forms of collaborative work does the archive offer, and what could it contribute to the exploration of the relationship of art and anthropology for all, scholars, artists and other actors? What can we gain from a process-based

notion of the archive? What implications does this have on the role of the archive in art and anthropology, and for the practices related to it, in particular.

### **C. Conclusions and Outputs.**

In the wrapping-up discussion of the workshop, we agreed that the outcome of the workshop didn't need to be a standard publication, an edited volume or special issue, but that in the spirit of the project we had to maintain an ongoing, opened conversation on the concepts we discussed. In these terms we plan to build an online blog where the discussions on the concepts will be open to contributions of people who didn't participate in the workshop. We also plan on organizing a workshop in the next EASA biennial meeting in Milan 2016, open to other EASA members so that we can enlarge and reinforce the discussion within the Anthropology of art interest group