REMARKS FOR IMMANENT REALMS

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Thank you very much for coming today. The remarks I bring to you come from my anthropological background. Anthropology as a discipline has had as its foundational premise the encounter with the "Other." Through the study of alterity, anthropology invites us to think critically about our own societies. When it comes to art, anthropology studies the ways in which different societies understand and represent visual and material cultures and define them as artistic representations.

From an anthropological perspective, art, artistic works, even the creative process undergone by an artist is not assumed to be a product of self-evident and universal value made by individuals in solitude. Anthropology ask questions such as: "why some objects are considered art while others are placed in the category of ethnographic artifacts" and, "who benefits from those distinctions?" Anthropology explores whether conferring universalizing aesthetic value on to decontextualized objects elevates them to a higher position, or whether understanding them in terms of their ethnographic context and local meaning is more appropriate. Anthropology also asks questions about the origin, not only of the creative process, but also of creativity itself. Creativity is viewed as integral to the process of socialization and apprenticeship, and of social reproduction. These processes are communicative, interactional, and also, improvisational. In other words, anthropology interrogates how an artistic piece becomes a cultural product.

French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss proposed that there is a universal underlying mental structure among all humans, akin to a computer code, and thus, the creative process was the working and reworking of a limited set of building blocks in a field of possible or legitimate transformations. As such, innovation—for instance-- could only happen within culturally prescribed parameters of style. In response to this perspective, other anthropologists have proposed that innovation characterizes creativity by way of its products and its process, a process that also implies physical constrains that revolve around the human perception.

What would an ethnography of *Anahata* reveal? *Anahata* is a sensorial experience that blends current technological innovations in photography and the uses of light with more traditional artistic techniques (including sound) to produce, in my perspective, an encounter with the sacred and the profane in the context of alterity. Like anthropologists conducting fieldwork for the first time, viewers are invited to enter an unfamiliar world and trust that they will be guided through this experience by sight or sound, or both. As I ventured into this world a few days ago to explore it myself, a number of themes emerged from the exhibition: For instance, the panel at the entrance of the exhibition seems to represent a deity (an orisha, a loa, a saint, a totem) that welcomes guests. I thought about animistic or world syncretic religions upon observing this figure: Is this a representation of the Orisha Eleguá, Exxú or the loa Damballah, opening up the door of the sacred for us? Is this figure the threshold to a liminal space?

The largest panel in the exhibit suggests a ritual in motion; the ritual seems to enact the symbolic value of sharing and reciprocating, while also inviting us to recognize the racialized and gendered "Other." Movement is at the center of this panel, and in some regard, in all panels, as the appearance and disappearance of the images are choreographed to music. Movement is a recurrent concern in anthropology, best articulated through the mobilities approach. This approach centers on the study of the mobilities and immobilities of people, capital, technologies, commodities and images. This perspective emphasizes interconnections between the physical movement of people and the virtual movement achieved through the circulation of images and information, as well as the official representations of these movements and places.

One of the panels displays what seems to be a symbolic representation of an immanent realm—that is, the manifestation of the divine on earth, the sacred *in the profane*. The panel asks us to think about nature in all its exuberance: muddy mythical creatures, wrinkled bodies representing trees, animals, menacing masks, a rendition of a youthful Mother Earth at the center of it all. Movement, once again, is present, although in this case, it is mostly insinuated.

A fourth panel represents uncensored bodies in an embrace; race and gender are also evidenced here. The last panel I observed depicts a beautiful scene that seems to represent a mature forest in the process of decomposing and preparing for an

imminent rebirth. A panel without images serves as a mirror that, depending on the angle of the viewer, shows different scenes from the larger panel in a different light.

Anahata uses a series of technological innovations to depict this mythical world. For instance, technological devices are used in static photography to produce the sensation of movement and to create a story. For anthropologists, technology simply refers to the ways in which humans use material culture to engage with the environment in which they live; humans do not interact only with humans but also with non-humans, including other species and now more than ever, with devices of all sorts. However, in the process of creating technology to mediate with the environment, as Ong would say, "Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness." Some studies propose that even thought-structure and sensual perceptions are altered as a result of the recurrent use of certain technological devices. Yet a closer look at the use of these devices indicates that humans use them in ways that were never imagined by those who produced them. Cellphones, for instance, have become human extensions. Social media platforms have become ever-present. And yet, cultures worldwide have made use of cellphones and social media platforms in unpredictable ways. How do the spectators that engage with *Anahata* transform the sensorial experiences that the exhibition offers? This is a question that I would love to answer, and that would require dedicated ethnographic work through participant observation, or better yet, "participant sensation" as multisensory anthropology would argue.

One anthropological interpretation of *Anahata* is that mobility is at the center of the exhibit because it depicts a myth, a story, a symbolic drama that is actualized through the rituals represented in the panel. Technology, in this case, is essential to produce the constant movement that is required to enact the ritual, over and over again.

Another anthropological analysis of *Anahata* might view it as an artistic exhibit that engages with the "great narratives" of our contemporary world through art: the presence of the divine on earth recalls our world's pressing environmental problems, which result from the indiscriminate over-exploitation of resources that characterizes the project of modernity in the west and that has caused climate change. The bodies that populate the exhibition might refer to the ways in which negative stereotypes are inscribed in the flesh of racialized and gendered bodies. The recurrent presence of mobilities might be a way for us to recognize the migration crisis that plagues the world—economic and even lifestyle or amenities migrants, political, economic and environmental refugees, among others.

An anthropological reading of *Anahata* brings to the forefront the ways in which the arts, science, and technology intersect today to create symbolic cultural representations. These cultural representations are unavoidably mediated by the articulation of the collective—the collective in the context of alterity.