

SCHNEIDER, ARND ALTERNATIVE ART AND ANTHROPOLOGY: GLOBAL ENCOUNTERS

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ORCID
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5101-6817>

PAOLA LAPPICY
Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 05508-010
fla@usp.br



The book *Alternative art and anthropology: global encounters*, edited by Arnd Schneider, addresses a conversation between anthropologists, artists, ethnographers and curators from outside the Euro-American axis who discuss their anthropological experiences in contemporary art. Among articles, interviews and images by authors from around the world, Schneider reiterates the proposal for a global conversation that broadens the debate between anthropology and contemporary art. The book proposes a decentralization of this debate by reading other experiences that were, until recently, not on the axis of this debate.

Through each chapter, the editor develops a string of narratives that build engagement between the fields of anthropology and contemporary art through different perspectives and interpretations. The book is drawn through the personal stories of artists, anthropologists and curators who explore art and anthropological research in their countries. After each chapter that reports an experience, there is a chapter that is a transcription of an interview between Schneider and the artist, anthropologist or curator, debating the experience and interpretations of the experience. Through these interviews, fundamental perspectives for the debate between art and anthropology emerge.

The work discusses contemporary art through photography, film, sound, installations, paintings, sculptures, poetry, and other art forms. In each chapter, there are pictures of the spaces and exhibitions of these artists. Through these images, conversations and stories of each other, we enter into a debate about methodology and theory in the field of discussion.

The premise that permeates the edition is the intersection between art and anthropologies. The focus of the volume is to bring other traditions of contemporary art and anthropology into the discussion and place them as central for the debate, based on the notions of difference and alterity.

Schneider writes about alterity, and how it implies what is irreducible. The author suggests that there are ways to go beyond alterity, to transcend radical alterity itself. These ways mainly consist on the possibility of communication and especially of translation. Schneider points out a question about contemporary art in a temporal and spatial sense – how contemporary is Western art when viewed from a non-Western point of view? How contemporary is the art produced in other spaces? What are the specific conditions of our contemporary when we think about the encounter between art and anthropology?

Anthropologists work with the translation of written and oral texts, and more broadly the “translation” between cultures. That means that anthropology could be considered part of a broader science of translation.

Schneider states that we must understand differences and the contemporaneity of difference, involving alliances between different perceptions of the world or ontologies. It is possible to think a transversality between anthropology and the contemporary arts which also use ethnography in their approach. The author calls unequal hermeneutics a way of understanding and learning through the Other that is not part of the same semantic territory as you. The project's proposals in the book attempt to decentralize any universal or unified discourse on contemporary art and anthropology.

The composition of various formats of bringing together art and anthropology brings a multitude of dialogues to the discussion. The essays that compose the text carry reflections of artists interested in anthropological theory and fieldwork, texts about what should be anthropology of art, exhibitions that started from ethnographic practices, curatorship as a form of anthropological research, anthropological studies about artistic practice, and thoughts about using fieldwork to bring together artists and anthropologists. All these reflections entail art and anthropology as an intersection, and propose to produce and discuss knowledge from these disciplines together.

Several essays in the volume work together as different point of views for the understanding of what constitutes anthropology of art. Shinichi Nakazawa, for example, wonders – how are we able to combine art and anthropology into one field? What results from this synthesis and what are its benefits? The author states that we can go beyond the disciplines of the social sciences that are confined to rational thought, and recreate anthropology as a new discipline that thinks through fluid intellect. This thought reveals the field of anthropology of art. In his conversation with Schneider, Shinichi postulates that in the concept of anthropology of art is the opposition between the asymmetrical rational logic of language and the symmetrical logical fluid of art. Language, for him, has linear time; the unconscious, on the other hand, does not. It is important for Shinichi to research art by combining symmetrical mind and out-of-mind expression using linear structures. For him, that is where the intersection of art and anthropology arises.

Lili Fang, within the same discussion that permeates anthropology of art, discusses why different Chinese cities began building art districts in factory spaces in the late 1990s. She recognizes that artistic ideas and the cultural industry do not always have the same interests, but they have a symbiotic relationship. Thus, she brings out the idea that artists have a role, within the postmodern city, as part of the political and economic vitality of these cities.

X. Andrade gets into the same discussion in a more provocative way. He brings a debate about Full Dollar's collaboration with art in Ecuador, and through this discussion he argues against public artistic projects. Working on collaborative projects primarily with non-artists, Full Dollar uses ownership strategies to develop a critical institutional ethnographic look at different visual economies. By "visual economies", the author understands complex ways in which images are affected by being part of concrete processes of production, distribution and consumption. X. Andrade talks about two projects in which the ethnographic method was used to collaborate with artists and artisans – in both projects, the discussion around ways in which neoliberal ideologies homogenize the public space is substantial.

Other essays think about an exhibition as a way to propose interdisciplinary encounters between different cultures, and reflect around that. In these texts, there is a discussion about the transformation of culture when in different contexts. Almira Astudillo Gilles, for example, brings the context and personal reflections that surrounded the project "Art and anthropology: portrait of the object as Filipino", focusing on the intersection between art and anthropology. His aim was to think ponder over the production of knowledge. Focusing on both the process and the artistic creation, five Philippine painters and five Filipino-American painters from Chicago created art that portrayed their cultural identity and their relationship to the ethnographic object. The project was inspired by the notion of co-curatorship, but it also reflects about the specific constructions of cultural identity. The question – "what is or who is a Filipino?" is asked, and the results of the dialogue are shared with the public.

Tomoko and Tadashi also think themselves as curator-anthropologists, who do not necessarily seek what would traditionally be thought as 'finished work'; they take into account an active role in fieldwork and research. They proposed an exhibition that combines elements of rural life in Shambei with window-flower handicrafts. Window-flowers are paper clippings that people from Shambei use to decorate their homes at the Spring Festival. From that proposition emerged an ambitious project of an art-anthropology exhibition – which would allow them to go to the field for the exhibition and to film daily scenes.

Another exhibition that draws up an essay in the book is *Dobrak!*, an exhibition of 5 collaborative projects developed by expert artists from fields of anthropology, cultural studies, and social sciences. This collaboration was curated by Adeline Ooi and Mella Jaarsma. The five projects in this exhibition are the result of six-month partner processes in each team – processes in which every team chose the way they wanted to work. The word *dobrak* means, in Indonesia, "to break". In the project,

breaking was thought in the positive sense, as a renewal process, as breaking traditions. The exhibition opens up space for collaborative processes as an alternative to the individual characteristic of the artistic world. There were five works that made up the exhibition, and each one suggests interpretations of topics that reflect contexts and layers of the everyday life in Indonesia – from thinking religions as spectacles to a discussion on batik (manual method of printing fabric).

Through this construction of narratives, the book becomes an important production to expand the fields of anthropology and contemporary art. The volume addresses traditions of contemporary art and anthropology that are outside the Euro-American axis for discussion and puts them as central into the debate. In this way, Schneider, as a meticulous editor, builds a narrative that makes a contribution to the field of anthropology through voices from around the world, decentralizing the debate, and demonstrating the potential of artistic research for anthropology, and anthropology for the contemporary art.

This book does not adhere to point of views in which anthropology engages with art as a form of translation, or simply when art uses ethnographic methods without critical positioning. The volume goes beyond these discussions, and in fact proposes a way of producing both artistic and ethnographic knowledge. Thus, throughout the book, art is thought not as an end in itself, but as a form of knowledge production. Schneider's proposal to present artists, curators and anthropologists who are not at the center of the Western debate broadens the discussion. In this way, the debate is decentralized, and paths of intersection between art, anthropology and social practices emerge.

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PAOLA LAPPICY is PhD student in Social Anthropology, Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences, University of São Paulo (USP). Her research focuses on the area of Anthropology of Expressive Forms, with emphasis on ethnomusicology. She is researcher at Research in Musical Anthropology (PAM) at USP, coordinated by Rose Satiko Hikiji and also a researcher for the thematic project "Musical Local: new trails for ethnomusicology" coordinated by Suzel Ana Reily of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). In his doctorate, she researches the songs and musical relations in the daily life of the prison, and in his master's degree, she developed a research related to songs and musical relations of garbage collectors in the city of São Paulo. Email: paola.gomes@usp.br

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