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Artistic Practices and the Artistic Dispositif – A Critical Review*

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Abstract: This article explores several different ways that art has been integrated into and rearticulated by various disciplines over the last few decades. In the face of a new trend — a steady increase in the inclusion of art in different disciplines— critical analysis seems necessary to distinguish those artistic practices which challenge the hegemonic discourse from those that reify it and use the arts for social control. To meet this objective, the concept of the 'artistic dispositif' is described and applied to contemporary art, art therapy, and different research methods using the arts. Concerning the latter, a particular focus will be given to the encounters between art and ethnography. Analyzing different artistic practices in this context allows for a deeper understanding of how to utilize art to challenge hegemony and to defy institutional limits and frontiers.

Keywords: *Thesaurus:* Ethnography. *Author:* Artistic dispositive; artistic practices; critical analysis; hegemony.

Prácticas artísticas y el dispositivo artístico: una revisión crítica

Resumen: El presente artículo explora las diferentes maneras como el arte ha sido integrado y rearticulado por varias disciplinas durante las últimas décadas. Frente a la nueva tendencia —un aumento constante de las inclusiones del arte en y por diversas disciplinas— un análisis crítico parece necesario

* This paper is result of a decade long independent academic research as well as a decade long collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (Macba).

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para diferenciar aquellas prácticas artísticas que sepan desafiar el discurso hegemónico de las que lo reifican, usando el arte para el control social. Para conseguir dicho objetivo se describe el concepto del “dispositivo artístico” y se lo aplica al arte contemporáneo, la arteterapia, así como diferentes métodos de investigación que emplean el arte. Respecto a los últimos se pone un especial énfasis en los umbrales entre arte y etnografía. En este contexto, el análisis de las distintas prácticas artísticas permite una comprensión más profunda sobre las posibilidades de desafiar la hegemonía con el arte y de retar los límites y fronteras institucionales.

Palabras clave: *Thesaurus*: etnografía; hegemonía. *Autor*: análisis crítico; dispositivo artístico; prácticas artísticas.

Práticas artísticas e o dispositivo artístico — uma revisão crítica

Resumo: Este artigo explora diversas maneiras diferentes em que a arte tem sido integrada e rearticulada por várias disciplinas ao longo das últimas décadas. Face a uma nova tendência —um aumento contínuo na inclusão da arte em diferentes disciplinas—, uma análise crítica parece necessária para distinguir as práticas artísticas que desafiam o discurso hegemônico daquelas que o reificam e usam a arte para o controle social. Para alcançar esse objetivo, o conceito de “dispositivo artístico” é descrito e aplicado à arte contemporânea, à arteterapia e a diferentes métodos de pesquisa que utilizam artes. Com relação ao último, um enfoque particular será dado aos encontros da arte com a etnografia. Analisar diferentes práticas artísticas nesse contexto permite um entendimento aprofundado de como utilizar a arte para contestar a hegemonia e desafiar limites e fronteiras institucionais.

Palavras-chave: *Thesaurus*: análise crítica; etnografia; hegemonia. *Autora*: Dispositivo artístico; práticas artísticas.

Introduction: Artistic Practices and the Artistic Dispositif

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This article offers an overview of the different ways art has been “re-defined” (Marxen 2008), “de-defined” (Garcia Canclini 2014, xvi), “de- and re-territorialized” (Carnevale 2013), as well as amplified or transferred into the social, political, therapeutic and research arenas over recent decades. In the face of a new fashion —a steady increase in the inclusion of art in different disciplines— a critical view seems necessary to distinguish those artistic practices which challenge the hegemonic discourse from those that reify it and use the arts for social control. Different art practices and how they challenge the hegemony are analyzed, with a special focus given to encounters between art and ethnography.

In the context of art's transdisciplinarity, Holmes (2006, 421) suggests the term "artistic device," drawing on Foucault's descriptions of the device—or *dispositif*¹—and Guattari's *agencement collectif d'énonciation*—an articulation of collective speech. The artistic dispositif encompasses artistic inquiries which refrain from overcoding realities and are able "to produce new figures, forms, constellations—in short, original material and cultural configurations that are inseparable from collective statements" (Holmes 2006, 421). Additionally, according to Deleuze (1995) and Guattari (1989, 1995), these artistic "assemblages" should result "from the flow of desire," "a kind of delirium in relation to others, to language, to images and to things. It is this drifting and at least partially delirious flow of productive energies that alone can articulate a collective statement: which is the whole interest and passion of the artistic device" (Holmes 2006, 412).

Here I agree with Holme's reasoning about the artistic dispositif responds in its "multiplicity of purpose... in accordance with a strategy dictated by a need, by a structural imperative." Nowadays, it seems to reflect people's "urgent need for an articulation of aesthetics and thinking—about the need for an intellectualized art, or for what might be called 'cognitive creativity,' in the particular kinds of societies that we inhabit" (Holmes 2006, 413-414).

A response to this need can be found in multidisciplinary encounters with the arts. These emerge, in the main, from artistic inquiry transgressing its supposed limits, addressing the complexities of human life. Today, many artists are less interested in constructing tangible objects than in participating in "*cultural ecologies*," "a collaborative production of desires" or a "display of experimental communities" (Laddaga 2006, 9-15; my translation). From these practices, a new definition of art has emerged: "a mobile laboratory and experimental theatre for the investigation and instigation of social and cultural change" (Holmes 2006, 2).

These phenomena are explored in Reinaldo Laddaga's book *Estética de la emergencia* (2006) (*The Art of Emergency*), and expanded upon by García Canclini using what he calls the *Estética de la inminencia*; in English, *The Aesthetics of Imminence*.²

The "cultural ecologies" described by Laddaga (2006, 29-30) interrupt "the common course of actions in the world," which means they disrupt the hegemonic discourse. For social sciences and other disciplines like philosophy, art offers "epistemological experiences," due to its "epistemological resiliency" (García Canclini 2014, 157; Buck-Morss 2011, 227): "Art processes are epistemological places where art and society, aesthetics and sociology, rethink their ways of making and knowing" (García

1 The dispositif, according to Foucault (2001a), is "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical and moral propositions" (Holmes 2006, 413). Given this multiplicity of purpose and elements, the dispositif is always at the crossroads of power and knowledge (Agamben 2014).

2 This is the subtitle of García Canclini's 2010 book: *La sociedad sin relato. Antropología y estética de la inminencia*. *The Aesthetics of Imminence* is my literal translation, as opposed to the official 2014 English translation of the title (García Canclini 2014).

Canclini 2014, 162). Focusing mainly on the encounters between contemporary art and anthropology, García Canclini (2014) highlights the “ethnographic turn” and “trans-disciplinary turn” in contemporary art (bridging art, anthropology, and sociology). This is demonstrated in the works and writings of artists such as Dora García (2010 and 2011), Roberto Jacoby (2011), Antoni Muntadas (2011), Jo Spence (2005), Ester Ferrer (2017), Martha Rosler (2013), and Krzysztof Wodiczko 1999.

In the abundant recent literature on encounters between art, ethnography and anthropology, artists and anthropologists have shared ideas regarding research and methods, participation, fieldwork, alterity, rapport, complicity, transnationalism, Nation State, institutions, institutional critique and archivism. For many, it is a question of pushing these ideas to their very limits to open up new horizons for their use or, rather, their deconstruction. Simultaneously, contemporary anthropologists and artists share similar research pursuits and tend to oppose dominant narratives, aiming at detotalizing proposals, including ambiguity and uncertainty, while simultaneously rejecting universalizable answers (García Canclini 2014).

For Brian Holmes (2006, 411):

40 ■ One of the strong possibilities of art today is to combine theoretical, socio-logical or scientific research with a feel for the ways that aesthetic form can influence collective process, so as to de-normalize the investigation and open up both critical and constructive paths. Projects carried out in this way have complex referential content, but they also depend on a highly self-reflexive and deeply playful exercise of the basic human capacities: perception, affect, thought, expression and relation.

Again, here I agree with Holmes (2006) critical analysis of artistic practices is necessary, especially since they are ever-expanding. This analysis should distinguish those practices which operate with required critical rigor and demonstrate the potential to defy dominant discourse from those which simply follow convention and are exempt from critical reflection.

Differentiating between the two may seem of limited significance, but a failure to do so can, in fact, lead to repeated and or worsening control and oppression (Marxen 2013a, 2016; Marxen 2017). The result is “the cultural experience on a similar footing to processes of consumption” and “a progressive trivialisation and impoverishment of experience, in which the critical, emancipatory dimension of cultural experience is eliminated” (Ribalta 2010, 230). Martha Rosler (2013) also warns against an expansion of control and (state) instrumentalization of artistic activities. The only possible remedy for instrumentalization is critical analysis of the insertion and redefinition of art that deeply questions beliefs that support the established order and the hegemonic discourse.

From my professional experience as an academic who has worked in various different countries,³ a medical and cultural anthropologist and a trained art therapist with 15 years of experience in different clinical and community settings, I explain four different art practices as examples of the aforementioned multidisciplinary encounters with the arts: types of critical art, art therapy, art-based research, and ethnography from art. Their possibilities and challenges of opposing hegemony are discussed in order to relate them to the artistic dispositif.

The Past: Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht

Since the previous century, art has continually intersected with the social and political field as well as with therapy and research activities. Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht are two prime examples of thinkers who had already developed ideas and thoughts in reference to the way art interacts with other fields in the first half of the 20th century (Vattimo 2005; Marxen 2012, 2011b, 2009, 2008, forthcoming).

For Walter Benjamin, the social and revolutionary transformation of art was primarily based on its technical industrialization, especially in the mediums of film and photography. He aspired to “the liquidation of art in its traditional bourgeois form” (Buck-Morss 2005, 81) focusing on a new clientele: the working class. According to Benjamin, technical industrialization would radically change the relationship of the masses with art, allowing for far greater social significance. The immense technical possibilities of reproduction would decrease—or even completely eliminate—the aura and magic of art, which, once secularized, could achieve social and political functions (Benjamin 1969).

In the 1920s and 30s, the production mechanisms of art were undergoing a radical change. Once hoarded in the hands of the wealthy and elite who controlled its consumption and viewing, now art moved into the social and political sphere, offering the general public an opportunity to engage more closely. Art stepped out of the “cult of beauty” (Benjamin 1969, 6); the mission of the artist became contribution to social transformation. It was theorized that artistic practice itself should engage with and reflect the relations of production and meet contemporary conditions of society. The conditions and mega-structures of production, access, and dissemination of the arts in a society would have to be changed entirely in order to entirely change that society (Benjamin 1978). For Benjamin, the loss of artistic mystique was more than compensated by the technical possibilities of massive distribution bringing art into the public arena. The uniqueness of the artwork—its “aura”—is replaced by popular access. People’s living situations, working conditions and perspectives on their own oppression are voiced as a result (Benjamin 1969).

Furthermore, the technical reproduction of art showcases innovative values and mediums. Thus, the focus here is not to question the loss of quality or aesthetics, but to explore the innovative function of art that has important aesthetic

3 Spain, Italy, France, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, and the U.S.

repercussions in the form of an enrichment and augmentation of creativity. In this sense, Benjamin (1969) referred to his contemporaries in the arts pursuing Dadaism and Charlie Chaplin's contributions to cinema. At the same time, Benjamin undertook an extensive analysis of Brecht's "Epic Theater" as an important example of politically committed art (Benjamin 1978 and 2003). The playwright highlighted the proletarianization of the bourgeois writer to show solidarity with the proletariat. In his concept of Epic Theater, Brecht sought to remove theater from its bourgeois pedestal and close the gap between the public and artists. That is, he wanted to turn the stage into a podium where viewers could adopt a critical and active position and both actors and spectators could work together to alter the conditions of human coexistence (Benjamin 1969, 1978, 2003; Brecht 1963). He changed the dynamics of artistic production by converting the previously passive contemplator into an active agent. These ideas were later reiterated by Warner (2005), Frazer (1997), and Mouffe (1993), as well as Ribalta (2010), who refers to the previous three authors when discussing the Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona (Macba) experience from 2000-2008 which is discussed in detail later.

Being extremely aware that the arts are particularly vulnerable to abuses of power, Benjamin was not at all a "technological determinist." He was aware that technological change or progress can open up the horizon for new possibilities but are not revolutionary or progressive in and of themselves since they can be easily coopted by capitalism and fascism. Truly political art, however, should lead to innovation that is inassimilable for the bourgeois apparatus of production (Benjamin 1969 and 1978).

Transferred to modern and contemporary times, different Latin American artistic practices are especially strong in their exemplification of the innovative aspect of "secularized" art, when brought to different publics, including laypeople (Conceptualismos Sur 2012; Marxen, forthcoming).

For example, in Argentina, during the 1968 project entitled Tucuman Arde (Tucuman's Burning), artists and sociologists worked in collaboration with print media unions (Longoni and Mestman 2010) and again within the Siluetazo intervention ("Big Silhouette Movement"), artists worked hand-in-hand with human right groups against the forced disappearances of civilians during the military dictatorship in Argentina (Longoni and Bruzzone 2008). Subsequently, the Grupo de Arte Callejero (Street Art Group, GAC) fought alongside human right groups against the impunity of the military dictators with their now famous public protests, called *Escraches*, using placards with designs similar to street signs (GAC 2009; Longoni and Bruzzone 2008). The tactic of the *Escraches* was later repeated in Barcelona, Catalonia/Spain by the art-activist group Enmedio for actions against evictions during Southern Europe's economic crisis, in collaboration with PAH (Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca, the activist platform for people affected by evictions).⁴ The Conceptualismos Sur (Conceptualisms South) network has collected, disseminated,

4 See: <http://www.enmedio.info/tag/escrache>

and promoted similar experiential projects in different Latin American countries in their book-catalogue and exhibition, *Perder la forma humana—una imagen sísmica de los años ochenta en América Latina* (*Losing the human form—a seismic image of the Eighties in Latin America*) (Conceptualismos Sur 2012).

In Europe, artistic innovations in broadly comprehensible political critique have been developed by, among others, the conceptual artist Hans Haacke, in dialogue with the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995).

Different Critical Art Practices

In accordance with Mouffe (2007), the term “critical art” is preferred over “political art” because the latter is considered redundant and inevitably leads to an incorrect topology; all art embraces a political dimension, since it reflects a given symbolical order. At the same time, politics always embraces an aesthetic dimension in the symbolic order of social relationships.

The arts never exist in a cultural vacuum. They are always interconnected with the structures of society, as already outlined, among others, by Brecht (1963), Benjamin (2003, 1978, 1969), Adorno (1991), Bourdieu (1996), and artists such as Haacke (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995) and Rosler (2013). The arts can either reify or challenge society’s mechanisms of control and oppression. The question here is which art forms can defy the hegemonic societal discourse, facilitating spaces for resistance, alternatives, and eventually, a potential for change (Marxen 2013b, 2016, 2017). Mouffe (2007); Longoni (2011), who discusses a “politicity” (“*politicidad*” in Spanish) in the arts; and Marxen (2013b, 2016) have all identified different critical art practices.⁵

First, and most obviously, the critical art practices develop when artists work hand-in-hand with activists, such as in the aforementioned campaigns for human rights (e.g., GAC, Siluetazo, Enmedio).⁶

However, critical art can also be performed in other ways, for example, by criticizing and denouncing a political reality through art. In this vein, Leon Ferrari and Nancy Spero protested against the Vietnam War, and on other occasions, Ferrari also objected to the Catholic Church’s collaboration in the violation of human rights, mainly during the military dictatorship in Argentina. Barbara Kruger and Martha Rosler produced critical art focused on gender. For Hans Haacke, critical art has crossed every aspect of his life.

Another critical art practice comments on the political condition of the production, distribution, and reception of art by official artistic institutions. Roberto Jacoby has articulated this critique on both literal and metaphorical levels; the Guerilla Girls directly denounced the gender imbalance in the art world. Again,

5 The mentioned art practices and artists are, of course, not limited to the quoted examples. They have been chosen according to their very heterogeneous ways of expression and their strong potential for criticality.

6 See Bishop’s skepticism about activist art (2012): Alone, it is not enough to enact social change, and needs to be joined by other institutions.

Hans Haacke, together with Bourdieu (1995), exposed the abuse of the arts for the accumulation of symbolic capital by multinational companies.

Artists like Dora García and Krzysztof Wodiczko explore and exhibit viewpoints and identities opposed to the mainstream: alterities, marginalization, and oppression. Of course, ethical issues may arise when the other is abused as raw material for a widespread trend in the art world. Still, this “alterity-art form” can offer a space for alternative narratives, “minor language,” in the same sense as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1975): refracting majority thinking and activating hidden potential from a minority position (Marxen 2013b, 2016, 2017).⁷

Other artists have created spaces of utopian experimentation, in opposition to capitalism, facilitating subjective work as an alternative to capitalist normalization. New ways of inhabiting the world are evidenced, deconstructing institutionalized models and points of view (Longoni 2011). The possibility of change through agency is transmitted mainly through images (Marxen 2011a). At the same time, a critical analysis is undertaken by questioning hegemony, in the sense of Gramsci (Marxen 2013b, 2016, 2017). Heterogeneous representatives of this art form include Lygia Clark, with her ongoing work *Structuring of a Self* (Borja and Enguita 1998; Marxen 2008, 2011a, 2013b; Rolnik 2005); Gego, who works on a more abstract level, creating geometrical and architectural sculptures (Bois *et al.* 2006); addressing gender, Jo Spence and Nancy Spero (Marxen 2011a); and, again, Roberto Jacoby (2011), in this case, his utopian micro-societies.

Art has been further circulated in popular spheres by accessible production techniques. For example, Juan Carlos Romero explored this modality using serigraphies and printmaking as political denouncement, partly working in public space with passers-by (Romero, Davis, and Longoni 2010); Jo Spence developed photography workshops on gender and social class (Marxen 2011a; Spence 2005).

Finally, professionals working in other spheres can organize subjective work to maintain the capacity for symbolization, using artistic techniques like, for example, art therapy or verbal association about art, and the consistency of art production and arts underlying social ties can be looked at with, for example, a form of applied psychoanalysis. Spaces are then created which offer alternative narratives for institutionalized lives and hegemonic discourse (see, for example, Marxen and Rodríguez 2012). Adequate professional training and continuity are essential as they allow the participants’ processes to unfold (Marxen 2011b, 2013b, 2016).

Claire Bishop (2006, 10) has observed “artistic practices since the 1960s that appropriate *social* forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life: intangible experiences such as dancing samba (Helio Oiticica) or funk (Adrian Piper); drinking beer (Tom Marioni); discussing philosophy (Ian Wilson) or politics (Joseph Beuys); organizing a garage sale (Martha Rosler); running a café (Allen Ruppersberg; Daniel

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7 Yet, see Bishop’s caution (2012, 74) to not “reduce art to a question of ethically good or bad examples.”

Spoeri; Gordon Matta-Clark), a hotel (Alighiero Boetti; Ruppertsberg) or a travel agency (Christo and Jeanne-Claude)."

Focusing on participatory art, Bishop (2012, 66) explores artists' motivations regarding social participation and the involvement of the audience, ideally converting from passive to active. This shift should represent "its mythic counterpart, passive spectatorial consumption" and "emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order —be this consumer capitalism, totalitarian socialism, or military dictatorship." Again, Benjamin's and Brecht's ideas described above resonate.

From the audience perspective, Bishop (2012, 72) has noted:

... A shift from an audience that demands a role (expressed as hostility toward avant-garde artists, who keep control of the proscenium), to an audience that enjoys its subordination to strange experiences devised for them by an artist, to an audience that is encouraged to be a coproducer of the work (and who, occasionally, can get even paid for this involvement).

Some participatory art projects reflect the "commodification of the human body in a service economy (since voluntary participatory art is also unpaid labor)." Paradoxically, participatory art contributes to, and has been co-opted by, populist agendas. In some of the worst-case scenarios, it serves as a platform for "banal egos," and instead of opposing the "society of spectacle," as coined by Debord (2000), it has merged with it (Bishop 2012, 72-73).

This critique is confirmed by Bourriud's (2001) theory of "relational aesthetics." Ribalta (2010) examined participation and relationality in the context of the contemporary art museum. As a case study, he examined the politics of the Macba, where he directed the Public Program from 1999-2009. For good reason, he criticizes Bourriud's relational aesthetics as "immobilist and regressive in that it 'aestheticises' the immaterial communicative paradigm and its implicit social and creative processes, imposing an expository regime that interrupts their mobility, and freezes and makes fetishes of practices." The result is "a perverse objectification of both political activism and the new forms of immaterial, affective, communicative and relational production of post-Fordism. Capitalism penetrates into subjectivity and sets it to work..." (Ribalta 2010, 252).

Capitalism determines desire production according to its patterns, or in Suely Rolnik's words formulated in her *Another Relationality* seminar held at Macba, capitalism penetrates subjectivity (Rolnik cited in Ribalta 2010). It drains people's creative desire to go against the grain, by either fossilizing and commodifying once unruly art practices or by sponsoring them by which the sponsored has to obey capitalism's rules. "Capitalism has turned pimp on us" states Ribalta. Whatever we do with the arts, "we are inevitably brought face to face with this question. What are we being pimped for? In other words, are we breaking with the logic of neoliberal capitalism

and the culture industries, or are we reproducing and extending it?” He poses this same question in a museum context: “Is micro-political criticism of the molecular museum a way of interiorising the demands of cognitive capitalism or a form of resistance?” He highlights the fact that to respond in any way to these questions you have “to attend to the participants in the projects, to their effects, to the singularity of the experiments —in short, an empirical, non-ideological bottom-up reading is required” (Ribalta 2010, 263).

As shown with the art examples mentioned above, critical art has creatively opposed dominant thinking in very different ways but only succeeds in doing so if the questions raised above are at least considered both by the artists (micro-political level) and the institutions (meso or macro level), whether the latter are of private or public constitution. Only then can they work as an artistic dispositif, “escaping from overcoding realities” and producing new constellations opposed to hegemony, facilitating flows of desire beyond established norms, opening up new ways of inhabiting the world (Holmes 2006).

The different critical art practices are mainly carried out or organized by professional artists and experts in the arts.⁸ The institutional frames are various: anti-institutional and street work (*i.e.*, Siluetazo), institutional critique (*i.e.*, Haacke), public art (for example Wodiczko, Gego), community based practices (*i.e.*, Romero and Spence) and conventional mediums that fit into museums and galleries but with an altering conception behind them (Ferrari, Spero).

There are other critical art practices where the participants are not necessarily in the arts. Ethnography from art, art-based research, and art therapy are some examples. The latter will be addressed regarding its relationship to Macba policy and its efforts to oppose the capitalist co-opting of the arts. One of Macba’s purposes during the mentioned time period was to reach “beyond the regime of visibility, whose paradigm is the exhibition.” The museum by then believed in “forms of subjective appropriation of artistic methods in marginal processes and outside the museum” (Ribalta 2004, 9).

This implied that there was a need for important redefinitions of the relationship between the museum and the city, including the removal of art from its supposed elitist pedestal, to take it out of the museum and to target groups that would not necessarily go to a museum of contemporary art. Brecht’s and Benjamin’s ideas, as outlined above, are again relevant in the creation of these policies (Marxen 2008, 2009, 2100b, 2012, 2016, 2017).

Art therapy

Among the Macba policies, “forms of subjective appropriation of artistic methods in marginal processes and outside the museum” is considered one of the core ideas of

8 As a form of distinction between the professional artist and non-professional participant, the criteria of the capacity to maintain a discourse is suggested. A professional artist has to be able to do so, but this is a demand not to be necessarily imposed on the participant.

art therapy (Ribalta 2004, 9; Marxen 2008, 2009, 2011b, 2012, 2016, 2017). That is why the museum brought together professionals from the fields of psychoanalysis, art therapy and anthropology to generate innovative strategies adapted for use in artistic productions.

In this vein, my decade long collaboration with the Macba (2003-2013) was based on the use of art therapy with a psychoanalytic slant and an anthropological understanding. It consisted of weekly art therapy groups at educational centers with teenagers labeled at risk of social exclusion in economic terms, coming from so-called dysfunctional families. Their behavior was called antisocial and disruptive by public school institutions.

The psychoanalytical focus of the project was to create the necessary conditions for subjective work, facilitating the capacity for symbolization, primarily according to the “potential space” in the sense of the British psychoanalyst Winnicott (1971). This space allows the participants to symbolize their life experience in a safe and non-judgmental setting (Marxen and Rodríguez 2012; Marxen 2008, 2011b, 2016, 2017).

Anthropological comprehension implies a critical analysis of both therapy and art. The main objective is to create and maintain spaces of freedom, as opposed to promoting dynamics of normalization, functionalism, and dominant subjectification (in the sense of Foucault 2001a, 1984; Rolnik 2001; Deleuze and Parnet 1977). The intention is to provide responses which differ from those the participants are usually given in institutional contexts. In the case of the adolescents, they were written off by their schools and by society as total academic and social failures. In their educational institutions, many teachers and educators had tried to refer them to mental health institutions for treatment and medication for supposed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Yet, in this context, the young people’s strong resistance towards mental health treatments should be seen as a possible refusal to be institutionalized by the dominant medical discourse. Likewise, it has been proven that after a process of art therapy lasting one school-term based on Winnicott’s idea of holding and without any medication, teenagers’ attention does not show any deficit. For the deconstruction of ADHD and a very critical view on over-medication see Horwitz (2010); Knobel Freud (2013); Valverde Eizaguirre (2015); Marxen (2017).

To explain the origins and fundamentals of art therapy is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, since its inception, art therapy has often lacked critical thinking. Within the discipline, the dominant medical discourse centers on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), now in its 5th edition. The DSM considers mental unease exclusively in categories which inevitably suggest psychiatric diagnosis, and thus subsequent medication, instead of perceiving mental health and illness as a possible continuum that includes social and political interactions and processes for example, in medical anthropology, see Jenkins (2015). Similarly, quantitative research is highly valued in this context; its ontological difference with qualitative research and the latter’s possibilities of contributing to social justice tend to be ignored (Denzin 2016). Simultaneously, artistic knowledge is

frequently reduced to the “highlights of Western art,” including the most objectified and commodified variants, such as Frida Kahlo or Outsider Art, reifying the label the very term implies. These dynamics of quantification and labeling of human experience and expression are opposed to the artistic dispositif and its aim to precisely escape “overcoding realities” (Holmes 2006).

In order to become an artistic dispositif, art therapy practice should be freed from the dominant discourse of hegemony and its penetration, in Gramsci’s sense; manifesting, for example, critical consideration or non-acceptance of the dominant medical discourse and its diagnosis, such as ADHD. The attitude of the art therapist, and a critical stance towards dominant discourses in art and therapy, are paramount. This includes serious and radical acceptance of the participants’ knowledge and, likewise, their style of verbal and artistic expression.

In the art therapy space, participants have the potential to feel accepted and comfortable enough to create their own narratives in order to deconstruct institutionalized lives and situations of domination. Their agency, understood as a capacity of auto-determination, should be strengthened.

Like the “alterity-art form” of critical art making mentioned above, Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas (1975) on minor language located at the edge of the dominating discourse are relevant. In the art therapy space, full of possibilities, the participants’ narratives can activate their hidden potential beyond the majority thinking and its mechanisms of marginalization and labeling. New horizons and alternatives are thus opened. A new way of being together is experienced, both with adults on a micro level and with society at large on a macro level. All of these elements together mean the exploration of a new way of working together, of creating something that is highly appreciated by the other. Therefore, after a hard and painful emotional journey a new safe experience can be ingested and integrated. Negri and Guattari (1996) have already stressed the capacity that marginalized subjectivities have to find new ways of articulation and creation. The ideas of these authors coincide with the described art therapy experience: they articulate both their lived and embodied experience (also Foucault 2001b; Marxen 2016, 2017).

Referring once more to some of the forms that critical art can take on, specifically following the art-life experience of the Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, art can function “as a vehicle for the liberation of the subject, in which they could, through the creative experience, reconstitute their own subjectivity and reconnect art and reality” (Carvajal 1999, 51). In the art therapy space as described above, participants can give subjective meaning to their life experience through subjective verbal and artistic expressions of meaning given by the participants; “these expressions being windows into the inner life of the person” (Denzin 2014, 2).

In combination with a critical analysis of art therapy, a non-directive approach is essential, allowing the participants to develop their own personal style, artistically and verbally, without being prompted by the professional. Flexibility and openness are cru-

cial for the participant's discovery, experimentation, and flow of their desire beyond impositions, whether they be structural or deriving from the therapist.

With the help of the museum, a service was established beyond psychiatry and medication which worked as an artistic dispositif and was very much appreciated by its participants. Yet, the museum as an institutional framework can never be equated with an artistic dispositif or its facilitator. In the case detailed in this article, the art therapy program was embedded in an institutional logic that was determined to rearticulate the museum's relationship with the city, aiming at a "new type of radically democratic institutionality" (Ribalta 2010, 264).

It is important to stress that this practice was and is not intended for exhibition. Along with the museum's policies and critiques of Bourriaud's relational aesthetic above, one of the main goals was to facilitate a work of subjectivity. "An exhibition space", however, "converts practices into objects." There is a contradiction between "antagonistic, process-based and experimental practices that seek to explode the established institutional frameworks and their implicit disciplinary divisions,—that is, between subjective forms of appropriation and practice of methods and artistic knowledge and the exhibitionary-institutional monumentalisation of these practices." The processes, which, by intention, cannot be represented, will become fossilized or sterilized by the "institutional exhibitionary framework" (Ribalta 2010, 254, 255).

This is even more evident when considering the contemporary instrumentalization of the arts, whether of a capitalistic or institutional nature. In the former case, publicity and symbolic capital are accumulated in the form of "good press" accrued to the sponsor, or, in the latter case, public acknowledgment of the institution is intended, marketing supposedly creative activities which are often used to distract from its reactionary institutionality, such is the situation with detention centers and jails. Both of these instrumentalizations usually follow capitalist logic by overvaluing the final, tangible result, as well as its subsequent commodification. The subjective process however, requires privacy and intimacy beyond public exposure (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995; Holmes 2006; Marxen 2017). In line with the criticality of the artistic dispositif, a resistance against these exhibitionary instrumentalization dynamics is necessary.

The lack of critical thought in the discipline seems to have reached its peak just recently with Karen Pence, wife of the Vice President of the United States, choosing art therapy —specifically, pediatric art therapy— as her philanthropic focus. This common practice of charity by politicians and/or their partners —mainly wives— or by multinational companies, has been theorized by Bourdieu and Haacke (1995) to represent a neoliberal accumulation of symbolic capital in the form of positive publicity which allows companies or politicians to hide unpopular dynamics behind the philanthropic facade.

In spite of protests, the board of the American Art Therapy Association maintains its association with Pence. This is particularly alarming considering the racist, xenophobic, neoliberal, anti-environmental, anti-human rights agenda of the cur-

rent administration which Karen Pence represents. Moreover, the contrast between her endorsement of pediatric art therapy and the intended abolishment of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program by the US government is more than striking, since the latter will dramatically uproot so many young people for whom the US is the only home they have ever known. On its own, the permanent danger of deportation will inevitably cause much psychological trauma, requiring therapeutic treatment that the affected young people will probably not get.

Once more, Walter Benjamin's warning should be heeded: art is extremely vulnerable, as it can be used to transmit democratic rights, but is also abused and instrumentalized for contrary purposes: to glorify those in power, whatever their creed (Benjamin 1969; Buck-Morss 2005).

Arts-Based Research

Recently, the arts have been incorporated more and more into academic research. Arts-based research (ABR) has purposefully drawn information from different fields, such as various artistic practices, the creative arts therapies, and qualitative—as opposed to quantitative—research. By privileging qualitative research, ABR aims to disrupt “dominant narratives and challenge biases” (Leavy 2015, 17). ABR and qualitative research “can be viewed as crafts,” in that they are composed and orchestrated through tasks, such as collaging and weaving (Leavy 2015).

ABR has leaned on the creative arts therapies by relying on the concept of “process, as opposed to the clearly graded stages that comprise quantitative inquiry.” Philosophically and epistemologically, both endeavors deepen inquiries about “what can be known, how it can be known, and by whom” (Leavy 2015, 19). Subjective knowledge is valued over objective, and often, ABR pretends to join the struggles and activists for social justice (Finley 2017; Leavy 2015). It is supposed to be transformative, so experiences should be performed or embodied rather than represented (Finley, 2017).

According to Leavy (2015), ABR's focus on process also comes from the tenets of art therapy, as well as meaning-making, empowerment, identity exploration, emotional expression, consciousness-raising, self-reflection, relational connections, inter/subjectivity, and expressive power. Furthermore, art therapy skills can help to convert data-driven research into an ongoing social relationship (Marxen 2009, 2012).

The intentions of ABR seem to have some limited value, but eventually, the stated objectives will be difficult to achieve by blindly relying on the supposed advantage of its “nonhierarchical settings” as outlined by Finley (2017, 565). This is credulous in a research process dominated by academia. This is why the anthropologist Delgado (1999) warned of “false democratizations,” positing that an image that passes through academia and related institutions can never be “innocent” or non-hierarchical. At some point the ethnographer will inevitably take some major decision about the use of the images in favor of their academic career. Bourdieu (1996, 1998) also broadly analyzed hierarchies in the research process, and confirmed the need to include

them in analysis. Furthermore, an uncritical application of the discipline of art therapy is problematic. As shown above, art therapy very often privileges quantitative research and its derivatives such as the DSM. Consequently, it favors objective over subjective knowledge. In its worst case, as detailed above, it even affiliates with politicians who do anything but promote empowerment for minority groups.

Finally, ABR has been equated with propaganda (Finley 2017), which is, by its nature, always critical, and increases the vulnerability of artistic endeavors to intentional misuse, as Benjamin has stated above.

In sum, ABR's claim to disrupt "dominant narratives and challenge biases" is questionable and hence, without challenging its own presumptions, it can hardly become an artistic dispositif.

Ethnography from art

Previously, I developed an eponymous research method, juxtaposing active image making and ethnography to obtain, broaden, illustrate, and contrast varied narratives (Marxen 2012 and 2009). "Ethnography by art" has been developed as a visually active methodology, in which the essence of information is transmitted through images. Besides using already existing images for ethnography, or confining image making to the ethnographer (in the manner of Visual Anthropology), the objective of this practice is to engage participants in the image making process, granting them an active and creative role in fieldwork.

Ethnography by art is embedded both in a redefinition of art, as well as a multi-sited and interactive comprehension of ethnography. Marcus (2010) has already stressed that the multi-sited approach holds the common ground between ethnography and art. The interactive aspect of ethnography and its application as extended social relationships are primarily drawn from Italian Marxist anthropology, more specifically, Gramsci and De Martino (2008).

The practical application of this practice can be seen in on-going ethnographic art workshops, where individual, collective or group work can address different subjects relevant to a specific ethnography project. In groups, interactions can be observed.

This method was successfully implemented during a five-year multi-site ethnography concerning the social capital of Filipino migrations between Spain and the Philippines (2007-2012). Ethnographic art workshops were held with adolescents of a multi-cultural high school in Raval, Barcelona (Marxen 2012). The institution was chosen because of its very high percentage of students with a migration background (around 90%), many of them of Filipino origin, mainly settled in Raval, the same neighborhood as Macba and of high importance to the Filipino community in Barcelona. The school, of Catholic, private constitution but with public funding, gave total support to the method. They welcomed it as an additional resource and, in their words, "a great opportunity" for their students.

One school class of mainly 13 to 14-year-olds was randomly divided into two groups of 15 students each who worked with the ethnographer in five weekly sessions

on subjects such as self-portrait, their relationship towards the urban space, their favorite spare-time activities, their relationship with their places of origin as well as their relationships with friends and family. Techniques and basic materials such as collage, drawing, painting and clay were used. Both materials and subjects were introduced gradually.

In order to generate an artistic dispositif, the ethnographic art workshop must be a space where the participants can give subjective meaning to their life experience through subjective verbal and artistic expression (Denzin 2014). Whereas the latter quote is taken from Denzin's interpretive autoethnography, and relevant to the art therapy dispositif as explained above, here the inner life of the person is placed in relationship to the group and society at large, as, for example, expressed in the student's images regarding their relationship with the urban space. Most of them chose the Raval neighborhood, and some of them criticized the massive gentrification of it. Concerning their rapport with their places of origin, many expressed several of their own and their family's transnational practices. As for self-portraits, some students addressed their migrant status and their limited or non-acceptance in the host country.

52 ■ Although the topics are given by the ethnographer, the key to this dynamic is non-influence on aesthetic choices. The ethnographer's job is to facilitate the process and create a space for artistic expression. Occasionally, some help is given at the participants' request, to address creative or technical impasses. Additionally, the artistic dispositif in ethnography requires the serious appreciation of the participants' knowledge and ways of expressions (as previously detailed in the art therapy section). Although the described experience was relatively short, being only five sessions, it turned out to be a space of subjective and collective experience. In accordance with one of the main ideas of ethnography, alternative narratives were developed both artistically and verbally, in the sense of Deleuze and Guattaris' "minor language." This implied the activation of hidden potentials in a minority group, here mainly migrant adolescents (Fortun 2010; Marcus 1998; Marxen 2012; Tyler 2010). Furthermore, ethnography's intention of showing heterogeneous narratives and experiences is reinforced by artistic expression, thus combating overcoding and labeling. At the same time, artistic expression is a suitable possibility for overcoming the verbally established (Marxen, 2009, 2012).

The workshops were much appreciated by the adolescents who, at the end, asked for an extension of the activity. Indeed, it is highly recommendable to extend the experience into more continuous sessions spread over several months.

It is crucial to inform participants that there will be no aesthetic judgment of their artwork. The arts, in this practice, are a means of expression, not a place to impose the norms of (capital-A) Art Academia. The artistic space is stripped of the canons and judgments of (capital-A) Aesthetics. When interpreting images, participants must be involved in negotiating the meaning of the artworks, and must play a prominent role in the discussion process. Furthermore, interpretation remains open to

third parties, which implies the participation of the readers of the ethnography, who may be specialists in the arts or not. Although initially developed for text interpretation, the ideas of the Aesthetics of Reception and Reception Theory are relevant, in that they convert the reader into an active co-author and re-writer of the text (see the representatives of the Constance School in Warning 1994; additionally, Eco 1989; Fish 1982; and for a more political view Barthes 1970 and 1973). In this way, the reader/spectator of the ethnographic texts and artworks re-writes and re-perceives both elements in their transversality.

It should also be stressed that the image-reading process in ethnography is not intended to “decipher” the images. It is rather an event with interactive actions that is open ended, including spaces or an openness of not-knowing (De Miguel and Buxó 1999; Didi-Huberman 1990). The aesthetic experience of sensing and feeling has to be considered, leading to an agreement between artist and spectator, both involved in the production, reception and construction of the world of common sense (Bourdieu 1996; Marxen 2009, 2012). Gadamer (1997) stressed the importance of the axis *operis-lectoris* (text-reader) when reading texts or viewing art. This viewpoint has been criticized by Bourdieu (1996) as an undervaluation of the historical socio-political context, as “hermeneutic narcissism” and “ethnocentric and anachronic comprehension.” He, himself, stressed the axis *auctoris-lectoris* (author-reader).

This proposed research in ethnography combines *auctoris-lectoris* and *operis-lectoris*, and adds the ideas of the Aesthetics of Reception and Reception Theory. However, as opposed to ABR, the hierarchical issues embedded in academic research have not been ignored (Bourdieu 1996, 1998; Delgado 1999; Marxen 2009, 2012). It can be considered as a way —or at least an effort— to democratize the ethnographic process without believing in either a total or radical democratization or in non-hierarchical settings.

During the ethnographic process the ethnographer’s oscillating position between their own knowledge “in suspense” and a local knowledge they have to learn should always be acknowledged. An essentialist and purist definition of art, as well as a rigid position of knowing and of aesthetic judgment, hinder social awareness of artistic production and perception. However, a redefinition of art which starts from the creative process and is stripped of academic canons and notions of beauty takes the ethnographer to the liminal territory between professional knowledge and the social world (Marxen 2009, 2012).

“Ethnography from art” does not only employ creative methods but also experimental, collaborative, “open lab,” multi-sited, participatory and social conceptualization and dissemination (Marcus 1998, 2010). Marcus (2010) further stresses, in both art and ethnography, the scientific aesthetics of projects and practices of uncertain closure which inevitably introduce the concept of open (meaning creative) process.

All of the attributes mentioned here are inherent to the ambiguity and uncertainty of the creative process. A link can be made with the art therapy dispositif, and its specific definition of the creative process with its non-directive free flow of

meanings (Fiorini 1995; Marxen 2011b). The objective is to offer a “space for spontaneous affects, a way for subjectivity to be improvised;” flexibility and openness are crucial for the participants’ discovery, experimentation, and flow of their desire beyond structural impositions (Whitaker 2012, 347-351).

Critical conclusions

We have seen how in critical art, art therapy, and ethnography from art narratives can help deconstruct institutionalized lives and situations of domination (Marxen 2016, 2017). Facilitating a potential space for alternative narratives should be the common goal of critical art practices prone to be artistic dispositifs, whether in research, art therapy, or contemporary art. As theorized by Deleuze and Guattari (1975) majority thinking can thus be “untooled.” Overcoding and labeling are replaced by an open process that facilitates the free flow of desire expressed in images. Their meanings can challenge representational limits, frontiers and ideological referencing. Consequently, “the common course of actions in the world” can be interrupted (Laddaga 2006, 29-30), and society can rethink its ways of making and doing (García Canclini 2014).

54 ■ The artistic dispositif comprehends practices which favor heterogeneous expression and the free flow of desire. In order to achieve this, participants’ knowledge must be taken extremely seriously. Moreover, a critical awareness of the social context of art is inevitable, especially since any artistic practice can complement and become part of the hegemonic discourse, as can other practices, if they have not undergone a process of critical analysis. Only through epistemological broadening of the body of knowledge, followed by critical analysis of the aforementioned interconnection of art and society, and professional, multidisciplinary awareness, can the arts challenge mechanisms of control and oppression; otherwise, they reify them.

In the words of Lukács (2007, 37):

So if we are ever going to be able to understand the way in which reactionary ideas infiltrate our minds, and if we are ever going to achieve a critical distance from such prejudices, this can only be accomplished by hard work, by abandoning and transcending the limits of immediacy, by scrutinizing all subjective experiences and measuring them against social reality. In short it can only be achieved by a deeper probing of the real world.

Given a critical perspective on art and society, the symbolic power of art is grounded in its greater potential for freedom. Compared to verbal language, artistic language condenses different tenses in one single work, beyond the rigid authority of one concrete signification. This allows art to call out social unease, while simultaneously opening new horizons and exploring possible alternatives for the future (Gadamer 1997; Marxen 2009, 2012, 2017; Vattimo 2005).

Returning to encounters between contemporary art and ethnography, Ssorin-Chaikov (2013) proposes an ethnographic conceptualism, which explicitly constructs the reality it studies, instead of claiming to represent an existing reality. Ethnographic conceptualism takes a performative and transformative approach which is similarly demanded in ABR.

Regarding the construction, rather than representation, of reality, Bishop's critique against hastily equating social and artistic practices seems essential. Social and artistic judgments and critiques do not easily merge; they are not directly compatible and should, rather, "exist in continual tension with each other" (Bishop 2012, 71, referring to Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

"Models of democracy in art do not have an intrinsic relationship to models of democracy in society. The equation is misleading and does not recognize art's ability to generate other, more paradoxical criteria" (Bishop 2012, 76).⁹ Although Bishop focuses on participatory art, here, her considerations coincide with the artistic dispositif, which "is as uncertain and precarious as democracy itself." The artistic dispositif has:

A double ontological status: it is both an event in the world and at one removed from it. As such, it has the capacity to communicate on two levels—to participants and to spectators—the paradoxes that are repressed in every day discourse, and to elicit perverse, disturbing, and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew. (Bishop 2012, 82)

This process is exemplified by intangible experiences within the artistic dispositif, challenging disciplinary conditions and institutional frontiers, articulating between the subjective and collective.

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⁹ See also: Marcus (2010) on the encounters, similarities, and differences among the aims and ethics of anthropology/ethnography and those of art, when contemporary artists engage in subject areas like "ethnography." The ethnographer's canon of ethics is obstructive to some artistic purposes.

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