

Philosophical Carpenters at the Ethnographic Table: Craft, Companions, and Strange Tools

Adam van Sertima

‘Making’ problematizes what is familiar because it changes our relationship with the world. The philosopher Alva Noë (2015) illustrates the difference between design and art as the difference between a doorknob and a painting: . A well-designed door knob hardly warrants a glance, and it is obvious as to its purpose to the point of invisibility in our skilful coping with the world. An artistic painting, on the other hand, makes us stop and question what it is, what it attempts to portray. It foregrounds a riddle. Jessica Lindblom (2015) notes that meaning arises foremost from embodied practices such as making. Meaning directly results from perception rather than from standing at a theoretical distance.

In constructing a table with a group who are generally unfamiliar with carpentry, they encounter processes and actions which lead them to ask communally ‘what is this’? The tools and table become boundary objects that reveal themselves, thus emphasizing the communication that arises in bodily action and secondarily in language. While aesthetics are not intrinsic to making an object, this does go somewhat towards people expanding their skilful coping. Thus the making of a relatively prosaic conference table becomes a site for embodied and socially enactive cognition.

The possibility of Personalized Medicine: Are experimentation and collaborative participation the best research approaches?

José Costa

As an outcome of his participation in the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Project, Paul Rabinow raised the following question: “What concepts, venues, and forms are most pertinent for building a reflective relation to the present?” (Rabinow & Keller, 2016). The discovery of PCR transformed both biotechnology and, to a great extent, anthropology’s modus operandi. In the first milieu, we are now witnessing a new form of medical knowledge-power connection, Personalized Medicine, which consists of the “tailoring of medical treatment to the individual characteristics of each patient” (Topol, 2014) grounded in human beings’ somatization, quantification and genomic refinement and improvement; in the second milieu, the Project provoked in Rabinow’s mind a profound reflexion about anthropology’s “mode of production and being” (Rabinow & Keller, 2016). The result of this reflexion was the so-called collaborative turn, a shift of focus from Malinowskian fieldwork to interdisciplinarity and experimentation, in Dewey’s sense (Rabinow & Keller, 2016), in order to confront new situations and making use of new concepts, responding thus to the “demands of the day” (Rabinow & Stavrianakis, 2013).

But, here we face a big difficulty, which assumes a great importance in the anthropological research of Personalized Medicine: the fact that “the dominant knowledge production practices, institutions and venues for understanding human things in the 21st century are institutionally and epistemologically inadequate” (Rabinow & Keller, 2016). The case is that we are trying to study up, which brings important limitations for participant observation (cf. Nader, 1972). This paper aims to reflect about these limitations.

Paper session 3:

“Collaboration 2: affects and effects”

These papers engage with the shifting conditions for ethnographic research, both institutional (interdisciplinarity increasingly as standard) and phenomenological. They draw on concepts relating to materiality and space that are familiar to anthropology and push them in new directions. They develop questions and vocabularies for rethinking political conditions and possibilities for collaborating to produce knowledge across boundaries of many kinds.

Collaboration amidst ecological issues

Jonas Müller and Tanja Bogusz

Facing numerous issues that surpass traditional disciplinary boundaries – many of them ecological – the natural sciences explore new modes of engaging with other sciences to address problems for which one scale just isn’t enough. In this abstract we therefore propose a twofold move: First, to discuss current options for fruitful collaboration which bridge disciplinary logics. For this, we expect the idea of a shared epistemological perspective to be both unrealistic and unnecessary. Instead, experimental collaborations between different modes of sensing the world could start from scratch with joint work about modes of problematisation. Such joint work is experimental. We understand experimentalism, following John Dewey, as a method which – in addition to its fragility underlines the shared virtues of different sciences, namely reflexivity, openness for revisions and the ability of structuration. In this sense both “the social” and “the material” are necessary parts of each research process, although the modes of problematisation differ. Second, we use this framework to take a look at some recent forms and challenges when different sciences meet, especially with regard to biodiversity research, satellite remote sensing, classical taxonomy, sociology and anthropology. Here we observe varying modes of engagement with knowledge produced at multi-sited locations, e.g. in the analysis of multi-spectral data collected by satellites as compared to taxonomical work mostly done on regional locations. The different scales offered