

Panel 6: Approaching the present through anthropology's past

Wednesday, 6 December 2023 – Stream 1

[Session I: 17:00-18:45 pm CET // Session 2: 19:30-21:15 pm CET // Session III: 22:00-23:45 pm CET]

This panel grows out of discussions among the editors and advisors of the *History of Anthropology Review* and our wish to make the study of ideas, institutions, and methods of past anthropologists directly relevant to anthropologists working today. What light can the history of anthropology shed on issues of current anthropological concern, through revisiting the field's earlier moments? For example, speakers might consider how past anthropologists' positions within and at times opposed to imperial and colonial projects can shed light on contemporary politics of indigeneity, the global distribution of suffering, or relations between researchers and their interlocutors. Or historians looking at anthropology's role in forming 19th-century race science and debunking it in the 20th century might consider how their work speaks to current ethnographers who are working on mass incarceration, militarized policing, or the reappearance of eugenics in big-data collection and surveillance— or vice versa. Perhaps anthropologists concentrating on the politics and practices of the environment and climate change might point out the ways earlier attention to the interactions between environments and cultures (for example in 19th-century geography, or in 20th-century ethnoscience or cultural ecology) offers useful perspectives on the present. Other burning anthropological issues today— gender definitions and hierarchies, class relations, intersections of religion and politics, the impacts of technology and media – might also find useful anticipations in the field's past. This panel welcomes contributions both from anthropologists making use of their discipline's past, and from historians mobilizing anthropology's archives toward the present.

Convenors: **John Tresch** (The Warburg Institute, University of London), **Richard Handler** (University of Virginia)

Session I [17:00-18:45 pm CET]

Paula López Caballero (SciencesPO, CNRS, France)

From series to experience: historicizing anthropological and indigenista fieldwork in Mexico (1940)

In this paper I will address a specific moment in the history of classifications and identity categories in Mexico that feeds a cross-cutting question about

indigeneity as a historical variable. This examination is part of my larger research project that aims to elaborate an interconnected history of anthropological fieldwork based on the specific case of social research in Mexico and the United States between 1940 and 1960. By closely examining a set of diaries produced by Mexican and American anthropologists during the first ethnographic fieldwork practices in the Tzotil village of Zinacantán, Chiapas, in 1942-43, I want to explore conceptual shifts in the very object of anthropological research: indigenous peoples. Indeed, the scientificity of anthropology in Mexico rested at that time on the elaboration of series, whether of body measurements, vocabularies or material culture. The daily, routine and systematic encounter with the native inhabitants implied new standards of scientific objectification. In particular, it was key to the constitution of these localities and collectivities as ideal locus for transformation and development. Thus, an epistemological shift was slowly taking place in which "the indigenous" not only indexed a glorious past to be safeguarded in the Museum, but also began to signify a present charged with modernising utopias. This utopian dimension continues to mobilise to this day. Hence, this paper offers a dialogue with contemporary issues by documenting the historicity of this form of identification. In doing so, my historical analysis feeds into contemporary debates on racism and mestizaje in Latin America.

Roshni Brahma (Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, India)

The Making and Unmaking of Religious Identities in Northeast India

Colonial anthropological knowledge production since the late 19th century led to the production of contesting religious identities in South Asia. The colonial project of categorizing particular groups into definite religious entities set out to determine the characteristics of Hinduism and those of various tribal groups. It created blurred distinctions between the two. The period simultaneously saw the consolidation of Hinduism wherein constant attempts were made to incorporate the tribal groups within Hinduism. Simultaneously, the period also saw the active participation of the tribal groups in the debates around their religious identity wherein they rejected being counted as Hindus. These debates have continued in the contemporary religio-political landscape in India amidst the rise of Hindu nationalism, resulting in contesting claims of identities. Thus, the paper is an attempt to explore the debates surrounding Hinduism and the case of tribal religions. It takes up the case of the Boros, a major tribal group in the North-eastern part of India. It looks into the ways in which the debates around the affiliation and distinction of the Boro religion in relation to Hinduism took a surge in the late 19th and early 20th century. By doing so, it attempts to understand the contemporary efforts of Hindu nationalist groups of building a unified Hindu community which have constantly looked for affinities between Hinduism and the tribal religions. Recent works on tribal religions of Northeast India reveal a complex affair of the interplay between the religious assertions of tribal groups and the assertions of Hindu nationalist groups.

Robert L.A. Hancock (University of Victoria, Canada)

Indigenous Anthropologists, Action Anthropology, and the Origins of Indigenous Studies

Considerations of the history of Indigenous Studies largely focus on the roles played by historians and literary scholars. Less well-known, however, is the impact of scholars trained in and engaged with anthropology, specifically the Action Anthropology approach associated with Sol Tax. While researchers have explored connections between the Red Power movement and the rise of Indigenous Studies, and between the Red Power movement and Action Anthropology, there has been no sustained work examining the relationship between Action Anthropology and Indigenous Studies. Key to this latter connection were four Indigenous scholars who came into close contact with Tax: the anthropologists Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee), Bea Medicine (Lakota), and D'Arcy McNickle (Metis/Salish Kootenai), and the legal scholar, theologian, and critic of anthropology Vine Deloria, Jr. (Lakota). While only Thomas was a student of Tax, all four engaged significantly with projects associated with him or that reflected the values and intentions of Action Anthropology, including the Carnegie Project on Cross-Cultural Education, the Workshops on American Indian Affairs, and conferences focused on higher education for Indigenous students. This presentation will offer current anthropologists a new perspective on relationships between anthropologists and Indigenous communities and deepen understandings of the histories and genealogies of both Indigenous Studies and anthropology in service of present and future methods and theories by exploring the significant resonances and connections between Action Anthropology and Indigenous Studies, including the centering of community-led educational programming in support of self-determination and the rejection of distorted or damaging representations of Indigenous people, communities, and nations.

Csaba Mészáros (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary)

Otherness and Sameness: Decolonial Representational Schemes of Asian Peoples in Hungarian Ethnology and beyond

Studies on the development of anthropology have often pointed out that colonial encounters and dominant European representational schemes on Otherness heavily influenced early ethnographic records. A rich literature on the local phenotypes representing oriental and primitive alterity in Europe has tackled the interrelatedness of colonial attitudes and the process of othering. However, much less is known about another representational scheme in ethnology: the scheme of Sameness. A few fringe anthropologies in Europe (among them the Hungarian) in the 19th century developed a unique discourse on recognizing Sameness and the traits of common origin among non-European peoples in Asia. A robust early 19th-century corpus of scholarly and literary pseudo-

ethnographies describing Asian nations as identical to Hungarian laid the foundation of the representational scheme of anthropological Sameness. This scheme has not only had a long-lasting effect on fieldwork methods and on the development of Hungarian ethnology, but it also hindered the reevaluation of anthropology's colonial legacies based on the assumptions that Hungarian ethnologists never referred to non-Europeans in Asia as others. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the representational scheme of Sameness revived in the anthropologies of Hungary and many Central-Asian and Siberian nations, becoming one of the dominant discourses on colonial encounters, relatedness, and identity politics. Based on a close study of a 19th-century corpus on Asian peoples identified as Hungairrans, my paper points to the 19th-century foundation of the representational scheme of Sameness and the consequences of its recent revival in the "twilight zone" of European anthropologies.

Session 2 [19:30-21:15 pm CET]

Margarita Valdovinos (Paris Institute for Advanced Study, France)

The history of the study of Amerindian languages. The case of Maya languages in France

A diachronic reflection about the classes of Yucatec Maya as a second language in Paris (Inalco) brought me to the study of French Americanist traditions and their interest in the study of Amerindian languages. At the first quarter of the 19th Century, the discovery of Mayan epigraphic writing by French intellectuals triggered the study of Mayan archaeological sites. Very soon, it became clear that along with archeological studies, the study of language was necessary to decipher the evidences provided by the material vestiges. In this paper, I will analyze how Amerindian languages have been studied in two different moments at the French academic context. First, I will study how Amerindian languages became an object of knowledge in the XIXth Century, and then, how in the XXth Century this knowledge is developed until it becomes an object of teaching. The observations offered by this study will help me understand how ideas about language are constructed, how do they emerge in socio-cultural practices, how they travel in time and space and how they interact with one another.

Ira Bashkow (University of Virginia, US)

The Forgotten Anthropological Pasts of the Concept of the Corporation: What Are Its Lessons for the Here and Now?

Time was, the corporation was a foundational concept of social theory, elaborated by scholars including Henry Maine, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Meyer Fortes, Louis Dumont, and M.G. Smith. But that

discussion ended abruptly in the late twentieth century with the collapse of structural-functionalism. There is, however, one area of discussion that today remains vibrant, primarily within archaeology and kinship studies, where anthropologists study long-lived dynastic family houses, temples, and palaces. This discussion was untainted by structural-functionalism, emerging in the 1970s when Claude Levi-Strauss rediscovered a much earlier thread of ethnographic research on the Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) by George Hunt and Franz Boas. How their research unfolded over several decades is a fascinating but little known tale. I tell it, and suggest it sheds light on pressing problems of the here and now.

Judith Albrecht, Tomás Criado, Ignacio Farías, Andrew Gilbert, and Karina Piersig (Stadtlabor for Multimodal Anthropology, Volkswagen Stiftung's Open Up programme, Germany)

Appreciating Multimodal Pasts: What if We Have Never Been Monomodal?

'Multimodality' is gaining momentum in anthropology: be it as an all-encompassing project to renegotiate the boundaries between visual, sensory and design anthropology; or reinvigorating collaborative and experimental more-than-textual approaches in ethnographic fieldwork, analysis or representation. While most advocates envision its future-driven potential to reinvent anthropological practice, we wish to consider the relevance of exploring anthropology's multimodal roots. Hence our hypothesis, slightly paraphrasing Bruno Latour: what if we have never been monomodal? Taking this historiographic approach, key moments liberating anthropological experimentation—such as the debates around Writing Culture—could be reevaluated as paradoxically having elevated text, somehow purifying non-textual approaches. Our collective project Multimodal Appreciation seeks to prototype ways to institutionalise and evaluate more-than-textual works, focusing mostly on contemporary productions. In this presentation, we excavate key examples from the past to compare their features, affordances or uses, and the attempts at institutionalising them. We also wish to interrogate (i) how past projects differ from contemporary projects, which tend to go well-beyond treating the more-than-textual as an auxiliary reference, or moving away from colonial practices of collecting and disseminating; (ii) to what extent they might have been 'intransitive', their value residing in the process and practice of making multimodal artefacts rather than their exhibition, circulation and reception. While this may contribute to a more nuanced historiographic program, it also presents an opportunity to reconsider what is at stake in the current fascination with multimodality: rather than the anthropology to come, the reemergence of repressed anthropological practices already there from the onset.

Samuel Gerald Collins (Towson University, Maryland, US)

Communication without Control: Anthropology and Alternative Models of Information at the Josiah Macy, Jr. Conferences in Cybernetics

The characteristics of our digital world—algorithms, virtual reality, AI, cryptocurrency, etc.—were largely formulated during the Josiah Macy, Jr. Conferences on Cybernetics, held between 1946 and 1953. The concept of reducing the world to flows of information is one of the legacies of these meetings, with all of the alienation and ideological work that “the digital” has perpetrated. Yet there were anthropologists at the Macy Conferences as well; Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson attended every meeting, and recent scholarship (e.g., Geoghegan 2023) has shown how anthropological thought contributed to the formation of our digital world through the reduction of culture and social life to codes and feedback loops. Yet there were also alternative models proposed during the Macy conferences, e.g., an embodied model of information championed by Donald MacKay (Hayles 1999). This paper looks to another alternative, one based in misunderstandings at the Macy conferences themselves. In practice and in discourse, Mead and Bateson held very different ideas about what “information” could mean—ideas diverging from the “command and control” model that would predominate. Despite those differences, though, the Macy conferees could communicate with one another and even plan projects together. This is their model of information—communication without reduction and without perfect understanding—interfacing rather than dominating. Anticipating the work of British cyberneticist Gordon Pask, this model of anthropological cybernetics opens the possibility of a communicative informatics without control, where interaction can develop without reduction and understanding without domination.

Brooke Penaloza-Patzak (University of Vienna, Austria)

The Rise and Decline of the Natural Science of Human Culture, 1869-1920 and Thereafter

Many histories locate the roots of anthropology in philosophy and philology. In the late 1860s, however, a new doctrine began to crystalize, one which proponents from London to Berlin, Florence to Vienna and beyond self-consciously framed as the natural science of human culture. Part ethos, part legitimization project, its practitioners had trained in medicine, physics, zoology, geography, geology and botany, and sought to distance their projects from the “speculative charters” of the philosophers and philologists, who inevitably “swept away” by “whirlpools of fantastic delusion.” Instead, they advocated comparative studies and an inductive statistical approach intended to furnish those who embarked upon the “dark, surging sea” of cultural analysis an “unshakable foundation” in science (Adolf Bastian, 1886, 3). They wished to understand the processes involved in the interplay of culture and the environment, and applied data-based practices and analytical frameworks from the natural sciences to ethnographic phenomena in an attempt to discover general laws that governed

cultural development. By the late 1910s, this doctrine had all but disappeared from professional discourses, yet it lived on in methods, frameworks, and research questions that were central in the development of arguments both for and against “race” science. This talk employs the history of work in and with ethnographic collections as a point of entry to discuss the arc and afterlives of the natural science of human culture, and its ambivalent longer-term legacy in what Lee D. Baker has recently termed the “racist anti-racism” of anthropology.

Session III [22:00-23:45 pm CET]

Emma Kowal (Deakin University, Victoria, Australia)

Digging up my ancestors

For contemporary anthropologists in Australia, the history of biological research on Indigenous people is something to be left well alone, an embarrassing remnant of racial science largely banished from the discipline since the 1970s. While the sociocultural anthropology of an earlier time has been somewhat rehabilitated with the ontological turn, biological aspects of anthropological research remain beyond the pale, and what is taught and researched in anthropology departments is nearly exclusively cultural. My interest in the history of making biological knowledge about Indigenous people was sparked through my ethnographic engagement with the burgeoning field of Indigenous genomics over the last 15 years. Increasingly, genomics is being used in Indigenous settings including health research, evolutionary biology research, and direct-to-consumer ancestry testing. Indigenous leadership and governance is central to many of these endeavors, with the hope that if Indigenous people are in control, the mistakes of the past will not be repeated. My book project, entitled “Haunting Biology: Science and Indigeneity in Australia”, explores historical episodes in the history of scientific research on Indigenous Australians in order to make sense of biological knowledge-making in the present. A serious engagement with those who made knowledge about Indigenous people in the past—recognizing the commitments we have in common as well as those that wildly differ—is necessary to provide useful accounts of how the history of biological difference matters in the present, and whether it can or should matter differently.

Thiago Pinto Barbosa (University of Bayreuth, Germany)

Dilemmas in decolonizing anthropology: thinking with the historical case of Irawati Karve

My paper will visit some dilemmas in current discussions on decolonizing anthropology through an analysis of the historical case of Irawati Karve (1905-1970). Karve was an Indian anthropologist with a vivid but contested legacy.

Trained in a school of racial and eugenicist anthropology in 1920s Berlin, Germany, she later became Maharashtra's (India) most famous anthropologist. Her work tried to adapt the different theories and methods she was trained in (including anthropometric methods) to the study of human diversity, culture, and society in India. Drawing from my doctoral research on Karve's anthropology and the troubles in its legacy, I discuss the limits and challenges in Karve's knowledge adaptations, which include her rootedness to a racial anthropology tradition as well as the intellectual gatekeeping exercised by European scholars (most notably the French Indologist Louis Dumont). Inspired by current discussions on how to tackle anthropology's colonial legacies, I think with the case of Karve's to shed light on questions related to the geopolitics of knowledge and international dependency in science. I argue that an increased attention to materiality and to the unequal distribution of power in scientific networks is useful when addressing the calls for epistemic decolonization.

Michael Edwards (University of Cambridge, UK)

Engagement, Solidarity, and a Return to the 1990s

In the histories of anthropology that we tend to tell, certain decades loom large: the 1920s, for example, or the 1980s. In this paper, I argue for a critical reappraisal of a decade closer to our present: the 1990s. In the wake of the Cold War, with the end of the millennium fast approaching, and with the full implications of the World Wide Web rushing into view, the 1990s were the temporal ground for an anthropology—of globalisation, technology, and much else besides—that both responded to, and was facilitated by, an apparent liberal hegemony that proved to be short lived. Today, the 1990s are often treated with nostalgia, derision, or some combination of both. But with the benefit of some three decades' distance, might it now be time to historicise its anthropology, to situate its moves amid the political conditions and cultural moods of that period? And in doing so, what might we learn about the discipline's current state? In particular, I explore what happens when we approach current anthropological discussions about solidarity—as both an ethnographic object and an ethical and political practice—through the prism of debates about a related but different concept—engagement—which ran through the 1990s.

Raphael Uchôa (University of Cambridge, UK)

“Savage knowledge,” ethnosciences, and the colonial ways of producing reservoirs of indigenous epistemologies

This paper explores the intricate relationship between the concept of “savage knowledge,” its significance during the 19th and 20th centuries, and the emerging field of ethnosciences. It specifically focuses on the Amazon region as a pivotal area in the development of ethnosciences, examining the contributions of renowned naturalists Carl von Martius, Richard Spruce, and Richard Schultes,

who conducted scientific expeditions to the Amazon during this era. Their works are crucial in reevaluating the dynamic interplay between the Western perception of the “savage,” the scientific principles that underpin it, and the geopolitics of knowledge exchange between countries in the global north and south. I argue that the contextual conditions which made possible the emergence of ethnosciences, including imperial assimilation, extraction, and coloniality, continue to exert influence on 20th-century political discourses concerning the integration of indigenous cultures into global politics. This influence is evident through the analysis of a UNESCO document in the second part of the paper. The study concludes that the incorporation of indigenous knowledge, systematised by ethnosciences, has often served as a pretext for controlling geographical reservoirs historically regarded as “natural resources,” ultimately transforming them into reservoirs of indigenous epistemologies.

Sarah C. Moritz (Concordia University, Canada) – Morris Prosser (Independent researcher) – Qwalqwalten (Independent researcher)

“He Spoke the Way we Did”: James A. Teit and the Oral vs. Written History of the 1911 Declaration of the Lillooet Tribe

On May 10th 1911, several St'át'imc Chiefs, accompanied by ethnographer James A. Teit, drafted, signed and shared the charter Declaration of the Lillooet Tribe in Spences Bridge of today's British Columbia to articulate a written, documented version of an oral tradition to the colonial government, developers and settlers on who they are, how their territory has been impacted by colonial expansionist agendas and what their creative collective vision for a self-determined future is. The inception of this ongoing process and shared history dates back to the first fur traders and early colonial contact. The Declaration was supported by and supportive of a larger regional Indigenous self-determination movement, the Indian Rights Association of BC and similar decrees. Based on long-term ethnographic, archival and oral history research with St'át'imc Elders, leaders and community members, this collaborative paper explores the important messages and original context of the written vis-à-vis the oral declaration process as form of treaty relationship to ensure the continuity of a St'át'imc way of life today. James Teit's theories and methods as ethnographer, hunter, political activist, Salish speaker and associate of Franz Boas and other Boasians and his role in the declaration movement will be assessed and the importance of these relationships examined in revisionist and historicist fashion. Critical insights will be drawn for engaged anthropological, history of anthropology and decolonial research methods for transitional and turbulent times.