

Why do social art projects look like participant ethnography?

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Aim of the paper

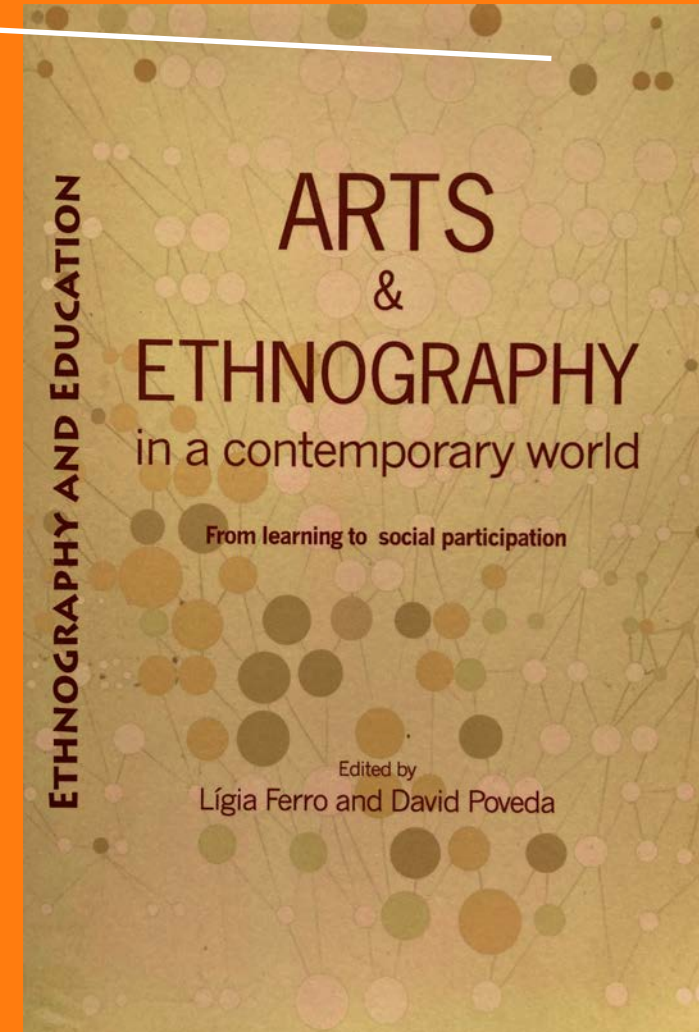
- Due to the rivalries and contestations present in the definition of contemporary art practice we ask how do ethnographers claiming to use art methods, understand the multiplicities of contemporary art research
 - To explore in which ways contemporary art practice resembles participant ethnography
 - To recognise the difference between the terms artistic methods and art practice
 - To reach a better understanding of how contemporary art practice can contribute to ethnographic processes with people
 - To ask if contemporary art can de-assemble and re-assemble the social in ways that conventional ethnographic methods might not be able to achieve
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How we will address the aim of the paper

- Reflect on our chapter *Misrecognitions in the Practice of Art and Ethnography, Arts and Ethnography in a Contemporary World* (2019)
 - Present an overview of debates in contemporary art practice, in particular social art practice
 - Introduce two art projects by the Partisan Social Club
 - Describe a recent extracurricular project with 12 PhD students entitled *How to talk to the city*, Partisan Social Club, in which we explore art and ethnographic methods and they partake in a meta ethnography to experience using artistic practice to understand their social context
 - Conclusions and reflections
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Misrecognitions in the Practice of Art and Ethnography

- We revisit the function of anthropology for contemporary art through Hal Foster's seminal essay, 'Artist as Ethnographer?'
- We then examine ways in which artists have collaborated with sociologists in recent UK research projects
- We consider a collaborative project by the Partisan Social Club and the Free art collective (with the Forum for Democratic Practices)
- We conclude that understanding the antagonistic aspect of each field is an essential part of successful collaborations between disciplines



Contemporary Art Debates

1990- 2000's

1960's

Rejection of formal art practices, debates between Painting and Sculpture.

Dematerialization of the art object (Lippard 1972)

Conceptual art, Text art, Land art, The body, identity, representation the social function of art.

Artists: Adrian Piper, Merle Laderman Ukeles, Judy Chicago, Robert Smithson.

- **Relational Aesthetics** as described by Bourriaud (1998) identifies artists practices that utilise relational processes. Artists: Felix Torres Garcia, Jens Haaning

- **Social Turn** coined by Bishop (2006), to describe a shift in art practice to include social and political arrangements. Bishop uses Mouffe's theory of agonism to move from the convivial to the antagonistic. Artists: Santiago Sierra

- **The dialogical** – as theorised by Kester (2004), emphasis on conversation and collaboration, community art practice and activism. Artists: Suzane Lacy and Stephen Willets

2010 - 2020's

- **Sociopolitical aesthetics:** (Charnley, K: 2021) 'Post- object;' artworks that address political matters through content and methods. Includes practices known as socially engaged art practice, performative practices, site specificity, institutional critique, art activism, artist collectives. Reflects upon what art and politics could be now in the context of neo-liberalism and to include decolonial theories of art and life

Thus social practices are not only 'sociable' encounters, but are critical engagements that produce observations on the world. Artists: Phil Collins, Bouchra Khalili and Forensic Architecture

Contemporary Art 1960's



From Left to Right:
Adrian Piper *Mythic Being*, 1973 – 1975, Merle Laderman Ukeles, 1973 *Hartford Wash: Maintenance Outside*, Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970,

Contemporary Art 1990 - 2000's



From Left to Right clockwise:
Jens Haaning, *Arabic Joke Posters* 2006, Stephen Willats, *Brentford Towers* 1985, Suzanne Lacy, *The Crystal Quilt* 1987, Santiago Sierra, *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People*, 2000 Felix González-Torres' *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*

Contemporary Art 2010 - 2020's



From Left to Right clockwise: Bouchra Khalili, *The mapping journey*, Phil Collins, *marxism today (prologue)* 2010 HD video installation, Forensic Architecture, *True to scale*, 2020

Partisan Social Club art projects

1. Art – Study-Action

- Study together rather than co-create - emphasis on re-commoning processes rather than the production of individual artworks
- Turns participants into active members that take over and create meta schemes within the project – explores multiplicities of ways of being together
- Creates multiple responses for artistic production that consider care, commoning and collectivising
- Utilise spaces of the art gallery to develop alternative public spheres – to provoke culture-led re-commoning

1. Art – Study-Action



Partisan Social Club, On Being together: membership, collectives and unions, Slogans and Embodiment. Activity and making by members, workshop documentation, 13 September, Partisan Social Club, Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall, London, 2018



Partisan Social Club, After Thompson: An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness: 'Is This T-shirt Working Hard Enough?' Sadie Edginton & Khaver Idrees, Yukako Tanaka. In this workshop the artists will be exploring the use of t-shirts in displaying printed political text. The artists have devised a set of shapes out of their languages of English and Arabic that people can play with to create text and patterns. We invite you to join us to create printed words. T-shirts will be available, also feel free to bring your own! Friday 15 November. Coventry Biennial, The Row, Coventry UK, 2019

Partisan Social Club Art projects

2. Social and Public Kiosks

- Puts a non-commercial structure in the public realm, (beyond the art gallery context)
- Proposes new methods for opinion formation via agonistic methods of agree and disagree (Slogan writing, manifesto readings and spoken choirs)
- Focus on the passerby rather than predetermined groups of interest – resists community naming
- Badge making, slogan writing, poster making to declare opinion and to publishing them in public space

2. Social and Public Kiosks



Free art collective, Public Kiosk, spoken choir reading of the 'Manifesto for Art', Cardiff With Culture: Visioning the City, g39, Cardiff, September 2016.



Researchers from the Centre for Democratic Practices (CfDP) The University of Northampton with passers-by at the Social Kiosk Market Square Northampton. Interviews were held to ascertain voter patterns on the recent Brexit referendum. Reasons on how people voted and why would then inform the design of the 'Why? Map'. 2016. Photograph Joe Brown.

Practice – project

Becoming a Public Ethnographer

Feb – July 2021 Institute of Education, University College London

Becoming Public Ethnographers: Aims and Objectives

Becoming public ethnographers develops knowledge and skills in ethnography

This initiative consists of a series of lectures and workshops aiming to strengthen PhD students' ethnographic voices and get involved in societal debates about social change.

These project fosters different ways of representing knowledge and dialoguing with the multiple publics that our research intends to address.

Main output: development of an ethnographic product (text, performance, installation) enabling us to engage with our publics.

Study and Re-commoning Culture

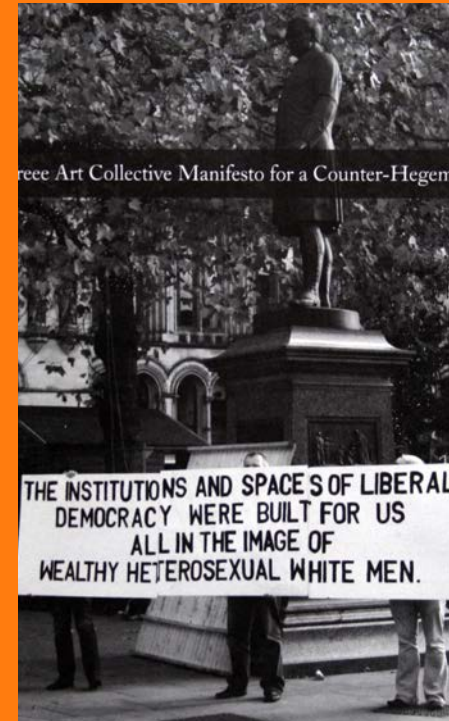
How to talk to the city, Partisan Social Club

How to talk to the city:

Public interventions and observations in the practice of art and ethnography

Aim

The aim of this workshop project is to develop the skills of the group in relation to understanding and participating in ethnographic processes that utilise a creative dimension. The idea is that every member will develop an artwork that engages with the public realm, both in terms of content and presentation. We will use artistic techniques to foster different ways of producing and representing knowledge. We will also experience how it feels to be a subject in an ethnographic process, by sharing our ideas, development and final works with the group.



Free art collective,
How to talk to public art, 2005



Toppling the Statue of Edward Colston,
Bristol, 2020

How to talk to the city, Partisan Social Club

Project Aims:

- Make a piece of art work based on issues that matter to you in relation to the city
- 6 days of working together

Day 1 Thurs 20 May Aim: Introduction to project	10.am – 12pm Welcome. Introduction to all members Presentation 1 AH&MJ ‘Why do social art projects look like partici-pant ethnography?’ Presentation 2 AH&MJ ‘Art, Study Action’	1pm -3pm Project briefing AH&MJ Content: ‘Perspectives on the city’ Questions and discussions
Day 2 Fri 21 May Aim: Developing Practice	10am – 12pm Presentation 3 AH&MJ ‘Misrecognitions in the practice of art and ethnography’ Questions and discussion Discussion: What is it like working with others, how does it feel being public in the public realm? Exchange experineces	1.30pm – 3.30pm Presentation 4 AH & MJ Artistic ways of production – What to make & how to make things? Sites and places Questions and discussions Members to present initial ideas
Day 3 Mon 7 June Aim: Artistic Techniques	10am – 12pm Presentation 5 AH&MJ Health and safety /Ethics Photographs and documentation – all things production / artistic to consider Video on how to document by designer Michael Wright https://millennialcreative.co.uk/	1.30pm – 3.30pm Presentation by members of initial ideas to date Selecting sites/ Planning action Making safely Testing ideas Any questions on techniques and production

Day 4 Fri 11 June Aim: Final ideas	10am – 12pm Members present progress Double check H&S Final questions about production	1.30pm – 3.30pm Members present progress Double check H&S Final questions about production
Day 5 Thurs 24 June	All members making their art work in the public realm	All members making their art work in the public realm
Day 6 Fri 26 June Aim: Presentation Conclusions	10am – 12pm Sharing and discussion Each member to present using documentation and field notes/ ethnographies Zoe Taylor Illustrator will join us to capture some of our ‘feeding back’ by drawings us speaking / re-enacting our scripts performances etc www.zoetaylor.co.uk	1.00pm – 3.00pm Sharing and discussion Each member to present using documentation and field notes/ ethnographies All materials submitted / shared google / drop box etc

How to talk to the city, Partisan Social Club

Online Meetings and presentation:

- Make a piece of art work based on issues that matter to you in relation to the city
- 6 days of working together



How to talk to the city, Partisan Social Club

Group Projects 1. Who is the other?



How to talk to the city, Partisan Social Club

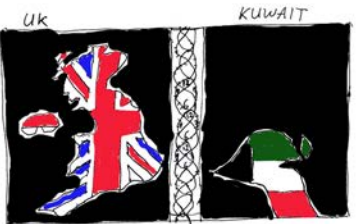
Group Projects 2. Time and Immobility

Can everybody see my screen?

This is a presentation of different themes - one is nationality, one is borders and one is time.

Time and Immobility - how time is used to control along with nationality and borders

How time is used as a technology by regimes to control space.



UK KUWAIT

Time and Immobility

- Technology of (resisting) governmentality as opposed to nationality and borders
- Linear and non-linear
- The gaps between the social & institutional realities

Perception of time - they underpin the gaps between institutional and social realities.

I tried to represent time as a barrier - a separator between two geographies and experiences.

How time is used to govern and control - forcing people to wait and while they are waiting they are prevented from doing certain things.

How time is experienced differently for us - for any government regime time is linear - people have to queue but for us, subjected to this regime, time is more complex - we have memories and worries about future loss - the governments can have us wait forever.

This has been a reality for me and other stateless people from my community since 1961 - and for me, since 1984 - so I tried to capture this razor fence.

This was, for me, more of a learning than 'teaching' experience - it made me think a lot.

This is an example of how any artefact is meaningless until it is shared and becomes social.

I wasn't able to do this in the open air - I used a space called the dewaniyah - a space for social gathering where people who know or don't know each other can gather.

Could you tell us a bit more about the process? Did you present your image to guests?

I put the presentation on the TV

we have this TV here

The dewaniyah - often it would be with elders?

Yes. Every house in Arabia has to have space for the dewaniyah - the concept is open hospitality. There are good and bad things about it - unfortunately it's exclusively for men.

Because of the exclusion many refugees are recreating this space in the UK to have a sense of home.

Doing this ethnography in the public space of the dewaniyah allowed me to learn many things.

1. How what I was doing would be perceived by others - some take control over time by regimes for granted - they thought I was wasting my time by trying to change things.

2. It enabled me to understand my position - what am I doing?

We gather here in this space. I'm one of the very few in my community who made it to higher education - so they are happy to see me and have me represent them.

I came from Southend up to Manchester to be a guest in my friend's dewaniyah.

How to talk to the city, Partisan Social Club

Group Projects 3. (Im)mobility in the city

(IM) MOBILITY IN THE CITY
23.06.2021

here it is!

could you make it screen show?

let me try again

I made a Powerpoint of the performance

It doesn't make mobility as easy as it's supposed to!

The performance was done by myself. Rommy kindly helped with photos and wrapping me up.

It happened on Wednesday in Hemel Hempstead. The location and materials are significant.

The location - the original idea was to use the bus stop but then I chose the park which was full of women, babies and prams.

'Mother' - also loaded and the idea that a woman should be a mother. What does it mean to be a mother?

The pram was a material - something I'm expected to have as a mother but also a contested object because it does not fit on the buses and trains so there's this paradox.

I used Post-it notes to write the themes of immobility that I wanted to convey - these are labels that have been put, or 'stuck' on me - I liked how they could be put on but also fall off.

I'm uncomfortable with all of these categories.

The pain of prolapse relates to a history of pain - menstruation, child birth, effects of birth control etc.

I also used sellotape as a material to bind my arms and legs and tie myself to the pram.

'Women' - since a child I've been surrounded by ideas of what a woman is, what a good girl is etc and the expectation of not complaining and enduring because you are a woman.

Prolapse

Pram

White

Immobility

Mother

Only after binding I realised I wouldn't be able to hold my baby like this - then I realised how I was showing my vulnerability through my immobility.

People ignored me when I said 'hello' and avoided eye contact.

Three people spoke to me.

I liked what you said about the bodily feeling of being restricted.

I wouldn't have done this alone

After 40 mins I felt like staying any longer would not result in any different reactions.

Conceptually, a fantastic project!

I was struck by your analysis of this. Maybe it could become a publication - reach more people - not just passers by?

You look good!

It felt really good to take the tape off. I didn't realise how tight it had been but my body knew and it left a mark.

How did you structure your engagements? What narrative did you give them?

I would say 'hello, any thoughts? I'm doing a performance about immobility. I would point to the categories on me and say 'I think they're related'. I explained my story. I started with the prolapse.

Now I'm wondering if this was the best way. I spoke to a woman who also had a baby but she had never heard of prolapse and could not relate.

These categories; 'white', 'woman', 'mother' etc - they are taken for granted. and I was able to tell my story and convey this idea of my immobility in a way I thought people outside of academia could relate to. It was good for me to question all of the assumptions we make about the public.

I assumed that a woman would be able to relate more but she wasn't.

I'm still trying to make sense of these categories.

These things aren't really do's/cursed

Joggers

Conclusions and reflections

- The group began the project by thinking art was elite and not much use to the political situation, this shifted when thinking about politics in CAP artworks as a type of communication and therefore a contribution to the public sphere
- Most of the group's experience of space – in their home contexts and as visitors to the UK presented various barriers that impinged upon their ability to contribute to the public sphere. One member was a refugee and this instigated a debate about the limits of citizenship within the making of public sphere. 6 female members of the group decided to work together on a project in the public realm
- In response to the group PSC realised that their approach to art and the public sphere was dominated by western art practices and they adjusted this to learn more about MENA artists and artworks
- The groups responses were informed by CAP methods and tools - CAP highlights contested histories and theories of identity and representation as well as new methods of mediation which can inform ethnographic study - this brought an awareness of the problematics of asking others to share their experiences
- Members found that they could produce artworks as tools for communication that did not need specialised craft skills, they used these tools to articulate their own stories and research enquires, reflected their own political positions
- By working together and with others the group began to think of what could be reciprocal in the ethnographic process
- Artists can identify and reflect upon social problems, but they also intervene and act on the world through refusing the way things are and producing new imaginaries. CAP suggests a positionality and is a form of communication. Is there space for collaborations between scholars and audiences that bring this to the understanding of the social?
- After Latour's theories on the social, can CAP enable a de-assembling and a re-assembling of the social in ways that conventional ethnographic methods might not be able to achieve?

Thanks for listening

Special thanks to:

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