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Société Suisse d'Ethnologie
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SEG Jahrestagung Colloque Annuel de la SSE Annual Meeting of the SAA

Re-viewing the field: Contemporary debates and approaches to fieldwork

Monte Verità (Ascona), 22-24 April 2021

Call for Papers

The Swiss Anthropological Association (SSE-SEG-SAA) convenes once a year a major conference around thematic panels. Due to the pandemic, the 2020 edition was postponed to 2021. This annual meeting of the SSE-SEG-SAA will address the topic of fieldwork.

The birth of modern anthropology is concomitant with the invention of “the field”. Since Malinowski, long-term presence in a place that is not home has been, and is still in many ways, the paradigmatic ethnographic method. With the passage of time, the discipline has evolved to include new themes and approaches, and yet the field remains its epistemological and methodological anchoring point.

It is time to take stock of the debates around the meaning and localization of the field that have been shaping the discipline for a number of decades. We have in mind the now frequent reference to “multi-sited ethnography”, or the largely discredited use of the distinction between anthropology “abroad” and “at home”, well problematized in the 2019 annual meeting on “The Global as Method”. In practice, contemporary anthropologists avail themselves of a wide spectrum of tools, methods and concepts for going about their empirical work, raising questions about the limits and the specificities of the discipline.

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Particularly with the rise of life “on-line”, anthropologists have been inventing new forms of fieldwork to capture and analyze these new forms of social interaction. With the rise of the Internet 2.0, notions such as “virtual fields”, “social networks”, “forums”, “platforms”, and so forth are increasingly invoked as both objects and methods of inquiry. These new “fields” are characterized by their lack of geographic situatedness and by the fact that social interactions most often take place between people who do not “know” each other “in person”.

Simultaneous to this “virtualization” of the field, we are also witness to what appears to be a countervailing movement in globalized societies: the intensification of logics of heritage and of what are roughly termed “identity politics”, which celebrate specific cultural elements, often linked to a territorially rooted sense of belonging. These logics of “re-rooting” raise new challenges for anthropological theory, traditionally critical of simplistic equations between communities, cultures and territories. Indeed, anthropologists are often solicited directly to participate in these social activities, and must ask themselves new questions about how they wish to position themselves as researchers and as social actors when their data are co-produced with the people they study, when their status and objectives must be negotiated with local actors, and when restitution of research results becomes increasingly mandatory. With the concept of “situated knowledge”, feminist and post-colonial thinkers have thoroughly discredited the notion of scientific neutrality, the “view from nowhere”. It is now taken for granted that anthropologists must assume responsibility for their positionality, but the forms of these engagements are hotly debated, and challenge the very idea of “the field” – its composition, its boundaries, the relations it creates amongst actors, in sum, its agency as a social actor in its own right.

This Call for Panels welcomes propositions that examine these new fieldwork configurations. Our hope is to stimulate reflection on the convergences, alliances and conflicts produced by these new temporalities and spatialities of “the field”, in resonance with other disciplines from which anthropologists can borrow productively and to which they contribute. Defining “the field” calls for a multitude of approaches, which are not merely theoretical or epistemological, but also ethical and political.

Time slot for each panel: 90 minutes (roughly 10-15 minutes per paper).

Link for paper submissions: <https://forms.gle/n7rX493Pqz9rFqpu9>

Deadline for submission: January 20, 2021

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Panel 1

Creative Collaboration – Art and Anthropology at the Interface

Convenors

Leïla Baracchini, University of Neuchâtel

Fiona Siegenthaler, University of Basel

Claire Vionnet, University of Paris 8

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Art and anthropology share a long history of inter- and transdisciplinary exchanges. Arts have been the subject of ethnographic studies, as well as part of the methodological tool-kit for visual documentation (such as photography, sketches and film). Conversely, ethnography has attracted the interest of artists for more than a century; the modern avant-garde in Paris being only the most prominent example. The 'ethnographic turn' in the arts in the 1990s (Foster 1995), and the increasing epistemological interest of anthropologists in art have however incited new forms of exploring the interface of art and anthropology (Lassiter 2005). Collaboration between scholars and artists have thereby moved to the centre stage. Several reasons have intensified this collaborative convergence: It promises to solve or at least relieve the problem of uneven power balances and asymmetric relationships between researcher and researched; it aims at repurposing conventional methods and forms of representation; it appears to transmit sensorial matters more appropriately than text; and it holds out the prospect of creating new spaces of knowledge production that facilitate the reflective representation of plural and diverse realities in a globally transforming world.

As a result, experiences at the crossroads of arts and anthropology have increased these last few years, leading to heuristic, epistemological, methodological and narrative innovations in artistic and scientific productions (i.e. Marcus 2010 ; Schneider and Wright 2010 ; Ingold 2013 ; Schneider 2017; Pussetti 2018). Collaborations between artists and anthropologists are part of a more general trend and seek to redefine the disciplinary boundaries, to explore other forms of presence in the field, to develop new methods to generate knowledge and new ways of communicating research beyond academia.

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The modalities of exchange are diverse (Chapman and Sawchuk 2012; Leavy 2009), and although experimental research practices combining art and anthropology open new possibilities (i.e. research-creation), they also raise new questions, ethical issues and tensions.

This panel addresses case studies of collaborative exchange that discuss the practices, potentials and challenges at this art-anthropology interface. What dynamics are at play? What forms of expertise are shared? What tensions emerge? What kind of new experiences and knowledge are generated? What role does creativity play when different individuals, professionals and socio-cultural groups team up? Also, how is the ethnographic practice shared, shaped and framed by these collaborative processes? The questions do not only address the interfaces of anthropology and art, but also relate to the dissemination of knowledge in and to society in general. Just as anthropologists try to improve the dissemination of their knowledge to diverse communities, artists aim to improve the dialogue with their audiences and participants.

This panel welcomes proposals that discuss the potentials and limits of such exchanges. It seeks to explore how these creative experimentations contribute to redefine the boundaries of the field. In accordance with the topic of this panel, we are particularly open to experimental formats of presentation (lecture-performance, video-essay, etc.).

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Panel 2

Museums as fieldwork: paradox or opportunity?

Convenors

Roberta Colombo Dougoud, Musée d'ethnographie de Genève

Damien Kunik, Musée d'ethnographie de Genève

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Since the birth of modern anthropology, fieldwork has been considered a crucial phase of any ethnographic practice. Considered rightly or wrongly as the founding father of fieldwork, Bronislaw Malinowski, in the introduction to his book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, describes his research techniques pointing out that participant observation involves a long-term trip into the field, living with the people, engaging in their community, learning their language, eating their food, and taking part in their everyday life. The meaning and the practice of fieldwork have been debated for a number of decades. The postmodernist criticism of the scientific validity of fieldwork has also impacted museum anthropologists. What kind of fieldwork was and is carried out by museum practitioners?

In retracing the history of the emergence of anthropology, it is interesting to understand how far it is linked to the museum. From the first half of the nineteenth century onwards, a vast movement to create ethnographic museums in Europe began. Their establishment was mainly guided by the concern to collect and preserve cultural material from non-European people before they vanished. As these were generally people without writing, it was considered that only the study of their material productions would make the reconstruction of their history possible. Material culture was therefore a source of information and the museum became a space in which data could be compared and theories formulated. At a time when ethnography had not yet made its way into academic institutions, it was most often in ethnographic museums that anthropological knowledge was developed.

Since the 1980s, following radical criticism, ethnographic museums face the urgent need to reform themselves. In 1998, Jean Jamin raised the question provocatively: "Should ethnographic museums be burned down?" Their very existence is problematic, because of the transformation both of the discipline to which they are linked and of the world they are supposed to represent. As their collections come primarily from colonial enterprises based on

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asymmetric exchanges, they have to rethink their practices, to reformulate their narratives and to create new politics of representations in the context of a postcolonial discourse.

In recent years, the situation has become more complicated as a result of budget cuts in museums, which no longer allow for collection campaigns; the ethical decisions which motivate the choice to limit acquisitions to objects with irreproachable identity cards; the reduction in staff, which no longer allows for the effective processing of donations; or finally the heritage-making practices of the artefacts preserved, which turns them into a "treasure" that only a restricted group of people is now authorized to handle.

In this situation what kind of research is possible? What and where is the fieldwork for museum practitioners? Ethnographic museums are becoming fieldwork for different professions: researchers wanting to investigate the collections and the way in which they have been used to represent oneself and the other; members of source communities, trying to reconnect with their ancestors' creations, asserting their own histories and voices in exhibitions, redefining politics of access to collections; contemporary artists creating new artworks in dialogue with the collections.

Indigenous peoples in the museums have actively contributed to transform these institutions into sites for research on the politics of Indigent through their criticism of ethnographic and museological representations, through their collaboration in the management of collections and the development of exhibitions, and through their research in their cultural heritage held in museums.

To change or to die, therefore, is how the question of museum research is articulated in a framework that is fundamentally different from the one that allowed the creation of such institutions. An increasingly obvious choice is that of making the museum itself the unchanging field of research, by opening the doors of the repositories as much as possible, by facilitating reception and consultation to the communities hitherto visited by anthropologists. A fieldwork that is in some ways upside down, posing new challenges to allow new perspectives in the study of the material cultures of human societies.

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Panel 3

Autochtonie, processus d'essentialisation et posture(s) de l'anthropologue : dilemmes et enjeux méthodologiques, épistémologiques et politiques

Convenors

Leïla Baracchini, Institut d'Ethnologie, Université de Neuchâtel

Anahy Gajardo, Institut d'Ethnologie, Université de Neuchâtel

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Les processus identitaires autochtones suscitent depuis plusieurs années de vifs débats au sein de la discipline anthropologique (Kuper 2003 ; Kenrick & Lewis 2004). Suite à l'institutionnalisation et l'universalisation de cette notion par les Nations Unies et la mobilisation des autochtones pour la reconnaissance de leurs droits, de nombreux États ont définis des cadres légaux et des mesures politiques spécifiques, contribuant à la globalisation de formes inédites de cette catégorie d'appartenance collective. En ligne avec ces cadres normatifs qui définissent les frontières de l'autochtonie en des termes culturels fixes et territorialisés, nombreux sont les acteurs individuels ou collectifs autochtones qui (sur)investissent l'idée d'authenticité culturelle à des fins politiques et économiques (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009 ; French 2009 ; Gajardo 2016). Ces phénomènes de reconstruction des identités autochtones sur des bases souvent essentialisées et leurs effets contradictoires (Hale 2006 ; Lavanchy 2009 ; Sylvain 2014) ne cessent depuis de questionner la posture des chercheur-e-s sur le terrain.

Faut-il prendre le risque de déconstruire la catégorie autochtone alors que celle-ci est au cœur de luttes d'acteurs qui se battent pour un accès plus équitable à des droits et à des conditions de vie dignes ? Les chercheur-e-s doivent-ils renoncer à documenter les processus d'essentialisations stratégiques (Spivak 1998), au risque de faire de la catégorie autochtone un « impensé du constructionnisme » (López Caballero & Giudicelli 2016) ?

Soumis d'un côté aux critiques, attentes et demandes des groupes autochtones et de l'autre aux impératifs académiques de produire une analyse critique, de plus en plus de chercheur-e-s font état des tensions qui structurent la recherche en milieu autochtone et des difficultés à se positionner au sein d'un champ hautement politisé. Au-delà de l'opposition classique entre posture critique ou engagée, constructionniste ou essentialiste qui a longtemps clivé les débats

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en anthropologie, certain-e-s chercheur-e-s soulignent l'impossibilité à sortir du politique et consécutivement la nécessité de repenser sa posture sur le terrain (Gagné 2009 ; Sillitoe (éd.) 2015).

Comment se positionner face à ces appropriations « par le bas » (Robins 2001) des stéréotypes coloniaux ? Comment analyser de manière critique ces phénomènes sans pour autant les discréditer (Jackson & Warren 2005) ? Quelles formes de collaboration ou d'engagement sur le terrain sont envisageables ? Et avec quel(s) apport(s) ? quelle(s) limite(s) ? Et quels enjeux ? A partir de ces questionnements, ce panel souhaite inviter les chercheur-e-s à partager leurs expériences de terrain, les questionnements traversés et les solutions adoptées afin d'engager un dialogue constructif sur les dilemmes et les enjeux méthodologiques, épistémologiques et politiques liés aux processus d'essentialisation des identités collectives autochtones par les acteurs et actrices autochtones eux-mêmes.

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Panel 4

Empathy in the Field: Can the Affective be Transformative?

Convenors

Eda Elif Tibet, Institute of Geography, University of Bern
Estella Carpi, Migration Research Unit, University College London

Contact: eliftibetto@gmail.com, estella.carpi@gmail.com

In this panel we would like to explore the inter-space between academic intellectuality, research excellence and human sensitivity. In academic environments, on the basis of our own emotional experiences, the interconnection between these factors are not seen as necessary and are even unlikely. Large segments of today's knowledge production are not experience-driven, but they are rather outcome-driven.

Western scholarship, a product of an educational system based on Cartesian divisions between "rational thinking" versus "emotions" often associated with "irrationality": such binaries are being challenged in today's reformations of fieldwork particularly for those working on issues related to vulnerability.

Throughout the history of Anthropology as a discipline, un-empathetic approaches to vulnerable subjects have been documented to have negative and even dangerous effects on a personal, societal and policy level. As Anthropologists instrumentalized "the ethics" and the "impact value" of the science itself for intellectual benefit, they have been criticized for being "insensible", "unemphatic", "biased", "doctrinated", "colonial", "cynical", "hostile", "discursive", "categorical", "exclusive", "racist" and "ethnocentric".

Hence, this panel intends to discuss if and how 'sentimental education', as introduced to Western Scholarship by Richard Rorty, can serve as an affective tool to sensitize scholars whose research issues relate to diverse forms of vulnerability (Eg. economic, political, and social).

In more detail, the questions we would like to explore are:

Can 'sentimental education' help produce empathic research? If so, can empathic research

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entail fairer scientific representations and a stronger transformational potential on vulnerable people and settings?

While anthropology has long since sought to question the need of 'cleaning' theories and methods from emotionality, it has not yet approached it as a transformative tool. In this panel, we rather engage with how emotionality can transcend the road to scientific knowledge, honest intellectuality, and transformative research. We invite papers discussing their epistemological and ontological fieldwork tools from moving beyond the discursive to the affective, the apathic to the empathetic, from the colonial to the decolonial, both in terms of theory and methods. Engagements through multimodal media and auto-ethnographies are as well encouraged.

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Panel 5

Artivism: Ethical and political implications of being an engaged researcher in the field

Convenors

Dalia Zein, The Graduate Institute Geneva

Sarah Bittel, The Graduate Institute Geneva

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With the constant search for a multiplicity of methods and an increased concern with “giving back to the field”, the intersection between artivism, social movement politics and anthropology is deserving of attention. Artivism suggests the interplay of art and activist practices (Paterson 2008, 261). Research participants' existing artistic practices or the setup of interactive theater, engaged documentary films, or collaborative production of comic books and workshops on storytelling are examples of ways in which researchers have sought to bridge the gap between lofty academic language and accessible art material. Proactive forms of engagement with the field often take place in different settings, with researchers joining civil society organizations or various forms of social mobilizations, stepping from the researcher's office out into the public space. Research using methods of artivism generally looks for co-production or collaborations with research participants, aiming for a relationship that builds on reciprocity and involvement of participants in the process of knowledge production. As a consequence, such forms of presence in the field echoes feminist and post-colonial critiques on the notion of scientific neutrality.

In this panel we wish to explore a range of questions that touch upon the overlapping between the artist, the activist and the anthropologist (Sansi 2017, 60). “Social movement politics and contemporary art interventions increasingly traverse a porous boundary” (Flynn 2016), and so what happens when anthropology is added to the mix? Where do we then draw the boundaries between the field and the researcher? How do double roles of the researcher as workshop organizer, participant, author and curator influence research output? Artivism in research additionally raises questions about positionality, as this type of involvement carries ethical implications (Flynn 2016). Moreover, with the strong emphasis on participation and the transformative effect that this merging has on both art and anthropology (Sansi 2017, 61), it is

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essential to delve into the question of the political limitations which both art and ethnographic research face in this context.

We would like to collectively reflect on ethical and political dimensions and challenges artist methods raise in academic knowledge production and dissemination. We would like to also debate ways of reconciliation between doing research and being politically engaged in the field. We welcome papers that investigate one or more of the above discussed themes. Our aim is to ultimately bring forth collective reflections on the potential epistemologies, networks of solidarity as well as empirical innovations produced by ethnographic activism. The scope of this panel is not to be limited to a particular geographical context as we hope to examine these themes across a diverse range of ethnographic fields.

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Panel 6

Observation beyond presence – Hospital ethnography at the beginnings and ends of life (Medical Anthropology Switzerland, MAS)

Convenors

Julia Rehsman, Berner Fachhochschule Gesundheit

Veronika Siegl, Universität Bern

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In this panel, we want to re-examine the question of what it means to conduct fieldwork in a medical institution, and what can we learn from the way ethnographers were able to access, navigate and leave their respective fields. We are particularly interested in ethnographies that deal with the beginnings and ends of life, as medical institutions play an increasingly important role in defining and setting the scenes for where, when and how life begins and ends.

Oftentimes, fieldwork in medical institutions requires research permits and ethics approval that other fields do not, posing particular challenges and obstacles to anthropologists and ethnographic methods. In general, there is no easy “role” for ethnographers in the hospital or clinic and often we find ourselves between stressed medical staff with too little time and vulnerable patients with too much time. Moreover, traditional understandings of what it means to conduct fieldwork seem far from feasible, and rarely ethical, in these medical settings. In the context of the beginning and end of life, the limits of “observation” become particularly evident.

With this panel focusing on the beginning and end of life, we want to explore the challenges that existential and intimate moments such as giving birth or dying pose for ethnographic fieldwork. Such experiences can hardly be grasped by “observation” and “participation”. How does this affect ethnographic research and analysis? Which new forms of presence and of togetherness can we create during fieldwork? How is it possible to “observe beyond presence”?

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Panel 7

Working in the Field

Convenors

Esther Leemann, University of Zurich

Rebekka Sutter, University of Zurich

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“Central to anthropology is fieldwork. This does not mean working in a field, but choosing a place to stay and going to live in it, which is known as being ‘in the field’” (Delamont 1995, 6). We subscribe to this widely accepted definition of fieldwork and yet, unsettle the notion with a simple question: What if fieldwork, which remains the epistemological and methodological anchoring point of the discipline, literally means working in an actual field? What if it means doing participant observation with people making their livings from agricultural fields - farmers, landlords, campesinos, tenants, plantation workers and managers, swiddeners, bee keepers and healers? We are well aware that a focus on rural people and ‘agrarian questions’ is all but fashionable among our students - and among many colleagues. We argue that such a focus is not a backlash but a call for a commitment to the global half that lives off agriculture in the twenty-first century. In line with the question on „what sort of ethnography do people learn to do in the twenty-first century and how does this relate to what they write“ raised in a recent editorial note in HAU (Ferme, Costa, and Durham 2019, 8) we want to reflect on our discipline’s contemporary (earthy) fields and fieldwork practices.

What do we lose or gain if we prioritize a field as site over multi-sited fieldwork and if we do not follow the flows but remain in place and observe them in one site? What are the (dis-)advantages when we explore the life related to actual fields and not virtual fields enabled by the internet 2.0? Untrained eyes - very often with an urban bias - and policy makers alike often stereotype those living from fields as static and backwards. Our discipline provided a rich literature stressing the many entanglements and dynamics of those balancing on an alp (Netting 1981), eating the forest (Condominas 1977), resisting every day (Scott 1985), struggling for a field of one’s own (Agarwal 1995), testing powers of exclusion (Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011), fighting state territorialization efforts (Peluso 1992), culturing trees (Fairhead and Leach 1997), unquieting the woods (Guha 2010) and having histories of weediness (Tsing

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2005). We invite contributions grounded in ethnographic research that complicate simple categorizations. We are interested in reflections on the fluidity of the very category ‚field‘ and its temporality and spatiality: as swidden fields are only borrowed from forest and paddy fields are flooded for months during the agricultural cycle, so do great parts of seemingly rooted communities suspend working on fields and fish, hunt, gather, herd, dig gold, do wage labor on construction sites or coffee plantations, guide tourists, migrate and cross borders in search of off-season work. We invite contributions looking into the diversity of social configurations and senses of place of those living from fields.

Furthermore, we are interested in research (including from visual anthropologists) that challenge common pictures of nature-culture, good and bad landscapes, the very materiality of a ‚terrain‘, and the relations between the human and the more-than-human realm.

In line with the conferences observation that ‚the field‘ calls for a multitude of approaches, which are not merely theoretical or epistemological, but also ethical and political, we invite scholars to explore what ‚the field‘ and doing fieldwork also entails: Dirt (in a very literal sense), noise, silence, physical proximity, loneliness, relatedness, entanglement, involvement, uncertainty, constraints, pressure, shrewdness, fertility, ruptures, improvisation, flexibility, endurance and boredom. We propose a focus on field work, which is much more than exploring mere accounts of work in the field and argue that the famous ‚village studies‘ were not necessarily ‚fields studies‘. We hope for new insights for old agrarian questions and are therefore calling for sensory ethnographies, embodied research experiences and situated knowledge.

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Panel 8

Can you do me a favour? Reciprocity and lack of reciprocity in anthropological field research

Convenors

Clémence Jullien, AOI, University of Zurich

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Non-anthropologists often have difficulties in understanding why people talk to anthropologists rather than refuse their inquisitive gaze and continue their life undisturbed. Perhaps one of the answers are interests, hopes and expectations people have when interacting with anthropologists. Some of these interests are voiced directly, others remain unsaid. In many cases, people ascribe anthropologists with opinions and agendas before the actual meeting takes place. Needless to say, these expectations and interests have a direct impact on the field research process as well as the kind and quality of research data.

Information which interviewees provide to anthropologists foster their careers, make them shine or shatter. Reciprocity can rightfully be expected by those who contribute their time and information to the process of anthropological knowledge production. Many tasks which ethnographers are expected to perform are part of this “reciprocity package”. They can include: helping in the household, supporting it financially, advertising local products, teaching and delivering speeches in schools and other institutions, mediating in case of conflicts, providing legal assistance and medical advice, carrying illegal documents abroad and exerting pressure on higher levels of government. As some scholars (Scheper-Hugues 1990 and 1995; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Farmer 2013) observed, questions of moral integrity and reciprocity (“giving back”) are increasingly raised as anthropologists continue to enjoy a privileged position in the field. However, in many cases, anthropologists cannot or do not want to reciprocate.

Against this backdrop, we will map and disentangle different types of expectations and interests which people have when interacting with anthropologists. Based on our firsthand experience from different cultural contexts we will raise three interlinked questions: (1) What

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kind of reciprocity is – for us today – appropriate and legitimate and how did this change over time? (2) How do these expectations and interests impact our research process and the quality of our data? When do they foster and when do they hinder our work? (3) How do these expectations and interests relate to the scholar's nationality, age, position and gender? What other factors are in play?

It is well known that the themes of anthropological study have been evolving, following – more or less closely – processes of urbanization and globalization, as well as the advent of new infrastructures and technologies. However, the way such changes have affected the ethnographic relationship in the field requires further research. This panel will shed light on new questions of power relationship and reciprocity between anthropologists and their partners in the field. More importantly, it will show how the reflexive analysis of both the expectations of the interviewee and the researcher's trajectory in the field can help a better understanding of social and power relations in the field.

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Panel 9

Doing fieldwork on/with performative arts: explorations in aesthetic, relational, and creative methods

Convenors

Muriel Bruttin, Université de Lausanne

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Arts in general, and performative arts in particular, have been at the heart of numerous ethnographic research projects since the beginning of the twentieth century, being constitutive objects of the matter at the center of anthropological discipline: “culture.” Following the disciplinary reorientation from a focus on “exotic” societies to a more complex understanding of the world and the circulations that take place in it, anthropology has changed how it understands these practices. They are not necessarily analysed as representative of a specific “culture” or through their links to other usual anthropological themes (such as rituals) anymore, but are thought today as existing as their own field of research. Anthropology has thus developed tools in connection to other disciplines to think these practices. Sociology of the art has for example provided a framework to better understand the professional reality and the network of actors present in the worlds of arts (Becker), or the logics of distinction at stake in this field (Bourdieu). Building on these approaches, anthropologists have analysed the way in which the specificity of art is socially built (Shapiro). On the one hand, by taking art “out of its exceptionality” (Bourdieu), these analyses have allowed researchers to consider art as an object of research per se. On the other hand, by treating art as though it is an object like any other, and by focusing almost exclusively on the sociological context that surrounds art, this perspective has failed to take seriously the aesthetic aspects of art. This lack of consideration of the particularities of the art itself are even more significant with regards to performative arts – such as dance, theater, performance, etc. A purely sociological focus on these practices not only disregards their aesthetic dimension, but also ignores their creation process (beyond the infrastructural context), the embodied experiences of the artist or of the audience, and the specific effects of the ephemeral, but nevertheless affecting, nature of such practices.

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In recent years, anthropologists have been rethinking the links between arts and anthropology. Some have reconsidered these connections from an epistemological perspective (Ingold). Others have considered new methodological perspectives (Schneider and Wright; Elliot and Culhane), or have attempted to make connections between the sociological context and the aesthetic properties of art pieces (Majastre and Pessin). These new approaches on art and anthropology are part of a broader attempt in the discipline to nourish fieldwork methodologies with new and imaginative tools (Schäuble). By “crossing disciplinary boundaries between art and anthropology,” they aim to account for the sensory, embodied and affective experiences inherent to social reality, but also to develop more collaborative and ethical ways of doing research (Elliot and Culhane, 2017: 8).

Following these innovative perspectives, the purpose of this panel is to further these reflections with a specific focus on performative arts. We would like to invite researchers to consider the specific issues and opportunities offered in doing research on this particular form of art. To capture and understand such practices requires that we creatively rethink our methodological tools and our theoretical perspectives regarding fieldwork. Therefore, questions this panel would like to address include, but are not limited to, the following:

Aesthetics: How can we approach pieces of performative art on their own terms? How can we practice research that does not evacuate the content and form of the art pieces? How do we include in our considerations such things as the movement, aesthetic, sonorous, visual, or felt aspects of the piece?

Relation to artists: How can we take into account the artist's own intellectual, sensuous, aesthetic and affective contributions (which are present in their work)? What kinds of intellectual and affective relationships do we create when we work with artists on their own work? What kinds of positioning might we want to adopt?

Temporality: What methods are required for us to grasp practices that tend to be ephemeral, and which, unlike paintings in museums, do not sit still to allow us prolonged observation?

Interconnected mediums: How do we observe the simultaneous complexity of the interconnected aspects of this art form, in which so many different things are often happening at the same time (sound, light, movement, interaction between performer and audience, etc.)? How can we analyze and render such complex interconnections?

Creative writing forms: What are some novel ways in which we can do “note-taking” when we are doing fieldwork on performative arts? What forms of restitution can we use to communicate our observations? How do these forms of restitution influence our fieldwork approach and relationships?

We welcome proposals from both within and outside the discipline of anthropology.

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Panel 10

Following people: Co-producing “the field” through mobilities

Convenors

Joanna Menet, Lab. for the Study of Social Processes, University of Neuchâtel

Markus Breines, Open University, UK

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Debates over the localization of anthropologists’ “field” have been ongoing for several decades. While earlier anthropology embraced the idea of a clearly delimited unit of analysis, current anthropologists struggle with the lack of a clear localization of their “field”. At the same time, anthropologists have been using strategies of (physical) travel with their research participants for a long time. Since Marcus’ (1995) suggestion of following things and people as part of multi-sited ethnography, and with the mobility turn in social sciences, methods “on the move” have been (re-)invented to study mobility experiences and grasp the complex processes that enable or hinder the mobilities of people. As a result, researchers deploy strategies of meeting research participants in various places or literally travelling with them, using participant observation or mobile methods. While different forms of following people are used as research methods, the epistemological and methodological implications are often unstated - with the implication that the boundaries of their geographically unbounded fieldwork remain unspecified and vague.

In this panel, we seek to unpack the black box of “following” to address its theoretical, methodological, and ethical implications for “the field”. We invite theoretically and empirically informed papers which address one or several of the subsequent questions:

- Which methodologies do researchers use to follow mobile research participants?
- How do these methods co-produce “the field”?
- What relationships emerge between researchers and their participants through following?
- Which ethical and practical challenges do researchers face in using such methods?

To explore the spatialities and temporalities of the field, we invite papers discussing aspects of following people on different scales and in different geographical sites. This could include confined spaces (e.g. prisons), to mobile groups (e.g. market traders), to virtual social interactions (e.g. social networking sites), or transnational cross-border mobility (within a region or beyond).

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Panel 11

Re-viewing the field while writing ethnographies: from experience to words to books

Convenors

Melina Rutishauser, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel

Miriam Badoux

Michelle Engeler

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Against the background of new fieldwork configurations – new temporalities and new spatialities of “the field” but also new positions of the researchers and new ways of co-producing data with various actors – this panel aims to creatively re-think writing fieldnotes and ethnographies. “As ethnographers, our stock in trade is language, writing – words” (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996: 286). We would therefore like to re-view the field by focussing on the ways in which we transform fieldwork experiences into words – the “writing of the field”.

While ethnographic fieldwork itself has attracted much scholarly attention since the 1980s, anthropologists have only recently started to reflect about the process of “writing the field” (Narayan 2012, Ghodsee 2016, McGranahan 2020). In this process, researchers “invent” and re-view the field in different ways, with different approaches and for varying purposes. The composition and the boundaries as well as the positionality the anthropologist assumes in the writing creates diverse relations among the field, the writer, the text and its readers. “The field” is present in ethnographies, but how each anthropologist is putting it into words varies and involves a wide spectrum of new techniques and tools to create these specific scenes. In the process of transforming fieldwork to a published text, the field is re-viewed and re-thought several times in each step of the writing process (e.g. field notes, first drafts, a final book).

Thus, this panel invites contributions that reflect on new techniques to create scenes on the pages (or on other means), on new ways of identifying threads that can be woven together to tell “a story” about some aspect or slice of the social world studied, and on new approaches to co-produce both data as well as analysis by and for a broader public. By including both

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theoretical reflections and already realized pieces of work that “write down the field” in a new and creative way, be it in written form or by visual means, on- or offline, this panel aims to relate current debates on fieldwork with the topic of producing contemporary ethnographies. We particularly encourage submissions by advanced PhD candidates or scholars who have recently finished their PhD and who would wish to reflect and discuss on their own strategies and challenges to “write the field”.

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Panel 12

The Opacity of Experience: Fieldwork as the Site of the Unknown

Convenor

Marco Motta, Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern

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The notion of “fieldwork” and what it entails in terms of personal engagement, methodology, and analysis, is undoubtedly a main concern for anthropologists. Much has been reflected upon, and practices have been largely reinvented. Above all, much consciousness about the ethical and political stakes of the different “field practices” has been raised. Yet, many questions remain open and still nourish lively debates among social scientists about what “fieldwork” actually means and entails in an ever-changing world—its modalities, locations, scales, temporalities, and so on. Moreover, questions about the fact that the sorts of “knowledge” we produce depend on our methods have received revived attention. This panel proposes to take up the challenge presented by the organizers of the conference and asks how we could rethink the notion of the “field” in light of a closer look at the related concept of “experience”.

Anthropologists are often asked to chart the field in advance, determine the methodology, define a schedule, assess the risks and potential mishaps, and even report beforehand on the outcomes, as if they knew ahead of time where exactly they will find, how they will proceed, what they will face, and how they will respond. These conventional expectations about how anthropology works as a scientific discipline that is expected to produce “knowledge” on society, in the wake of more robust empirical sciences’ models, depend on many underlying assumptions, among which three interests us here: first, that one can know, and claims to know, in advance what one is after; second, that it is clear where to look when one is searching for something; and third, that one knows a priori where the boundaries lie of what we call the “field.” Yet, as we will discuss in this panel, it might turn out that what anthropologists are looking for is unknown, and that it is not as clear as we think where exactly they should search. And, it may well be that what we call the “field,” rather than being a predetermined area of inquiry, is the place where something about the world and ourselves that we do not know is to be discovered. If we take this seriously, then we also must

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acknowledge that what counts as anthropology cannot be fully determined or knowable a priori. Hence this entails re-examining these three related issues, and proposing alternative ways of seeing what the “field” is, and the role it plays in anthropological thinking.

As an empirical science, anthropology proceeds most often inductively, rather than deductively. In this train of thought, it is conceived that through such a procedure, particular observations form the basis of more general, more or less provisory and uncertain conclusions about social facts; the “case” seems to acquire force from its reasonable generalizability. At the heart of this conception, obviously, the notion of “experience” plays a key role; there is no anthropology without “field experiences” out of which anthropological thinking can grow. That is, we cannot “know” anything about others and reality without experiencing a life with others in reality. Yet, how exactly do we picture “field experience?” What if the empiricist conceit—that is, the reification of a divide between thought and reality, or our experience of it—relied on a misconception of the relation between thought and experience? In this panel, we would like to ask notably: What are the different ways of conceiving “experience?” Where do they derive from? To what sort of pressure, or stakes, do they respond? And what do these different conceptions imply?

There is a dominant idea that one’s experiential position—for instance, “having been on the field”—is one of privilege; one thinks of oneself as in a privileged position to make (faithful) claims about reality because one “has been there” and “has done that” and seen things with one’s own eyes. There is no question here about the fact that indeed one draws knowledge from one’s experience of having been somewhere and done something, and anthropologists are thus fully right to advocate for the importance of fieldwork. But there is a question unanswered about how we picture the relation between our experiences and the knowledge we claim to produce on its basis. Often, this idea of a privileged access to reality and one’s experience, and thus the authority that arises therefrom, is not interrogated. For this reason, we would like to call into question this idea, and ask how different anthropology would look like if we took into account the opacity of others and the self. It might be that sometimes we are all too sure about what we (can) know, and place excessive reliance on our capacities for knowledge. What would it change then for anthropologists—thus anthropological knowledge—if they did not so easily give in to the idea that others and oneself are as transparent as it is sometimes assumed? Is there a way to trace a different route within this set of problems?

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Panel 13

The social fabric of “traditional culture” in the People’s Republic of China: dynamic articulation, domestic policy and soft power

Convenor

Pierrick Porchet, Université de Genève

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Since the reform era of the late 1970s, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been actively promoting “Chinese traditional culture” framing cultural elements within politically acceptable forms. Some elements are encouraged while others are proscribed, leading to a specific redefinition of what is understood as traditional culture in China. This involvement not only allows state institutions to keep a close control on cultural expressions, but it also positions the Chinese government as a model for the safeguarding of traditional culture, which in turn increase its legitimacy both on national and international levels.

Chinese institutions implemented a large variety of strategies to commodify cultural goods within their cultural policies. They have been invested in the selection and promotion of cultural heritage as defined by UNESCO conventions (Bugnon 2018, Maags and Svensson 2018), becoming a leading nation in UNESCO’s lists of world heritage. (Bodelec 2014) Beside this formal framework, authorities also collected and rearranged so-called “folkloric” practices such as oral literature, visual arts, dances and calisthenics. (Graezer 2012, Palmer 2007, Wyss 2017) In addition, state institutions also reclaimed Confucianism as Chinese most genuine intellectual tradition, integrating the Confucian vocabulary within their political rhetoric. (Zlotea 2015) and fostering global cultural dissemination through a worldwide network of Confucius Institutes.

This political leadership over “culture” does not consist in a linear top-down process. State discourses are re-articulated – sometimes even contested – by grassroots actors. How do various cultural stakeholders (state institutions, civil associations, practitioners, researchers) negotiate the meanings and narratives associated with traditional culture? Moreover, through its involvement in international projects, the PRC is crafting a soft power strategy with an

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emphasis on the universal significance of Chinese culture. What are the multiscalar dynamics underpinning this development?

As an object of study, “Chinese traditional culture” and its multiple dialogical processes open up for a large variety of theoretical reflections. It highlights how the notion of “culture” is primary contingent: cultural forms are identified as “traditional” then re-articulated and re-purposed according to social actors’ needs. It raises issues of spatiality and scale as the practices are often conceptualized in their locality and re-mapped within larger narratives. (Bortolotto 2017) Finally, the role of researchers – and academia at large - should be reflect on. Whether being formally enrolled in governmental projects or affiliated with universities’ departments, researchers often participate in the ideological constructions related to traditional culture. How do they engage with the actors “in the field”? How do their research outcomes participate to the common understanding of traditional culture?

This panel will address the broad question of traditional culture in the context of contemporary China. It will explore how this notion is defined and appropriated by various actors where cultural expressions appear as ideological constructions which meanings are constantly renegotiated. Moreover, it will reflect on the dynamics of the instrumentalization of culture through the domestic cultural policy as well as the soft power strategies of the PRC and how scholars are engaging these polymorphous “fields”.

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