

### Shifting patterns, zooming layers, focusing processes: art and anthropology in a transforming and translucent world

Pröpper, Michael

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Pröpper, M. (2015). Shifting patterns, zooming layers, focusing processes: art and anthropology in a transforming and translucent world. *EthnoScripts: Zeitschrift für aktuelle ethnologische Studien*, 17(1), 5-22. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-8-8008>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-SA Licence (Attribution-ShareAlike). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

## Anthropology and Art

Jahrgang 17 Heft 1 | 2015

Michael Pröpper

Shifting patterns, zooming layers, focusing processes. Art and anthropology in a transforming and translucent world

Ethnoscripts 2015 17 (1): 5-22

eISSN 2199-7942

### Abstract

This article offers an overview over the thriving field of (con)current art and anthropology collaborations in the domains of words as well as works. Introducing the exemplary contributions of artists, art historians, curators and anthropologists to this special edition I argue that in an ever transforming, politically contested and ecologically threatened world the two disciplines have the potential to zoom in on patterns, processes and layers of a textured and translucent reality that is far from being sufficiently understood or represented.

### Herausgeber:

Universität Hamburg  
Institut für Ethnologie  
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)  
D-20146 Hamburg  
Tel.: 040 42838 4182  
E-Mail: [lfE@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:lfE@uni-hamburg.de)  
<http://www.ethnologie.uni-hamburg.de>

eISSN: 2199-7942



Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Licence 4.0 International: Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen.

## Shifting patterns, zooming layers, focusing processes Art and anthropology in a transforming and translucent world

Michael Pröpper

*Aber Lebendige machen alle den Fehler,  
daß sie zu stark unterscheiden.  
Engel (sagt man) wüßten oft nicht, ob sie unter  
Lebenden gehen oder Toten. Die ewige Strömung  
reißt durch beide Bereiche alle Alter  
immer mit sich und übertönt sie in beiden.  
(Rilke 1997:188)*

### Introduction: Thriving fields

The interlinkages between art and anthropology and more so between art and ethnography, to come to more sensually holistic ways of understanding and representing different realities in a globally transforming world, are the matter of many recent projects and publications (Latour 2013; Pink 2009; Pink, et al. 2010; Schneider and Wright 2010; Schneider and Wright 2013; Svasek 2007). Edited volumes (Baxstrom, et al. 2008; Marcus and Myers 1995; Schneider and Wright 2006; Schneider and Wright 2010; Schneider and Wright 2013), special journal issues (Pink, et al. 2010; Rutten, et al. 2013), blogs and collaborative projects<sup>1</sup>, and interdisciplinary institutes<sup>2</sup> indicate activities in this thriving field of interaction and collaboration. The exhibitions and digital-collaborative art and science projects Bruno Latour has thought up with artists<sup>3</sup> to renew the political-ecological through the spirit of art and science come to mind (Latour 2002; Latour 2013). Likewise one can think of Tim Ingold's writings and experiments on a graphic and motive anthropology (Ingold 2001; Ingold 2007; Ingold 2010; Ingold and Hallam 2007). Often book and journal compilations join products by artists and anthropologists side by side, likewise there are increasingly works from people

1 <http://artpologist.com/>; <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/kfi/>; <http://field-journal.com/>; <http://www.anthropologies-of-art.net/>

2 <http://sel.fas.harvard.edu/>

3 <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/333>; <http://www.iconoclash.de/>

with hybrid identities, that means people who do anthropology AND Art (Schneider and Wright 2013).<sup>4</sup>

All these activities happen in a context of a rapidly transforming world that immerses and challenges the arts as well as all the sciences. Anthropology of late has lived through a crisis of representation and narrativity, has arrived at widespread massive criticism of the global projects of modernity (Latour 1995), post-colonialism, capitalism and neoliberalism with all their global effects in local contexts. On top of that there is a global challenge that unites artists and anthropologists – the ecological threat of the human impact upon the physical world, lately termed by some as the Anthropocene<sup>5</sup> (Klingan, et al. 2014; Weintraub 2012), which is being epitomized by the threat of climate change (Latour 2014). It seems that being confronted with the sheer scale of problems to understand and tackle no single discipline and not science as an institutionalized system is able to provide solutions or even formulate problems adequately (ibid). What we are facing is a crisis of classic models of reality and realism, “deficits in reality” as Natalie Göltenboth terms it in her article (this volume), that require new and different approaches to this *reality crisis* – a quest for “better realities” as Katherine Carl terms it in the interview with Linda Weintraub (this volume), or the “rupture between imagination and real life” as Tim Ingold calls it (2014). Reality it seems is more complex, textured (Klingan, et al. 2014), layered, and translucent as conceptualized so far. Instead of bounded disciplines and mono-naturalistic options for action we need collective approaches at problem formulation that involve understanding the interlinkages between physical, emotional, sensual, bodily and discursive parts of politicized realities.

Critical realism (Bhaskar 2008), political resistance, new forms of narrativity and representation, involvement and immersion into real life problem forming, knowledge fusion, sensually being inside not outside of things, these are key term landmarks in a terrain that also the authors of this special issue are carefully and step by step wandering. While this terrain still seems to be theoretically and practically uncharted, especially the disciplines of anthropology and art, both characterized by a high degree of ‘undisciplinedness’ and the fact that categories and definitions are not neatly formulated

4 Also proponents of a more classic art-anthropology as Morphy and Perkins have outlined that an anthropology of art should open the subject of art for cross-cultural analysis. Therefore, anthropologists should critically question dominant Western conceptions of art (e.g. the emphasis on the autonomy of aesthetic experience, the connoisseurship of elites, the utilization and capitalization of objects as symbolic capital, or the emphasis on cultural renewal using terms like innovation, avant-garde, or rebellion) (compare Morphy and Perkins 2006:1ff).

5 Anthropocene is a term that has been proposed by geologists to denote the epoch that began when human activities had a significant global impact on the earth and its ecosystems. The term is currently being examined further to become formally part of the Geological Time Scale.

but often contested, seem well suited, especially as they are characterized by a strong mutual affection.

### Mutual affection, hybrid practices

Already 20 years ago Foster had argued convincingly that anthropology has a particular prestige among artists as a science of alterity, which takes culture as its object and is open to self-critique and reflexivity (1995). Broadly, it is the anthropological *practice* of ethnography in conjunction with the direct encounter and within-ness of the researcher in real-life sociality, culture and politics that seems to fascinate artists of late. Consequently, relational aesthetics and socially engaged participatory art are important contemporary strands (Kester 2011). In these projects artists are dealing with *social relations* and the challenge of participation of the people they interact with, also being cautious about inequalities, marginalizations, hegemoniality, power differentials and criticism of the politics of collaboration (Bishop 2012; see Schneider this issue). As part of anthropology's attractive self-reflexivity there are multiple old and ongoing debates certainly of high interest for contemporary artists. I am thinking of debates about the (im)possibilities, adequacies, ethics and politics of representing the self and other (Clifford and Marcus 1986; and the myriad of subsequent publications), old questions of subjectivity vs. intersubjectivity, structure vs. agency (Gell 1998; Giddens 1979), whether anthropology is a science at all or an art in itself (Carrithers 1990), as about the materiality and processuality of the human predicament (Carrier and West 2009; Ingold 2000; Miller 2005; Wimmer 2005), and yet the recent debates of the merging of culture and nature in times of the Anthropocene (Latour 2014) – to pick just a few.

Likewise Foster has argued that the mutual intrigue is caused for once by a certain 'artist-envy' among anthropologists. "In this envy the artist becomes a paragon of formal reflexivity, sensitive to difference and open to chance, a self-aware reader of culture understood as text. [...] is this figure not a projection of a particular ideal ego – of the anthropologist as a col-lagist, semiologist, avant-gardist? In other words might this artist-envy be a self-idealization?" (Foster 1995:304). It seems that in their contemporary struggles to deal with the unspeakable, un-representable of the human condition, the complex interaction of the *sensual self* with the world (Howes 2003; Smith 2010), anthropologists increasingly admire artists for their liberties of expression and tend to lean from their practices.<sup>6</sup> The immersive multi-sensorial products of the Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab<sup>7</sup> might be

6 I will consider in this article mainly an anthropology which deals with global modern arts expressions, and to a lesser way the classic art-anthropology investigating indigenous art expressions in a comparative manner (Layton 1991; Morphy 2005).

7 <http://sel.fas.harvard.edu/>

read as only one current example of a new concern with the senses in anthropology. I will keep touching this ‘sensory turn in anthropology’ (Rutten, et al. 2013) in the course of the paper.

As outlined, one can observe in recent publications a strong concentration on the subject of *practice* especially driven by writings on the practice of ethnography (Schneider and Wright 2013). The ‘ethnographic turn’ in art, the emerging interest of artists in ethnography and participant methodology, has been critically discussed (Coles 2001; Foster 1995; Rutten, et al. 2013). Increasingly we observe the emergence of ethnography based art exhibitions (Pussetti 2013) (a fact that is also being addressed in the contribution by Weintraub in this issue) and globally mobile curators operating in an ethnographic manner. Ethnography as anthropology’s main method and a means of entering, investigating but as well innovatively representing the world, is being advocated as a kind of link, a possibility encouraging artists and anthropologists “to learn directly from each other’s practices ‘in the field’”(Schneider and Wright 2010).

Focusing on many practice-based examples Schneider and Wright have discussed the distinctions and fuzzy borders between artists and anthropologists practices and have raised their voices in favour of an art-ethnography based on cross-fertilization, dialogue, appropriation and collaboration - in the visual but also in other domains (Schneider 2008; Schneider and Wright 2006; Schneider and Wright 2010; Schneider and Wright 2013). Artists and anthropologists share a set of common practices that raise similar ethical issues. In this sense Schneider also argues for a new hermeneutics for the collaboration in this volume. Another recent step seems to be ‘ethnographic conceptualism’, meaning that ethnography is being conducted as conceptual art, integrating the performative methodological involvement of audiences.<sup>8</sup>

### Pushing theory: Sensual and processual realities

Despite the importance of the focus on practice for understanding the cross-fertilization and mutual engagement of anthropologists and artists alike there are some uncharted theoretical fields. Schneider and Wright have rightly emphasized “that an engagement between art practices and current anthropological theory is now required to push forward theory and practices in both fields” (Schneider and Wright 2013:6). They suggest “a genuinely theoretical conversation to be had, not necessarily with words but with works” and suggest subjects such as materiality, personhood, relations, actor-network-theory, and perspectivism (ibid.2013:16). Likewise Ragazzi suggests a look at mimesis and appropriation, materiality and the agency of objects (2013). I would fully support such claims, yet I do perceive some chartering work still to be done.

8 [http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/researchforum/events/2012/spring/jan31\\_EthnographicConceptualism.shtml](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/researchforum/events/2012/spring/jan31_EthnographicConceptualism.shtml) accessed 09.12.14

For the moment I would like to remain with the *words-based* conversation and will come to the *works* later. In *speaking about* the anthropology-art nexus it is common to use certain concepts and metaphors. Art and anthropology are being described as spatial domains or fields that lie next to each other separated by an invisible line or an unchartered terrain. It is the narrative of a “border zone” and “divisions between the fields” (Schneider and Wright 2010:1), of a “‘third space’ that crosses disciplinary borders” and a “contact zone” (Rutten, et al. 2013:471, see also Schneider this issue) that constitutes a feeling of betweenness, of unchartered territory, of newness and thus explorative spirit. Likewise this zone is analogized with interwovenness, intermingling and the mixing of two liquid colors “maintaining their original identities in places, together they achieve new colors and forms” (Schneider and Wright 2010:1). Furthermore, somehow the whole territorial setup is ‘surrounded’ (or permeated) by a wider landscape of the sensual, subjective, hard-to-represent or speak-about aspects of human existence that both ‘disciplines’ attempt to tackle, to understand and to represent. Simultaneously these fields can also have an agency, they can become like corporate actors acting upon each other and the world. Foster writes that “art thus passed into the expanded field of culture that anthropology is thought to survey” (Foster 1995:306). Here metaphors of interacting, of touching or overlapping are being used. This corporate agency is then somewhat mixed with single actors agencies – the actual performers of exemplary practices.

I would not contest that such metaphorical speaking has heuristic functions. But I suspect that while emphasizing *practice* we need to have a clearer look at the actors and agents of such practices as people are the human, embodied and emotional locus of practices (involved in to wider societal structures, of course). Thus we should more clearly apply process theory (Ingold 2011; Wimmer 2005; Wimmer 2008) to ongoing actions of anthropological and artistic actors in the world. That means other theoretical aspects of practice, the *embodiment* and *ontology* of doing any practice, may it be anthropology or art or both, should gain more emphasis. I do not contest that in concurrent writings processes, movement and fluxes involving discourses and structures play a dynamic role but I argue that the empiricism and the examples are based on single actor’s practices – without clearly grasping the full theoretical and conceptual dimensions of their reflexive positioning. This may just be one facet yet an important one.

There are yet a few more unresolved issues. Is anthropology a word-based descriptive comparative science mainly about ethnographic representation or rather something that should investigate the world also in an experimental forward-looking self-reflexive and philosophical manner, as Ingold suggests (2008). Should anthropologists attempt to use artistic methods and experiments to not only colour but deepen their ethnographies? These questions lead into a query about the adequate representation of the respective

findings. When remaining with the spoken (or written) representation of some practice-nexus, one could argue that the roles in the theoretical conversation that Schneider and Wright have called for should remain clearly distributed. Art is doing practical experiments without ever claiming more than direct sensations differing among recipients, while the written analysis, the etic and intersubjectively intelligible view of addressing a broad audience is being formulated by sciences like anthropology.

However, dissatisfaction with the incompleteness of the outcome or product, its lack of authenticity, feel and emotion, and its remaining out-of-touch with the physiology and ontology will remain for anthropologists with artistic sensibilities (and maybe vice versa). Susan Hiller, an anthropologist who later turned to art experienced a great discomfort in the role of the observer and became an artist to “find a way to be inside all my activities” (Einzig 1996; Hiller 1996). And in fact the detachment of the scientist from his/her ‘object’ of study, the unreachable claim for objectivity and the lack of recognition of involvement all are serious matters that have been debated for long (Fabian 2014; Jackson 1998). Contrarily Hiller postulates that the artist, like everyone else, is an insider whose work depicts biographically determined social conditioning. “Artists’ work does not allow discontinuities between experience and reality, and it eliminates any gap between the investigator and the object or situation investigated” she writes (Hiller 1996:24). Consequently she found the role of the participant observer disturbing due to the absence of a “passionate commitment to the values and goals of the people one observed” (Hiller 1996:18). “Fieldwork did not provide revelations into the nature of any ‘ultimate’ reality behind the varying sets of perceptions one learned of. It was just an exercise in observation and limited social interaction” (ibid.).

I would agree with Ingold that it is a desirable part of the anthropological endeavor to come to a “critical understanding of human being and knowing in the one world we all inhabit” (Ingold 2008:69). Ingold in fact advocates an anthropological ‘being-with’ instead of a mere ethnographic ‘writing-of’ (ibid.). Remaining within an ontological perspective both practices are attempts to contribute insights into major mysteries of our existence. Death, afterlife, magic, cosmology/religion, the complexity of the human being, the human body/mind, the soul, human emotions, or the occurrence of the global ecological crisis, overconsumption, utmost terror and violence, exploitation and marginalization – these are just a few examples where the scientific results – the spoken and written representations cannot keep pace with remaining unspoken, unspeakable yet intensely experienced and thus causative parts of reality (Bhaskar 2008). Such parts are called transmateriality by Schneider and Wright who seem to denote a similar idea “that ephemeral, transitory phenomena (anything between social actions and extrasensorial experiences) produce and leave material traces that refer back and point for-



ward to similar events not any longer or not yet manifest” (2013:15). In sum what I aim to say is that there are aspects of life, of situations, of practices, of interactions, of that thing that we call *reality*, which challenge our perception and our abilities of recognition and representation, influence our often strikingly misfitting behavior and call for radically new understandings and approaches. This is a challenge for the collaboration and merging of the two disciplines and their different audiences<sup>9</sup> and styles of representation.

Hence the call by Schneider and Wright to continue the conversation on the level of *works* which might be understood as a call for a deepened engagement in the sensational and representational domain. A salient underlying future question seems to be: What happens in the process of the production and reception of art (as of things and processes in life in general)? And what happens in the process of the production and reception of anthropology? What is missing? For which reasons? What is the meaning, the purport, the sense?

As Christina Lammer outlines in this volume anthropology and art both are practices of searching, delving and researching. It is a common feature of both practices to produce some sort of knowledge about the world, to uncover. That means that both practices are serving purposes of utility. There is of course the absolute liberty of art to be useless. Frayling provocatively stated that the “American Customs & Excise definition of ‘a work of art’ is that the owner must be able to prove it is completely useless.”<sup>10</sup> However, if we take a research agenda of art to produce some knowledge about and represent some findings about the human journey through the world seriously, to my mind the two mainly differ in their institutionalization – which carries a lot of epistemological baggage.<sup>11</sup>

Allow me to insert a short one-paragraph excursus on institutionalization: It is mostly the rules of ethics, politics, empiricism, methodology and intersubjectivity that constrain an anthropology which considers itself as science (and thus a quest to truth) to remain within the realm of the speakable, representable, reproduceable. Additionally the scientific system has entirely different incentives for rewarding good performance, which is mostly the successful participation in an academic literal discourse (being rewarded with one of the scarce steady jobs). Art as a solitary expression of the search-

9 A question that occurs to me is if art and anthropology in western contexts might be addressing different audiences – the scientific real, material world and the artsy ontological/spiritual, ‘afterwork’, lay world? Or do they address people in different modes of their activities – in a science mode and a lay mode?

10 Christopher Frayling, Rector of the British Royal College of Art on <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/w/what-is-craft/> (accessed 20.08.2013).

11 This is of course leaving aside art’s other main aesthetic, archival, decorative or therapeutic functions which do not merge with anthropology or science that much.

er is much less confined to these boundaries, and rewards few with relatively enormous financial and social capital while many remain largely unprotected by an institutional system but pecuniarily precarious and ‘free’. From this position the artist can choose a different approach to ethics, to provocation, and to pushing social boundaries as some artists do.<sup>12</sup> However, to be taken serious the artist cannot continuously violate the most basic agreements of truthfulness, ethics or sociality. A border zone emerges that may attract especially those anthropologists who question the claims for objectivity and truth and experience themselves as subjects representing an idiosyncratic, solitary worldview. Likewise artists attempting to come to representations about the world to be taken permanently serious in intersubjective discourse may choose to adopt some theme, material or methodology that supports these claims. Especially in the field of human-environment relations ranging from the scientific conundrums of human perception to the destructivity of human ecological impact actors from art and anthropology also in collaboration have produced very interesting outcomes (Weintraub 2012).

But to continue, what is the nature of that knowledge that art and anthropology produce about an ultimate reality behind the varying sets of perceptions that Susan Hiller mentioned (1996)? And what are the products? Ethnography is certainly largely a descriptive knowledge of the observable, as is probably also iconography.<sup>13</sup> As Susan Hiller observes “ethnography is very much about talking, about ideas and issues, making art is a process largely without talking but much more feeling” (1996). Pointedly one could argue that sciences’ role is still rather intellectual while art is more physical/emotional while in fact such separation of labor is producing only partial approaches at some sort of holistic understanding.

Is the reality ultimate and *behind* the things? Or is it not rather *within* and among the things that we just do *not focus precisely enough*? Are there not layers of a world that need to be zoomed like complexly interwoven narratives? The work of Kathryn Ramey, this issue, involving her personal biography in a complex filmic narrative is a step in this direction. Are there not aspects of the world, like the aural politics that Jen Heuson in this issue argues need to be heard? Or the deeply emotional relationships with things and images that need to be chiseled out as in the work of van Klaveren or Aigner, both also this issue? Is it not the re-questioning of the real meanings in the imaginations, and representations or their absent content, the overcoming of taboos of thinking and feeling alike? Lammer is suggesting a different sensual representation about a subjective investigation, the exposure of emotional landscapes of touches and senses in the work of surgeons and patients alike. All that is not unspeakable but requires a sort of intuitive sensual understanding on the side of the recipient. It is a mutual approach

12 A popular example is <http://www.jonathanmeese.com/>

13 In the sense of critics of positivism a dispassionate intellectualization.

to the „qualitas occulta“, the “energy-metamorphosis” and the “tangency” of the art-object in interaction with the recipient as the art-historian Gertrud Inboden called it (Völcker 2009).

To me all the questions that have been raised so far boil down to the increasing awareness that reality is not quite that material, temporal and distractedly observable thing that we tend to believe. Anthropology and art, taken as meaningful quests, have to involve their actors inside the processes of research – a fact that is much less problematic for artists. Furthermore we cannot entirely talk about the outcomes as things/products or singular events but as observations of ongoing *processes*, actor-object-networks and multiple translucent layers of a complex reality. It is a major issue “whether the notion of art is necessarily associated with the notion of object or product” (Hiller 1996:20). There are multiple challenges to complexity representation (Köhn 2013). I would agree with Ingold that at its core the (solitary) individual and social practical involvement with the world, as it is largely applied by anthropologists and artists alike, is something that evolves along temporal and spatial lines (Ingold 2007; Ingold 2011). Practices are in fact processes, as a process of creative improvisation is intrinsic to life (Hallam and Ingold 2007).

From this perspective there are several fortes which have been emphasized in art. Its ability to “disrupt and irrupt time, working against the kinds of linear social time manifest in social formations” (Schneider and Wright 2013:7). Its ability of shifting patterns of thinking: e.g. by staging, re-enacting, slowing down, speeding-up, exposing imperceptibilities, breaking up linearity and narrativity or the “transmateriality” of material objects (photos, images) making translucent the actions or events from which they originate (Schneider and Wright 2013:15). But for an anthropology that takes this processuality of the human conscious being and its experience within a complex layered and translucent reality for serious there will be impulses for future anthropological representation and complex narratives. In this sense the thematic contributions we have compiled in this issue all take their own shot at certain aspects of this nexus.

### Thematic contributions

We present critical reflections on the potentials for future collaborations in a field of sensory political/ecological art-ethnography, potentials for theoretical or practical collaborations as well as productive friction that infuse both activities with new political meaning and engagement and potentials for future complex collaborations in a field of social/political action. We have mixed contributions by artists, curators and anthropologists who all work in some way on these various subjects and have taken care to offer them maximum liberties to voice their perspectives.

In an opening theoretical contribution the anthropologist Arnd **Schneider** argues that in the current climate of convergence plus an ongoing ethnographic turn of the arts, there is a favorable climate for a new hermeneutics in the collaborations of artists and anthropologists (see as well Schneider 2008; Schneider 2013). He emphasizes the need for collaborations around the rhetorical figure of being on “speaking terms” and argues in favor of mutually critical perspectives, experimentality and exploration, and a process of negotiating and being in dialogue. This dialogue in mutual respect should circle around the topic of appropriation in a Ricoeurian sense as “to dispossess oneself of the narcissistic ego, in order to engender a new self-understanding, not a mere congeniality with the other”. He further argues for relinquishment, the temporary ceding of disciplinary boundaries and the hybridization of practices. However, such a dialogue should be conscious of differences in terms of capital, but as well unequal hegemonic relationships and practices between actors.

Wilma **Scheschonk** is an art historian and anthropologist who engages in a deep reflection about the Latourian perspective onto the Anthropocene, a world in deep ecological crisis that is being reshaped by human discourse and action, and his call to conflate art and science (Latour 2013; Latour 2014). She reflects on the filmic attempt by Armin Linke called ‘Alpi’ to meticulously analyze the discursive and practical ‘overshaping’ of the alps.

The whole domain of relational or collaborative art which investigates the interlinkages between art and social life is the matter of an empirical case study that is presented by the anthropologist Nathalie **Göltenboth** in her contribution on participation and collaboration in Cuba. She investigates the work of Havana contemporary artist René Francisco from an anthropological perspective. Francisco applies a sort of ‘social-desire’ fieldwork, social work and house restoration practices and Göltenboth shows exemplarily how such a socially committed art understood as social sculpture becomes meaningful for the people involved and is meant to break indifference, resignation and loss of agency. Convincingly she presents a case of an art *within* social contexts, not separated and disconnected from it though also offering a bi-directional agency as the artist also capitalizes on the results by exhibiting films, photos etc. In the sense of the transmateriality mentioned above the artist works with multidimensional representational material that comes out of the lives of people but simultaneously symbolizes and visualizes empowerment in a living metaphor of ‘Cubanness’.

Jennifer **Heuson** is an anthropologist and sound artist who emphasizes the essential role of sonic, acoustic art approaches to ethnography in making aural politics sensible. She discusses the importance of a sonic and sounded approach to the present “experiential” and “sensorial” moment of Native American heritage tourism, ethnography, and sound studies mainly to expose that sensory aural lifeworlds can be politicized as they are divided

along racial lines. Her sonic research deals with the challenge to make such aural politics able to be sensed. She exposes how the managing, mediating and making sound, noise, and silence, is being used to link these to emotional and physiological effects and to ultimately justify, colonize, and exploit cultural and racial difference. Her contribution thus also offers a critical look at significant differences between aural politics and other sound-based approaches, such as soundscape preservation and sonic criticism (Samuels, et al. 2010).

In an equally stirring study on racist stereotypes and assumptions about Native Americans the art-historian and art teacher Susan Livingston deals with the attempt to use art to reshift power structures and challenge hegemonies (that have also been established by some 'classical' anthropological narratives) by reflecting on the art of Kent Monkman, a Canadian artist of Cree ancestry. Monkman works with a variety of mediums, including painting, film/video, performance, and installation. Monkman uses quee(re)appropriation, or the queer re-appropriation of previously appropriated images, to challenge the grand narrative of the erasure of Indians, the imposition of European sexual binaries in the «New World,» and engages in issues of authenticity and power in a postmodern era of rampant decontextualized appropriation.

Kathryn **Ramey**, an anthropologist and artist, tackles the question of the validity of our collective historical recollection and the complexity of an adequate representation of reality. She uses the format of a cinematic essay to present a multivalent portrait based on different but connected narratives of discovering and forgetting. In her essay she merges the demoted planet Pluto, a MIA WWII General by the name of Ramey, who was a relative of hers, and a US commonwealth to examine the scientific, militaristic and historic rationalities surrounding them as much as her personal emotional involvement inside these discursive events. Using such a way of representation refusing linear narrative or voice of authority in favor of digressions she reflects on the potentials and challenges of merging ethnographic fieldwork with formal experimentation. Her contribution is thus able to shake up received notions of what is an appropriate presentation for anthropological research as well as what kind of content is acceptable for experimental film.

Rosanne **Van Klaveren** is a media artist also touching the subject of socially engaged and participatory art. She reports of her artistic approach to create an internet platform for the storage and exchange of food related local knowledge in circumpolar regions. She shows how an artistic approach can create favorable opportunities for the needed combining and communicating of knowledge but also reports of the difficulties that a real world application causes. Artistic participatory practices can establish connections between people(s) that are valuable for the sharing of knowledge, especially when ini-

tiators are outsiders to those who own the knowledge and/or in situations of othering.

Florence **Aigner** is a photo artist who presents portraits of a memory game that was created with a group of multi-cultural trainees in French language in Brussels in 2012. It is about them and their relationship to one specific painting that they had chosen from the collection of the Musée Royal des Arts Anciens de Bruxelles. In describing and depicting this intimate and multi-role encounter and the intercultural dialogue that emerged Aigner discusses the collaborative dimension of the project, how a group that has never been in a museum before meets this environment and brings into it its own cultural references and experiences. Her contribution is thus a reflection on encounters of reinterpretation and transformation of the self and the imagination within a social multi-cultural encounter.

Kathrin **Wildner** is an urban anthropologist with longstanding experience as a curator and editor of anthropological and artistic collaborative projects. In her article she explores the urban space, the city, the metropole as a social, cultural and political lab, where disciplinary, institutional and regional limitations of research and knowledge production can be cracked open (van Eeghem 2013). She presents experiences from the transdisciplinary project 'Global Prayers' which investigated religious phenomena in global cities as well as the transformation of urban spaces by religious movements with the means of science and art (Becker, et al. 2013). Reflecting several methodological approaches, like the recordings of the sound artist Gilles Aubry which expose especially well the texturedness and layeredness of a sounded space, or multi-sited ethnography, enactment or intervention, she presents potential new avenues of collaboration which span the disciplines.

Frank **Weigelt** and Miriam **Vogt** have picked up the complex challenge of trying an interdisciplinary and experimental dialogue between an anthropologist and an artist. Inspired by research on European Buddhism they have chosen the term of *Achtsamkeit* (=Attentiveness) as a thematic outline. Their work shows how the fruitful friction that emerges when the text based approach of the anthropologist meets the work-based results of the artist – in this case the production of wax-flags. It is the central argument that *Achtsamkeit* understood as 'sensual (self)conscious observation' is a crucial part of the artistic process of creating and receiving at the same time and could be made fruitful for the anthropological endeavor as well.

The contributions by Linda Weintraub and Christine Lammer are of a di- or tri-logic nature as they base on interviews. Linda **Weintraub** is an author and curator well known for her work on eco-art. Especially for this edition she discussed with Natalie Jeremijenko, an artist, engineer and inventor with a speciality in environmental and urban issues, and Katherine Carl the curator of an exhibition at the CUNY Graduate Center Gallery in New York

City entitled “World of Matter”.<sup>14</sup> Their exchange about the interlinkages between art and anthropology in a transforming world is full of insight by two professionals. Carl for example perceives anthropology as “cracking open in exciting ways” and perceives that as “things are happening in the margins, like the personal field notes that don’t end up in the finished journal article but are then food for a poem”. She thinks it is crucially important to involve both in dialogue. Both engage in reflections on critical realism which for Jeremijenko “takes a kind of observation immersion in a phenomenon of interest that exists without the coding and empirical analysis”. Like Susan Hiller she advocates a work about lived experiences that makes an ethnographic fieldwork methodology a valid entry point.

The Austrian sociologist and multimedia artist Christina **Lammer** combines sensory ethnography with video, performance and body art in hospitals and clinics to focus on embodied emotion and sensory interaction between patients and physicians during the course of medical treatment. In a dialogue with M. Pröpper carrying the title ‘Empathography’ she explains her approach to key concepts like sensuality, emotion and subjectivity and the role that the body (Leib) understood in a holistic sense, bodily perceptions and bodily borders play in her work on human dimensions in the field of hospitals. Lammer understands her work as artistic research and in this way is a perfect example of hybrid practitioner chartering new ground described above. Especially targeting the intersection between actions, arrangements, materialities and the sensual and expressive images of the human body she exposes some deep human dimensions of this field of interaction.

The sensual and expressive human body and the deep human dimensions of the bodily and emotional anthropologist undergoing and suffering in stressful and even traumatic fieldwork situations is focused as well by Erwin **Schweitzer** and Kathrin **Gradt**, both anthropologists. To avoid this situation which they call the ‘Malinowski-Blues’ they introduce in their article a new method called TRE (Tension & Trauma Releasing Exercises), a bodily oriented relaxation process that is able to dissolve muscular tensions caused by stress, relive traumata and thus improve the general frame of mind.

## Conclusion

The title image of this special edition is an artistic approach to the hidden meaning of objects as bearers of significance – achieved by the anthropolo-

---

14 <http://centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery>) This exhibition assembles interviews with members of indigenous populations and their representatives the world over. Each interview, which is accompanied by textual and visual documentation, conveys the impact of resource extraction, genetic modification, dam construction, industrial agriculture, and other indicators of economic growth upon a region, its population, and its cultural traditions. Reflecting their experiences.

gist Kathrin Gradt. It could be seen as an objectified metaphor for the multiple meanings, or different *layers of that translucent material reality* which anthropology and art attempt to grasp. It is in fact the approach to better attune our sensorial and emotional and perceptive capabilities to ultimately better understand multiple dimensions of a ‘*qualitas occulta*’ of that thing reality that unites anthropologists and artists. The endeavor is about ‘laying bare’ of hidden gaps of perception and knowledge, as well as structures of powerful narratives and the discursive penetration of all spheres of our social life.

Empathography, “Achtsamkeit”, non-linearity, poetic ethnography, critical aureality, asynchronous sensuality and an awareness for the intermittent nature of our daily sensory experiences, the layers of reality in the Anthropocene, social-political cooperation destabilizing lines of power and hegemoniality, the ‘participatory democracy’ of non-humans – lastly the forming of new problems instead of the repetition of old ones – these are all exemplary answers to the challenges ahead that authors in this volume have given. They have outlined that there is a great potential for contemporary art to become a means of precise communication in scientific discourses, and vice versa. Likewise several contributions have focused on processes of participation, improvisation, performativity and creativity as part of individual and cultural action in societal and ecological transformation. In this sense the political and social dimensions of the processual human encounter with a threatened ecological environment seems to steer many activities in the two merging disciplines alike.

Though still a bit hazy it shimmers through that arts’ ability of closing sensual gaps can be made useful as enrichments or subversive counter-products for scientific work while the scientific theorizing of certain especially social encounters can focus artistic expression. Art and research are both practices of investigation, of “excavating ubiquitous yet missing knowledge” about “‘hybrid’, ‘solidified’, ‘pixelated’ worlds all going on simultaneously” as Carl put it (this volume)<sup>15</sup> This involves art=research as in the work of Lammer, Wildner or the work of René Rodriguez that Göltenboth describes.

Ultimately what anthropologists and artists alike should attempt is to bodily grasp our environment as beings *inside* processes and to make these experiences sensually and inter-subjectively transferable. Lastly, the ongoing question to which this volume has contributed a few steps is how established patterns of thinking, narrating and acting can be transformed through an encounter of multiple perspectives to come to new critical perspectives on reality behind the varying sets of perceptions which do not allow discontinuities between experience and reality.

---

15 See as well <http://institut-kunst.ch/art-is-science/kunst-ist-wissenschaft/>



## Literature

- Baxstrom, Richard , Todd Meyers, and Peter Quinn, eds.  
2008 *Anthropologies*. Baltimore: Creative Capitalism.
- Becker, Jochen, et al., eds.  
2013 *Global Prayers. Contemporary Manifestations of the Religious in the City*. Zurich: Lars Mueller Publishers.
- Bhaskar, Roy  
2008 *A Realist Theory of Science*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bishop, Claire  
2012 *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso Books.
- Carrier, James G., and Paige West, eds.  
2009 *Virtualism, Governance and Practice: Vision and Execution in Environmental*. New York: Berghahn.
- Carrithers, Michael  
1990 Is Anthropology Art or Science? *Current Anthropology* 31(3):263–282.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus  
1986 *Writing Culture – The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coles, Alex, ed.  
2001 *Site-Specificity in Art: The Ethnographic Turn*. London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd.
- Einzig, Barbara  
1996 *Thinking about Art. Conversations with Susan Hiller*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Fabian, Johannes  
2014 *Time and the other: How anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Foster, Hal  
1995 The Artist as Ethnographer? *In The Traffic in Culture. Refiguring Art and Anthropology*. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers, eds., Pp. 302–309. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- Gell, Alfred  
1998 *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Giddens, Anthony  
1979 *Central Problems of Sociological Theory. Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. London: Macmillan.
- Hallam, Elisabeth, and Tim Ingold, eds.  
2007 *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*. Oxford: Berg.

Hiller, Susan

1996 Art and Anthropology/Anthropology and Art. *In* Thinking about Art. Conversations with Susan Hiller. B. Einzig, ed. Pp. 16–25. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Howes, David

2003 Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory. Ann Arbor: Univ of Michigan Press.

Ingold, Tim

2000 The perception of the environment. London: Routledge.

2001 Beyond Art and Technology: The Anthropology of Skill. *In* Anthropological Perspectives on Technology. M.B. Schiffer, ed. Pp. 17–32. Dragoon, Arizona: Amerind Foundation.

2007 Lines. A brief History. Oxon: Routledge.

2008 Anthropology is Not Ethnography. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 154:69–92.

2010 The textility of making. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34(1):91–102.

2011 Being alive. Essays on movement, knowledge and description. Oxon: Routledge.

2014 That's enough about ethnography! *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4(1):383–395.

Ingold, Tim, and Elisabeth Hallam

2007 Creativity and cultural improvisation: an introduction. *In* Creativity and Cultural Improvisation. E. Hallam and T. Ingold, eds. Oxford: Berg.

Jackson, Michael

1998 Minima Ethnographica. *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kester, Grant H.

2011 The One and the Many. *Contemporary Colaborative Art in a Global Context*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Klingan, Katrin, et al., eds.

2014 Textures of the Anthropocene. *Grain Vapor Ray*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Köhn, Steffen

2013 Organising complexities: the potential of multi-screen video-installations for ethnographic practice and representation. *Critical Arts* 27(5):553–568.

Latour, Bruno

1995 *Wir sind nie modern gewesen. Versuch einer symmetrischen Anthropologie*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

2002 *Iconoclash. Gibt es eine Welt jenseits des Bilderkrieges?* Berlin: Merve Verlag.

2013 *An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence. An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

2014 *Anthropology at the time of the Anthropocene – a personal view of what is to be studied*. In *American Association of Anthropologists*. Washington.

Layton, Robert

1991 *The anthropology of art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marcus, George E., and Fred R. Myers, eds.

1995 *The Traffic in Culture. Refiguring Art and Anthropology*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Miller, Daniel, ed.

2005 *Materiality*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press.

Morphy, Howard

2005 *The Anthropology of Art*. In *The Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. T. Ingold, ed. Pp. 648–685. Oxon: Routledge.

Morphy, Howard, and Morgan Perkins

2006 *The Anthropology of Art: A Reflection on its History and Contemporary Practice*. In *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader*. H. Morphy and M. Perkins, eds. Pp. 1–32. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Pink, Sarah

2009 *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: Sage.

Pink, Sarah, et al.

2010 *Walking across disciplines: from ethnography to arts practice*. *Visual Studies* 25(1):1–7.

Pussetti, Chiara

2013 'Woundscapes': suffering, creativity and bare life – practices and processes of an ethnography-based art exhibition. *Critical Arts* 27(5):569–586.

Ragazzi, Rossella

2013 *Liberating mimesis: between art and anthropology*. *Critical Arts* 27(6):799–806.

Rilke, Rainer Maria

1997 *Gedichte*. Stuttgart: Reclam.

Rutten, Kris, An van. Dienderen, and Ronald Soetaert

2013 *Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art*. *Critical Arts* 27(5):459–473.

- Samuels, David W., et al.  
2010 Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39(1):329–345.
- Schneider, Arnd  
2008 Three modes of experimentation with art and ethnography. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14(1):171–194.  
2013 Contested grounds: fieldwork collaborations with artists in Corrientes, Argentina. *Critical Arts* 27(5):511–530.
- Schneider, Arnd, and Christopher Wright, eds.  
2006 *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg.  
2010 *Between Art and Anthropology. Contemporary Ethnographic Practice*. Oxford: Berg.  
2013 *Anthropology and Art Practice*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Smith, Christian  
2010 *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Svasek, Maruska  
2007 *Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production*. London: Pluto Press.
- van Eeghem, Elly  
2013 Urban cracks: sites of meaning for critical artistic practices. *Critical Arts* 27(5):587–594.
- Völcker, Wolfram, ed.  
2009 *Was ist gute Kunst? Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag*.
- Weintraub, Linda  
2012 *To life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wimmer, Andreas  
2005 *Kultur als Prozess. Zur Dynamik des Aushandelns von Bedeutungen*. Wiesbaden: VS - Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.  
2008 The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 113(4):970–1022.

---

Dr. Michael Pröpper ([michael.proepper@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:michael.proepper@uni-hamburg.de)) is a senior researcher at the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology of the University of Hamburg and an artist. He is specialized in environmental anthropology. In his current scientific and artistic approaches, he focuses on the interlinkages of anthropology and art.