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When anthropology meets art. An interview with Arnd Schneider

Leïla Baracchini and Cécile Guillaume-Pey

Abstract

In this interview, Arnd Schneider reflects on his work about the disciplinary intersections between art and anthropology. Among the topics mentioned are his trajectory (starting from his first fieldwork experiences in Argentina), his reflections on alternative modes of representation, his encounters with artists and the questions to which a creative dialogue in a postcolonial situation opens up. Based on his experiences, he also discusses the importance of serendipity in the research process. Finally, the interview calls for a rethinking of the epistemological and political scope of interdisciplinary dialogues between artists and anthropologists.

Keywords: collaboration, ethnographic writing, interdisciplinarity, art and science, experimentations

Résumé

Quand l'anthropologie rencontre l'art. Entretien avec Arnd Schneider

Dans cet entretien, Arnd Schneider revient sur ses travaux consacrés aux croisements entre art et anthropologie. Y sont ainsi successivement évoqués son parcours (à partir de ses premiers terrains en Argentine), ses réflexions sur les modalités alternatives de recherche et d'écriture ethnographique, les enjeux académiques, institutionnels et éthiques de ce type d'explorations créatives, ses rencontres avec des artistes, et les questionnements que le dialogue créatif en situation postcoloniale peut ouvrir. Partant de ses expériences, il évoque également l'importance de la sérendipité dans le processus de recherche. L'entretien appelle, enfin, à repenser la portée épistémologique et politique des dialogues interdisciplinaires qui peuvent se nouer entre artistes et anthropologues.

mots-clés: collaboration, écriture ethnographique, interdisciplinarité, art et science, expérimentations

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Ethnographic writing and images

Leïla Baracchini¹: We would like to begin the interview with an aspect that concerns us particularly in the journal *ethnographiques.org* and that we want to highlight in this special issue, namely, ethnographic writing and the use of alternative modes of representation beyond text. What is your conception and practice of ethnographic "writing"? How and in what terms does the question of form arise in the field?

Arnd Schneider: Thank you Leïla and Cécile. It is a pleasure for me to share with you some of my thoughts on art and anthropology and forms of representations in anthropology in the wider sense. Now in order to answer your question, we have to go back a little bit to what writing means or what writing is in terms of ethnography. In the etymological sense in Greek, *ethnos* ("people") and *graphos* ("to write") is the root meaning the "description of people". But an older etymology of *graphos* means also "to draw", "to represent by lines drawn" or even, in an older meaning, to "scrape and draw into", to "scratch" with a stylus on a clay tablet. So already in the term "ethnography", there is a kind of "visual root" metaphor, which we seem to forget and which has been so much reduced in many anthropological writings.

David MacDougall, the eminent anthropological filmmaker and film theoretician, one of the most prominent figures in visual anthropology, once said: "Anthropology has had no lack of interest in the visual. Its problem has always been what to do with it" (MacDougall 1997). That, I think, is crucial. You can put this remark together with what another visual anthropologist, Lucien Castaing-Taylor (1996), wrote in an article where he addresses the issue of *iconophobia*, the fear of images, that characterises the work of many anthropologists. Images are considered unruly, unwieldy, and not open to the same kind of analysis as words. I am not saying we should favour an old semiotic approach of images, but one has, in a wider sense, to learn the languages of images - and I say images in the plural - in order to operate with them and use them together with writing. And writing is not just "writing", it includes already the visual. That is why I use this ethnological root metaphor. There have been some great writers in the history of anthropology who made good use of visual language. One may think, for example, of that famous opening passage in the *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* by Malinowski (1963). What is interesting about this passage is that it almost has cinematic quality, as noted by George Marcus and Anand Pandian, among others. Anthropology in its beginning used to be very visual. In her book *The Eye of the Ethnographer* (2001), Anna Grimshaw pointed out how anthropology in the early decades of the 20th century was much more visual and even cinematic or image-oriented. It was only later that there was a split where anthropology, art and the visual divided. The writing has again to become more visual and the visual, when used in the literal sense of "images", has to infuse more the writing. There has to be a dialectic symbiosis of the two. That's my idea about ethnographic writing and practice.

¹ This interview with Arnd Schneider was conducted by Leïla Baracchini and Cécile Guillaume-Pey on the 25th of November 2020, by videoconference. The editorial staff of the journal *ethnographiques.org* thanks Jean-Christophe Monferran for the recording. This interview for the journal *ethnographiques.org* was first published in French (the translation from English to French was done by Leïla Baracchini, Cécile Guillaume-Pey and Véronique Dassié). We provide here an English version of the interview.

Between art and anthropology

Cécile Guillaume-Pey: *How did your interest in the relationship between art and anthropology come about?*

Arnd Schneider: I come myself from an artistic household. My father is an artist and my mother trained as a fashion designer. So I had a kind of artistic atmosphere at home. But when I studied anthropology, I took initially a different route. I didn't start with the anthropology of art, I was interested in migration, Italian migration in particular. I first worked on return migration in a small Sicilian village and later, for my PhD, on different groups of Italian immigrants in Argentina. I was interested in notions of history, economic crises and economic history. In Argentina, people of my generation or even later generations were asking: "Why did our grandparents come here, when this country is now in such a mess?" I found that interesting, because in other settler societies, let's say the classic ones like Australia, Canada, the United States, you could in a way fulfil an American dream, whereas in Argentina the dream had failed.

I was also interested in art and in 1981, I was just in my second year at University, I published a short article called "Kunst und Ethnologie" (Schneider 1981) in the student journal of the Institute of Anthropology in Münster (North Rhine Westfalia, Münster) where I studied. For this, I reviewed the work of a number of artists who had been inspired by anthropological methods and fieldwork (among them Charles Simmonds, Nikolaus Lang, Anne and Patrick Poirier and Rainer Wittenborn). Towards the end of my PhD studies (at the LSE 1987 – 1992) in 1990, I worked for three years as the film officer of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) in London. There I mentioned my early article "Kunst und Ethnologie" to the then director of the Institute, Jonathan Benthall, who was extremely open-minded and supportive of interdisciplinary research – and in the early 1970s had promoted innovative programming on new technologies, environment and the body at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). He encouraged me to pursue my research on the relationship between contemporary art and anthropology and to publish my work in RAI's journal *Anthropology Today*. So I did some further research and wrote this article called "The art diviners" (Schneider 1993). And then, in 1996, I prepared another article titled *Uneasy Relationships* (Schneider 1996) on the same topic that I published in the *Journal of Material Culture*. It was based on research I had done in 1994, in New York and in Austin Texas, where I was staying as a Visiting Scholar at the Archer Huntington Art Gallery. With these two articles, the subject was in a way put on the agenda. In Art History in the meantime, Hal Foster (1995) had written his famous book chapter, "The Artist as Ethnographer", which achieved very wide exposure. That was in 1995. Thus in the mid-1990s, the ethnographic turn, as it had been later termed, in the contemporary art was not only practiced by artists but it had also now its commentators in academia, in art history as well as in anthropology.

Cécile Guillaume-Pey: *The two publications, Contemporary art and anthropology and Between art and anthropology, that you co-edited in 2006 and 2010 with Christopher Wright (Schneider and Wright 2006, 2010) marked a turning point in the reflections on the ways anthropologists engage with art practices and on the value of a collaborative dialogue between anthropologists and artists. Could you tell us more about the context in which you published these books?*

Arnd Schneider: At the RAI, I became friend with Chris Wright, the photographic officer of the huge photographic collection of the RAI. Chris had himself published some articles on the relation between art, photography in particular, and anthropology. At one point in our

discussion, Chris asked me: "Should we not do a book on the subject?" And that's how we developed the idea for *Contemporary art and anthropology*. The next turning point is the huge conference we both organized at the Tate Modern in 2003 called *Fieldworks: Dialogues between art and anthropology*. Actually, it is also thanks to a previous artistic encounter that I could organize this conference. Indeed, Richard Appignanesi, an Italian-Canadian writer living in London, first introduced me to Andrew Brighton, the curator of education and public programs of the Tate Modern. This writer is the founding editor of the famous *For Beginners* Series in which concepts or important persons are illustrated in a comic-like form. Because of my previous research in Italy and Sicily, he suggested to me to write *Mafia for beginners* (1994), a graphic novel illustrated by Oscar Zárate, an Argentine comic book artist and illustrator. Working with a cartoon artist was a fascinating 'art-anthropology' experience and a way of disseminating anthropological knowledge outside the academic sphere.

At the Tate Modern, Dominic Willsdon, the successor to Andrew Brighton, Chris Wright and myself were the curatorial team to organize the conference. We made a call for proposals and received 160 applicants; we had 25 selected and 11 invited keynote speakers (among them Susan Hiller, Lucy Lippard, George Marcus, Michael Taussig, and many more). The Tate Modern was of course a wonderful venue to host it. It was a very vibrant environment, very different to a university environment to have such a conference. Many people from the conference would contribute to *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* and *Between Art and Anthropology*.

Cécile Guillaume-Pey: *How did the academic community respond to this publication? And what interest did it raise outside academia?*

Arnd Schneider: The reception I think was very positive and huge, especially in the art artistic environment in the UK. One of the explanations for this is that in the UK already in the 2000s there had been this movement for practice based PhDs and for research based artistic research in both universities and art schools. So there was already a vibrant environment. Art institutions were particularly open to these connections, much more so than anthropology departments, where iconophobia was dominant. Whilst there were of course already some who were open to this type of experiences, such as the departments of "visual cultures" and "visual sociology" at Goldsmiths, or the centre for the study of "material and visual culture" at University College London in particular, the more "traditional" social anthropology, let us say the dominant one, remained globally hermetic to these transdisciplinary types of research. And this is still the case today.

Leïla Baracchini: *I would be interested to know your opinion on the place, status and recognition that is granted today to this type of creative explorations at the level of university curricula, as well as in scientific journals.*

Arnd Schneider: Yes, much has changed in recent years with the creation of journals like *Collaborative Anthropologies*, for example. Maybe, for a small part, I and my collaborators in the field have contributed to these changes. There have been two important changes: the breaking up of disciplines and the decentring of anthropology that is connected to decolonisation. That means that actually anthropology as a discipline has lost its hegemonic position or is about to lose its hegemonic position as a privileged centre of epistemic production. In this sense, the field is opening up.

But there is still a lot of resistance notably in the mainstream journals. Of course, today there are specialized journals that deal with these issues: *AnthroVision*, for example, one of the EASA recognized journals specialised in visual anthropology and the anthropology of

the visual, which is edited by Nadine Wanono, a French visual anthropologist, and by Beate Engelbrecht, who is part of the Max-Planck-Institute in Germany. There are also leading journals like *Visual Anthropology* and *Visual Anthropology Review*, which I think promote the discussion perfectly.

However, it is one thing to have such a dedicated journal that is online and allows the upload of film and photographic essays, but it's another thing if this discussion is also transported into mainstream anthropology (and its journals). The problem is, again coming back to our very early observation on iconophobia and the status of the visual in anthropology: how do we get this discussion in the mainstream of anthropology? This field is opening up. From time to time the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* or the *American Anthropologist* or *Current Anthropology* or the *American Ethnologist* or any of the premier journals in the field publish articles addressing visual anthropology topics in the widest sense. But the problem, or the danger, once you have journals explicitly dedicated to the visual, is that, no matter how much effort is made to broaden the field, it remains relegated to a compartmentalized niche function in Anthropology. And this we must get away from. The whole field has to change and to be cracked open so that the discussion can take its full place within anthropology and not be reduced to debates between specialists. But with the digital media much of this is opening up, and the last two decades have seen many new possibilities emerge.

The second question, which perhaps addresses your concerns and those of young practitioner-researchers, concerns the legitimation and legitimacy given to this type of achievement. It remains indeed always difficult to persuade academic institutions, particularly in terms of degree programmes and careers, that a visual work tells as much in theoretical terms and on its own terms as the written work. I think, that's what we want to change.

Leïla Baracchini: *That leads me to the question of sensory anthropology, how do you situate your approach in relation to this current?*

Arnd Schneider: Sensory anthropology has always been present in some ways in the history of anthropology. But as a field, it was established by people such as David Howes, Constance Classen, Paul Stoller, Steven Feld and others. Their work has been absolutely crucial for opening anthropological practice up to the senses. That had to happen contemporaneously with the reappraisal of ethnographic writing, because what are we doing in the field if we only gather in terms of visual perception and the spoken word? So that was crucial to have this sensory turn or this sensory impetus in Anthropology in order to pay particular attention to what we perceive with our senses and to record not just the visual and the spoken which is perhaps the most obvious, but also the taste, the smell and even the touch and the auditory beyond the verbal dimension. So this field is absolutely crucial in visual anthropology. In many respects, sensory anthropology and visual anthropology do share a common interest for interdisciplinarity, or transdisciplinarity, and for research in relation with contemporary visual and multimedia artists. This interest in the senses is also found in an exacerbated way among researchers who also conduct creative experiments such as Lucien Castaing-Taylor (think, for example, of his film *Sweetgrass* (Barbash and Castaing-Taylor 2009)), whom I mentioned before when talking about his notion of "iconophobia" and who initiated the Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard University.

One of the aspects that preoccupies me is the narrative form used. Whilst there are forms that work very well in certain contexts, as in the film productions of the Sensory Ethnography Lab for example, I think that sensory anthropology would also benefit from

experimenting more with forms that break the linear narrative. This is what we tried to implement with Caterina Pasqualino, an Italian anthropologist working at the CNRS in Paris. We organized together two conferences at the Musée du Quai Branly, one on performance art and anthropology and the other on experimental cinema and anthropology (Müller, Pasqualino, and Schneider 2017; Schneider and Pasqualino 2014). So the sensory, yes, it is important, but there is also a need for experimenting with the form of film itself. The two have to go together and that's my take on it which I also present in my new book *Expanded Visions: A New Anthropology of the Moving Image* (Schneider 2021a).

Interdisciplinary dialogue

Leïla Baracchini: *Today, some authors argue for a hybridization of the two disciplines and the creation of a new pivotal discipline, what do you think of it?*

Arnd Schneider: I am not convinced that we immediately need to create a new discipline or invent a name for it, because that again would be a kind of categorisation and I am rather in favour of breaking the categories down. The purpose of books such as *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (Schneider and Wright 2006), *Between Art and Anthropology* (Schneider and Wright 2010), and *Anthropology and Art Practice* (Schneider and Wright 2013) has precisely been to break down and transcend these categorical boundaries. So I don't know if we would help with establishing a new discipline... What I find more interesting, however, is to encourage the emergence of centres or projects that allow for collaboration between disciplines.

Sometimes this might be given a name but I would find it much too restrictive to have a new subject. Of course, we've been playing with words such as "art-ethnography", for example, and I wrote myself about a new 'third' field emerging (Schneider 2015). Because rather than a "discipline", I prefer to speak of a field of research where people coming from various disciplinary backgrounds, and having different practices, can meet. I am not sure that it is absolutely necessary to give it a name. What seems more relevant to me, however, is to observe what happens in these encounters, what is produced from them and what new project and vision can come from them.

Another way of thinking about these interdisciplinary encounters is to see it as an empirical field. If you look at this field and analyse it then you see people with different biographical trajectories and different biographical formations and that obviously brings an advantage to favour these encounters. But when I speak about a third or different way of doing things, I never say this as a normative demand. People sometimes misunderstood and with Chris Wright, we were confronted with questions such as: "But should we now all become artists? Should anthropologists get into art? Do they have to draw, paint or use multimedia? And the answer to that is that there is no "have to", no obligation in other words.

It is the dialogue, the exchange - the expression "on speaking terms" [3], that I borrowed from James Clifford (1988: 126), seems to be particularly fruitful here - that must be privileged (Schneider 2015). I am not saying one should forget one's own tradition or training. We all come from somewhere. But, when we find ourselves in a scene of encounter, in a dialogical situation, we must ask ourselves if really the history and the methodological toolkit of anthropology provides us with the adequate means to do what we want, to establish a dialogue. Sometimes we have to negotiate other terms, to think outside the box, find new partners to conduct our experiments. In my work, I've been engaging with artists. Remember also what the Italian poet Amelia Rosselli said: "*Il dialogo si fa a quattro* -

come una diagonale”. I use this figure when speaking about the multiplicities beyond “two”, for example to think the relations between two disciplines – art and anthropology for instance –or to speak about “uneven hermeneutics” as in the introduction to my edited volume *Alternative Art and Anthropology: Global Encounters* (Schneider 2017b).

Leïla Baracchini: *The reference to Writing culture of James Clifford and Georges Marcus (Clifford and Marcus 1986) comes up regularly in your text, can you tell us a word about the impact of this work on the development of your reflections?*

Arnd Schneider: I have been following this work ever since it came out. In 1986, when I was a student, I discovered this book on the table of one of my mentors at the University of Münster, Edward 'Ted' Norris, a specialist on West Africa, who lived in a house opposite from my flat share, and with an African headrest on his windowsill. The book was just published and he lent it to me. Since then, this book has remained a source of inspiration for me, as is also *The Predicament of Culture* (Clifford 1988) published two years later by James Clifford. The *Writing Culture* critique obviously was an epistemological critique of ethnographic fieldwork, on the status and the role of the researcher in the field as well as on the writing process and on the status of ethnographic text, highlighting notably the points of contact or affinity it has with literature. This reflexion was absolutely crucial.

But In the 1990s, in a retrospective analysis of this publication, George Marcus, whom I then met for the first time, pointed out an unthought of this criticism: *Writing Culture* left out the potential of the visual. So, he did experiments with the Venezuelan theatre director, Fernando Calzadilla, and the Cuban artist, Abdel Hernández, on the campus of Rice University where he was teaching then (Calzadilla and Marcus 2006). Their installation work, performative and visual, moved out of the realm of both factual and experimental writing, something that had never been explored before. These kinds of avenues, opened up with the *Writing Culture* critique, had not really been taken up, at least not within anthropology. This is a first point.

Second, on a historical level, James Clifford's work constitutes an essential opening for revisiting or bring to the fore the work done in France in the 1930s by the personalities gathered around the journal *Documents* and by the founders of the Musée de l'Homme, and their predecessors at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. I borrow from James Clifford the concept of “speaking terms” which he applied to a very particular contingent historical situation, which is the collaboration of people from different disciplines and different artistic fields, in the 1920s and 30s, in the journal *Document*. He was particularly referring to the relationship between two people: Georges Bataille who was the editor of *Documents* and Alfred Métraux, the Swiss-French anthropologist. But many other people were coming together around this journal, like the German-Jewish art historian Carl Einstein, whose work was recently republished in the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (Franke and Holert 2018).

Now, when I refer to these “speaking terms”, like in my article *Unfinished Dialogues* which is a kind of reflection on the historic encounters between Art and Anthropology in the twentieth century, it's never done in a nostalgic or romantic way (Schneider 2011). It is not a question of recreating the surrealist milieu now. I don't think we can do that. But, one can draw inspiration from these encounters and implement a heuristic or epistemological device to establish these “speaking terms” each and every time one might feel the necessity, or the opportunity arises in a particular situation. This is how I used the term and how I see the contribution of this work, the disciplinary history being fruitful and productive on the condition that one can go beyond it without being locked into it.

Encounters

Leïla Baracchini: *For this special issue of Ethnographiques.org on ethno-artistic encounters, could you tell us more about your first collaborative experience with artists?*

Arnd Schneider: Whilst of course I have been thinking and writing about art and contemporary art for some time, but it didn't involve initially collaboration as such other than interviewing artists or searching their archives, in a way very similar to what an art critic, an art historian or a curator might do. Then, at a certain point in my career, in 1999, I set up a large research project about and with artists in Argentina, where I had previously done my doctoral fieldwork with Italian immigrants around their notions of memory and nostalgia (Schneider 2000). The next project (1999/2000) was to go back to Argentina and work with artists who had been inspired by indigenous cultures, and had in a sense appropriated aspects of them to seek ways to create new identities (Schneider 2006).

These artists were of European descent as most of the populations in the coastal provinces of Argentina. It was a typical settler society like Canada, parts of the U.S and Australia. In that context, I interviewed artists, visited studios and indeed collaborated with many artists specialized in different fields: cinema, photography and the fine arts. It was then with Teresa Pereda, an artist who has since become a friend, that I initiated a real collaboration. She is a visual artist working in mixed media and installation. She is interested in questions of identity and, from a methodological point of view, she works somewhat like an ethnographer. She visits indigenous communities in present day Argentina and is interested in the history and archaeology of indigenous peoples. We travelled together during the time of my fieldwork in 1999/2000 and visited communities in the Andean province of Jujuy, which borders Chile and Bolivia. There, we, and I say we because we really worked together, observed and participated in the ritual of Saint John's day on the 24th of June which roughly coincides with the winter solstice in the southern hemisphere. Teresa interviewed people (Fig. 1), took earth samples and gathered other things to create an artist book, an installation and visual artworks. And I wrote the ethnography. We published separately, but this was my first real collaboration. It was also upon the invitation of the artist that the collaboration started: she invited me to come along and see this kind of "artistic fieldwork" and she really taught me a lot of how to understand artists as ethnographers, or more precisely, as practitioners working in a way that is very similar to anthropologists but producing something different.



**Fig. 1. Teresa Pereda interviewing Don Víctor in Cochinoca,
Province of Jujuy, Argentina, June 2000**

Photo: Arnd Schneider

Leïla Baracchini: *In your article "Contested Ground" (Schneider 2013), you also show that dialogues between artists and anthropologists can generate misunderstandings, resistance and friction.*

Arnd Schneider: In the case I just mentioned, this did not happen. Teresa and I were very congenial and perhaps working along the same track so this was a very harmonious encounter. But, in the mid 2000s, in a later collaboration with young artists from the Argentine province of Corrientes, in the northeast of Argentina bordering Paraguay, the collaboration was one of productive frictions and tensions. Together with this group of young artists graduated from the local art school, our field of study or our field of encounter, our "mise en scène" in the sense of George Marcus, was a local feast in the village of Santa Ana: the celebration of Saint-Anne, the patron saint of the village. In Christian terminology, she is the grandmother of Jesus, the mother of Maria. And, as a patron saint, her figure is carried in procession in the village. I did this fieldwork collaboration in two iterations over two successive years, the Argentine artists continuing to work on the project on their own during the intervening year. For example, one of the artists of the group, Hada Irastorza, had made a new dress for the saint from exchanges with the villagers and this dress was used the following year in the procession. In this collaboration, there was more friction because the artists and I came from different backgrounds: they had training in local art schools, they didn't have a clear idea of what anthropology was, and they were suspicious, perhaps with good reasons.

In the other case, both Teresa and I were outsiders to the field. Here the artists were insiders and I was a foreigner. This made them suspect that I would to some degree just "use" them to carry out my ethnographic investigations, They feared being reduced to a

subordinate role of translator or informant because of their knowledge of the dialect and the particularities of the local culture. Also, unlike the relationship I had with Teresa, who, like many artists in Buenos Aires, is of middle class background and well situated economically, the relationship I had with these young artists in Corrientes was more characterised by positions of hierarchy. I was representing for them the hegemonic Other. Not that I exploited specifically the situation or behaved in such a way, I hope at least I didn't! But it was as if the initial configuration - a researcher from a rich Western country arriving in a poorer country - imposed this type of relationship, something that is frequently found in comparable field situations.

In the particular context of contemporary art in Argentina, the question that arose was also to know what the project I was carrying out could bring to the artists, who themselves had specific expectations to promote themselves in the art world: Would there be a catalogue? Or would they get a show at the local museum? How could it further boost their career? These were questions that I was confronted with and that I had not fully thought through before embarking on this project. I had thought if I collaborated with them on equal terms and treat them respectfully, then we could make interesting work together: they would create art while I would produce writing and photographic documentation of their practices. But I hadn't realised what might be in for the artists apart from practical questions, concerning remuneration for example, which is a recurring question in the field: "Do you pay your informants?". I did not pay them, but of course I covered the travel expenses. The economic terms of the collaboration were clearly defined and were not a point of friction. But there was friction about what might be my intention and my expectation concerning their role as artists and what would happen later in terms of prestige and production with what we would produce. That was very interesting and productive for me to learn from this.

Uneven Hermeneutics

Cécile Guillaume-Pey: *In your recent work (Schneider 2018, 2021b), you introduce the concept of "uneven hermeneutics" to speak about the uneasiness of translation and appropriation, that punctuate the collaborative process with artists, and to highlight the specific efforts required to set up a collaborative practice in fieldwork situations implying unequal relations. From your experiences in various contexts worldwide, what advice could you give for the development of an ethic of art-anthropology collaborations?*

Arnd Schneider: Actually, perhaps we have to make a little detour, or retour, and talk first about my reflections on appropriation. These reflections emerged first from my work with Argentine artists who appropriate or are inspired by indigenous culture. I was then interested to understand what kind of operation this involves, how is this done and what happens in these appropriating encounters, both with the Other in contemporary terms, I mean with living other people, but also in historical terms, when you appropriate from the past. In other words, what happens, as an artist, when you appropriate traditions that are not yours?

This is how I came to revisit the notion of appropriation, which often takes on a negative connotation in debates, perhaps with good reason. Many indigenous First Nation writers have pointed out that appropriation from a subaltern position – that is when subalterns appropriate from dominant society - cannot be thought of in the same way as when the dominant society appropriates elements from the subalterns, precisely because of (post)colonial power relations. The unevenness of this field also arose during my work with the Argentine artist Teresa Perera, on a rural field with indigenous populations. These

encounters fuelled a dialogue in which the question of how balanced or unequal the relationships are was raised.

Starting from these questions, I began to revisit the hermeneutic tradition in anthropology. Very influential from the end of the 1960s to the 1980s, first with Clifford Geertz and then with others, the hermeneutic tradition in anthropology then went a little bit out of fashion because it was assuming a form of dialogical and interpretative equality. Today, this tradition needs a critical revision in order to better take into account persistent power imbalances. This is what I am working on at the moment. I think that if we take into account power relations, imbalances and inequalities, we can arrive at a new concept. This is what I meant with “uneven hermeneutics”, that is, the possibility of an encounter based precisely on speaking terms that must be negotiated, established in agreement with the Other and ethically respectful. In some projects, it might be that, despite all the goodwill on both sides, despite the initial “speaking terms”, a community might decide to stop this collaboration and then one has to respect that. In the past, in a context marked by colonialism, anthropologists would often force people or at least persuade them, using their dominant position, to collaborate. Today, it has become important in fieldwork encounters, especially when the relation is between First Nation and an outsider, to define the terms of the collaboration upstream, with the representatives of the Aboriginal groups who will determine and agree with the researcher on the methodology, the expectations and the topic of the research.

But, there are historical antecedents for respectful collaborations even before the discussion on decolonization now became so virulent. That is why I recently accepted the invitation by the *Biennial of Native Contemporary Art (BACA)* in Montréal to write an article about a historic project of collaboration, the James Bay Project (Schneider 2020a). Conducted between the late 1970s and early 1980s, this project involved two German artists, a writer, Claus Biegert, and a visual artist, Rainer Wittenborn, and three First Nation communities (of the Cree Eeyou Istchee) from Northern Québec. This, I think, was an exemplary project, far ahead of its time, an example of respectful collaboration, close to anthropology in terms of work, carried out with the agreement and upon invitation of the First Nation communities. It was a clear work of advocacy for a community whose territory was threatened by the construction of huge hydroelectric dams in northern Quebec. At the time, there was already a small branch of anthropology, called “action anthropology” which developed mainly in the United States and to a lesser extent in Canada, where anthropologists would work together with teams of lawyers for the defence of the territories of indigenous peoples. So here we have a historical example of an approach that has become more and more practiced today, where the terms and conditions of research are not determined exclusively by those in the centre, in the metropolis, but defined by and with the people you work with.

Leïla Baracchini: *How, according to your own experience, creative co-productions can become tools that can be used outside the academic field to make complex and sensitive realities perceptible? and with what limitations, challenges and difficulties? And in this sense how does it contribute, or not, to the decolonial process?*

Arnd Schneider: After the three books I edited with Chris Wright, *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*, *Between Art and Anthropology* and *Anthropology and Art Practice*, I realized that to continue in the same direction would be to maintain a conversation behind closed doors between the metropolitan centres of Europe, North America and perhaps Australia and New Zealand (and this despite the fact that each of the books also featured practitioners from other parts of the world). So I thought it would be very interesting to include in the discussion people from different parts of the world to see what have been done elsewhere in academia and in the arts in terms of encounters between Art and

Anthropology. How had the two come together? How, coming back to the third field, had the disciplines been defined and transcended in different ways elsewhere? Because we seem to assume that we have this solidified, reified notions of what Art and Anthropology are, where in fact they have been used and defined differently elsewhere. The book *Alternative Art and Anthropology, Global Encounters* (Schneider 2017a) grew out of this project. In the introduction, I refer to the work on "decoloniality" conducted in Latin America by scholars like Walter D Mignolo or the philosopher Enrique Dussel, or even - and above all - by the art critic, curator and writer, Gerardo Mosquera (2010), who has coined the notion of "art being produced from here". With this, the positionality changes. Contemporary art is not anymore defined from the western point of view - from the position of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Tate Modern or the Centre Pompidou -, it is also an art produced elsewhere, connected to the world discourses, but whose actors have an assumed position of artists working from their own metropolitan centre in São Paulo or Buenos Aires, or even from a more peripheral location. So yes, decolonial thinking is very important and those transgressing the boundaries between Art and Anthropology should definitely connect with it.

Serendipity

Cécile Guillaume-Pey: *In your recent work about your exhibition project in Rome with the artist Leone Contini (Schneider 2020b), you speak about serendipity. How central is this concept for you?*

Arnd Schneider: If you define serendipity as happenstance, by chance sort of recurrent in fieldwork or in your exploration of the field, then I think one has to be open to that. This is what often happens in collaborations between art and anthropology. One cannot really define "serendipity" as a method; it is more like an open box or space that opens the field of possibilities. You have to allow this, if you want serendipity to happen. This way of conceiving fieldwork departs from a more traditional approach, which would consist of methodically following the steps of a research project, a set research agenda and a set series of questions...

Cécile Guillaume-Pey: *It is therefore necessary to be sufficiently receptive and to manage to create a space to give its chance to chance in a way...*

Arnd Schneider: Yes precisely. I think it is essential. This fieldwork that I carried out with Leone Contini on the colonial collections of the Luigi Pigorini Museum was very important and the particular occurrences difficult to explain. While walking through the galleries of this national museum of ethnography, which is now part of the Museo delle Civiltà, Leone came across a model of a Roman temple in Libya. Libya was occupied by the Italians from 1911 to 1943. And Leone said: "Oh I recognize this. These are the ruins of Sabrata. My grandfather excavated them!" Suddenly, and serendipitously then, a link was established between our research project and the family history of Leone, whose grandfather had been Superintendent of Archaeology in Libya during the colonial period. We weren't particularly looking for that kind of connection, it just happened. At the museum, we not only found artefacts from the former Italian colonies, Libya, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, but we also discovered that, curiously, some of the employees of the museum we were working with were descendants of Italian settlers in Libya. Even more curious, the father of one of the employees of the museum had been an artisan, a mosaicist and a manufacturer of ornamental objects, and he had worked with the grandfather of Leone Contini in Libya. We never imagined we would discover this connection to the artist! There were very curious

coincidences, which made the research process in a way very personal and complicated, particularly for Leone, whose situation as a descendant of colonialists was already complicated in a political sense. Leone talks about it in retrospect and he problematizes it, but these personal connections made the field more complicated (Contini 2019, 2020). This is also a matter of serendipity.

Creative Frictions in the Museum Context

Cécile Guillaume-Pey: *Regarding your recent experience with Leone Contini, could you tell us how this collaboration affected the ways in which anthropological exhibition was set up?*

Arnd Schneider: In the context of this exhibition in Rome, it was not only a collaboration between an artist and an anthropologist, between Leone Contini, who had also trained in anthropology, and myself. You have to have a third partner. Encounters between artists and anthropologists are always rooted in a particular field, from which a third partner emerges with whom they enter into a relationship and with who there may also be friction (Schneider 2016). This may be, for example, an indigenous group. Here, it was a museum.

Cécile Guillaume-Pey: *What are the frictions that have emerged in this "triangular" relationship between you, the artist and the museum?*

Arnd Schneider: During my collaboration with Leone in Rome, the Pigorini museum had accepted our proposal to do fieldwork and artistic work within their institution, but they were very unsure of how to react or how to evaluate our type of research. They were familiar perhaps with my professional figure, the anthropologist, the professor of anthropology, coming to an ethnography museum. So my coming was not unusual in itself. The museum staff had also collaborated a few times with artists to organize workshops, but perhaps never before to work directly on their collections. A collaboration between an artist, coming in and working in a very serendipitous and unpredictable way, and an anthropologist doing other things than just interviewing, was very new and probably and unsettling too for them.

So we had to fight our way through, especially since the museum is also a very bureaucratic place. We always had the support of the curatorial team and that of the then director, the late Filippo Maria Gambari. But our relations with the technical staff, who had to approve the exhibition, were more complicated. For example, we wanted to use from the vaults of the museum the cannons that had been used in some colonial battle in the 19th century in Ethiopia between Italian troops and Abyssinian or Ethiopian troops. But to put them on the floor of the museum room destined for our exhibition posed a significant problem: because of their weight they could damage the important mosaics and the tiling in the room. The technical staff therefore had to weigh the cannons to ensure that that there would be no damage. And there were other such practical challenges...

When we went to the vault of the museum to look at artefacts, our approach was somehow different from somebody that would go through classifications. We were interested in the form of objects, in their possible associations. Our professional legitimacy and our right to conduct this kind of research were sometimes questioned. It is a very contested field to work in a museum when you come from the outside, it can be a very hermetic institution. In the end, however, we were all involved in a learning process, we managed to find adjustments and I continue to collaborate with the curators Rossana di Lella and Loretta Paderni, who have actively supported our project from the beginning.

A radical epistemological potential

Leila Baracchini: *To sum up, let me ask you one last question: Going back to what had founded your reflections on art-anthropology collaborations, could you tell us today, about 20 years after your first publication on the subject, what in your opinion has changed? What remains to be done? And what are the new challenges?*

Arnd Schneider: Yes, it has been almost 30 years if you take as a starting point "The Art Diviners", published in *Anthropology Today*! To come back to one of the questions asked earlier, I think there is no need to establish a new discipline, and perhaps there is no need for a discipline *per se*. But there is a continuing need to have people with different backgrounds, professions, and ways of thinking working together. This is perhaps more necessary than ever, because we are also facing some new challenges today. The current pandemic, for instance, has put in high relief structural inequalities in the world, structural inequalities within countries with different health systems, different access to health systems, and now also to vaccines, and so forth. We are also facing the question of climate change and many other problems. Whether we are artists or anthropologists, we are all touched by these phenomena that impact every local community, every situation we work on. And in this respect, one should not lose sight of the radical epistemological potential, which discussions transcending the boundaries between art and anthropology have had and still continue to have.

What started 30 years or even 100 years ago, if you think of the 1930s, have been radical challenges, that can still be radical now in terms of going beyond ordinary ways of perception and representation and opening up new ways of seeing and thinking the current threat (pandemics, inequalities, climate change). For every aesthetic choice has political implications. Rancière (2010) wrote more than anyone else in this sense. This radical epistemological potential of collaborations is therefore important not only as a field of experimentation for its own sake but also because of its political significance.

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