

Entrevista: Kate Crehan

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Kate Crehan é antropóloga norte-americana, PhD pela University of Manchester, professora emérita da City University of New York, Estados Unidos. Tem como principais interesses de pesquisa Antonio Gramsci, economia política, gênero, desenvolvimento, antropologia pública, estética e África do Sul. Suas publicações incluem títulos, como *The Fractured Community: Landscapes of Power and Gender in Rural Zambia* (University of California Press, 1997); *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (University of California Press e Pluto Press, 2002); *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective* (Berg, 2011), tratado nesta entrevista, além de numerosos artigos e capítulos de livros.

A Entrelaces, por meio do professor Yuri Brunello e da aluna Licilange Alves, conversou com Kate Crehan sobre seu livro *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective*, publicado em 2011. A finalidade desta entrevista, realizada em 01 de dezembro de 2020, por e-mail, foi conhecer e divulgar as interessantes reflexões levantadas pela autora a respeito da arte comunitária a partir de uma perspectiva antropológica. O livro nos traz uma ampla compreensão sobre a arte elitizada e sua consequente exclusão feita aos grupos considerados minoritários, em especial à classe trabalhadora, demonstrando que a arte é, portanto, atravessada por relações de poder, questões estas que dialogam de modo coerente com o tema do dossiê em tela.

Entrevista:

L. A.: You claim that anthropology may have arisen out of the concern of the colonizing North to understand unknown worlds with which it was coming in contact, but at least it led such other worlds to understand how things might look from other perspectives than those of the Hegemonic north. What are those understandings to which you refer that these "other worlds" were taken to acquire and what is the role of art in these "worlds"?

K. C.: A major dimension of any cultural world are its categorical maps. These maps are constructed in part out of the basic concepts that culture uses to order the world as it perceives it. Members of any given culture use such concepts to make sense of the realities they confront, and to navigate their way through those realities. Because such 'basic concepts' are so fundamental to the way the world is perceived they tend to be thought of as reality itself, rather than as means by which we make sense of reality.

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‘Art’, I would argue, is one such concept. In the post-Enlightenment West it tends to be taken for granted that there is a universal category ‘Art’, defined along the lines of the anthropologists George Marcus and Fred Myers’ definition, quoted in *Community Art*: “the commonsense category of “art” – transcendent, referring to a sphere of “beauty” external to utilitarian interests’ (p. 12). But this ‘commonsense category’, as Marcus and Meyer note, is far from universal. The answer to the question, ‘what is the role of art?’, in the worlds encountered by the colonizing global North is that it cannot be taken for granted that those worlds (or cultures) *have* a category ‘art’ equivalent to that of the post-Enlightenment West. It is the task of the anthropologist or other analyst to discover what specific cultural maps this ‘other world’ uses, and how their way of organising reality does, or does not, fit with the Northern notion of ‘art’.

L. A.: In *Community Art: An Anthropological Perspective*, the defense that art is traversed by power relations is clear, a fact that justifies its elitist and exclusive content. In the aforementioned Institutional Theory of Art, by Dickie, he considers that “works of art are art because of the position they occupy within the institutional context”. There are, therefore, reasons to consider something as art. Do you agree that these reasons are more ideological than scientific?

K. C.: As I stressed in my answer to Q1, the category ‘art’ can be defined very differently by different societies, and in some societies may not exist. At the same time, however, the criteria determining whether something is ‘art’ are not arbitrary. As Arthur Danto notes, this determination rests on a whole discourse which defines what is, and what is not, ‘art’. The point is that this discourse is different in different societies (or cultures). Within any discourse there are certain logical coherences, which might be seen as in some sense analogous to ‘scientific’ reason. Any simple opposition between ‘ideology’ and ‘science’ is problematic. ‘Science’ can be highly ideological. The nineteenth-century anthropology that derived racist theories of human evolution based on the measurement of skulls, was profoundly ideological (see Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man*) but, according to the scientific tenets of the time, it adhered to the criteria of science.

L. A.: In what sense can art be transformative, especially in the life of a portion that lives so alien to it, such as the working class?

K. C.: Is art so alien to the working class? It is true that in many (maybe most) societies there is a sphere of ‘high art’ from which many working-class people feel excluded. As Grayson Perry puts it, if they do enter one of the temples of such ‘art’, they are likely to feel, ‘that at any moment they will be tapped on the shoulder and asked to leave’ (quoted in *Community Art*, p.3). But if we define ‘art’ more widely to include, for instance, the quilts made by African American women, until recently relegated by the curatoriat to the lesser sphere of ‘craft’, then we can find plenty of ways in which art is relevant to working-class people, even if they never set foot in a gallery. To stay with those quilts, they offered their makers opportunities to create rich aesthetic objects that often constituted profound reflections on their everyday lives and the realities of living as a people of colour in the U.S. I am not an expert on quilts but I suspect a strong argument could be made that for both their makers and those for whom they were made, they were in some sense transformative, helping to build a sense of identity and community. I would resist the argument made by some on the left that unless art *actively* challenges the status quo, it cannot be considered genuinely progressive.

L. A.: The figure of the lone artist with responsibility for his individual creations is much more a product of romantic thought. At this point, you speak of the modern concept of Art associated with Capital A, stating that this focus on the individual is associated with the growing importance of the market and the needs of those who produce Art in the market context. Do you not think that, in a way, this “arrival” of art to this Capital A would have a positive side in the sense of contributing to democratizing the access of the masses to art?

K. C.: Once again I think this is a complicated question that can only be answered in the context of particular times and places. The shift from a patronage to a market model for the distribution of art certainly changed the way art was produced and consumed. Novels, for instance, began to be produced in huge numbers, but for a middle-class readership rather than a working-class one. There was also an increased market for etchings that reproduced paintings but again one that catered to middle-class rather than working-class audiences. As regards making visual art accessible to the ‘masses’, I am not so sure whether distributing art through the market necessarily, or always, extended access to those ‘masses’. Under the patronage system a lot of art was produced for public rather than private consumption. Patrons provided churches - particularly in Catholic countries – with art on a vast scale, altarpieces, sacred sculpture, etc. This sacred art was accessible to the ‘masses’ who attended church in a way that portable easel paintings, produced for the bourgeois market was not.