

Book Review

**Schuchardt K and Spieker I (eds) (2024)
Performanzen & Praktiken. Kollaborative Formate
in Wissenschaft und Kunst. Leipzig, Leipziger
Universitätsverlag. ISBN: 978-3-96023-610-8**

Jonas Tinius
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin

This item has been published in Issue 05 'The Author Is Dead, Long Live Co-Authors! Collaborative Work in the Humanities,' edited by *The February Journal*.

To cite this item: Tinius J (2025) Book review. Schuchardt K and Spieker I (eds) (2024) Performanzen & Praktiken. Kollaborative Formate in Wissenschaft und Kunst. Leipzig, Leipziger Universitätsverlag. ISBN: 978-3-96023-610-8. *The February Journal*, 05: 159–164. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60633/tfj.i05.131>

To link to this item: <https://doi.org/10.60633/tfj.i05.131>
Published: 30 October 2025

**Schuchardt K and Spieker I (eds) (2024)
 Performanzen & Praktiken. Kollaborative Formate
 in Wissenschaft und Kunst. Leipzig, Leipziger
 Universitätsverlag. ISBN: 978-3-96023-610-8**

Jonas Tinius

It has been a few years since anthropology once again turned to the question of collaboration, not simply as a research technique but as a modality of knowledge production. In moments of disciplinary uncertainty and public delegitimation, the issue of who produces anthropological knowledge, how, and with whom is crucial. After all, collaboration is a mirror of anthropology's self-reflection. How we collaborate defines what we can know, shaping and often creating what we consider a field and the work we do with it. One might even ask: can there be an anthropology without collaboration, and what does this mean for how we conceive the discipline? Discussions of this kind can easily result in unnecessary navel-gazing or patronizing methodological suggestions, but in the best cases they reflect on what anthropology is and can be. George E. Marcus (2000) offered an example with the practice of 'para-sites,' those awkward, productive, shared spaces between fieldwork sites and curated experiments, and so have some of the more serious discussions of multimodality, curation, and art, which do not assume that we already know what multimodal or artistic practice means (see Abu-Lughod 1985; Canclini 2014; Sansi 2015).

Performanzen & Praktiken. Kollaborative Formate in Wissenschaft und Kunst ('Performances & Practices. Collaborative Formats in Science and Art'), edited by Katharina Schuchardt and Ira Spieker, responds to these questions and probes what we think we know about collaboration. Despite questioning disciplinary boundaries, which is reflected in the broad range of its contributors' principal affiliations and professional identities, the book decidedly addresses German-speaking and also disciplinary debates on anthropology. This may appear contradictory given the theme of the book, but it is also a welcome and necessary contribution to a discipline that is changing its course. The ways in which art, performance, and, for a lack of better words, other forms of *practicing life* have been studied in anthropology have drastically changed over the last decades—in part through the conceptual opening of multimodality and what it tells us about how anthropologists work with other(s') forms of knowledge production.

The volume stems from a 2022 conference at the Institute of Saxon History and Cultural Anthropology (Institut für Sächsische Geschichte und Volkskunde, ISGV), organized in cooperation with the *Gruppe der außeruniversitären Institute und Landesstellen* (Group of extra-university institutions and regional offices) of the German Society for Empirical Cultural Studies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft, DGEKW).

It gathers thirteen essays plus an introduction under four thematic headings (*Positionierungen, Interventionen, Inszenierungen, and Kollaborationen*), which I found only moderately useful because these themes obviously overlap and speak to most contributions. That being said, the contributions' insistence on actually working through and clarifying these and related concepts in their respective accounts is for the most part very refreshing. Published in 2024 by the Leipziger Universitätsverlag in the series *Kleine Schriften zur sächsischen Geschichte und Volkskunde* ('Short Writings on Saxon History and Cultural Anthropology'), it offers, on the whole, an immensely rich portfolio of contemporary efforts to experiment across the boundaries of art, ethnography, and public engagement.

In their introduction, '*Performanzen und Praktiken—eine Standortbestimmung*' ('Performances and practices—A reappraisal of the field'), Schuchardt and Spieker frame the book around two principles aims: first, to explore forms of doing and presenting research beyond conventional academic modalities; and second, to analyze the heterogeneous '*Produktionsgemeinschaften*' (p. 7, 'production communities') and collaborative structures that such projects generate. This does not take place in a vacuum, and Schuchardt and Spieker draw inspiration in the performative turn in anthropology and some current discussions of multimodal methodologies. Collaboration, they argue, entails friction: a contact zone of deliberate irritations and misunderstandings (p. 14). For the editors, these frictions are productive. Failure, rather than success, can become a generator of knowledge events, provided there is the right openness in project design that allows for failure to happen. This is not in itself a groundbreaking observation, but the honesty with which contributors address it makes for entertaining and yet insightful reading.

Schuchardt and Spieker's overview also stresses that collaborative research should be understood in terms of process rather than its result: the volume focuses more on 'concrete working modi' (p. 15) and less on final products of research, though an immense number of projects is presented throughout the book. In this framing, collaboration becomes a condition of research rather than an optional method. Schuchardt and Spieker emphasize how projects require an ongoing negotiation between institutional, methodological, and disciplinary logics and constraints. Of course, this is, again, not a surprising observation, given that, for instance, accounts of 'the curatorial' have been calling for a recognition of collaborative forms of work and a questioning of the protocols of infrastructural and institutional labor for over ten years (see Rogoff 2013 or Sternfeld 2022). While Schuchardt and Spieker do not explicitly address extra-university infrastructures, the volume itself emerged from collaboration between the ISGV and the *Gruppe der außeruniversitären Institute und Landesstellen*, illustrating the reflexive, process-oriented work that anthropologists can do (and, as the editors also stress, have long been doing) beyond the seminar room.

The volume's thirteen chapters develop these ideas through detailed ethnographic and variously artistic experiments, which are on the whole

refreshing to read precisely because the reflections on process and forms of collaboration do not come at the expense of ethnography and descriptions of fieldwork. Alexa Färber and Alexander Martos's essay on the '*Realfiktion Klimarechnungshof*' ('Real-Fictional Climate Court of Audit') does so by interrogating the 'project logic' of research as a late-capitalist form of labor organization (p. 64). Building on Maria Muhle's notion of *pre-enactment* as a practice of 'possibility' rather than reality, they expand ethnographic method into a kind of future-oriented speculative performativity, or *Realfiktion*. Their contribution, like many others in the book, playfully uses different media within the text itself, such as field notes, screenshots, diagrams, Zoom-call photographs. While produced within the usual constraints of academic publishing (and its consequences for design, quality, placement, and so on), it does make the publication feel like a documentation of multimedia and multimodal processuality in its own right.

Michael J. Greger's '*Ich bin sozusagen das Dazwischen: Die Performenzen und Texte des Bodo Hell*' ('I am, so to speak, the in-between: The performances and texts of Bodo Hell') is an example of a discussion that itself plays with mode, narrative, focus, and conversation with interlocutors. Portraying the Austrian writer and performer Bodo Hell as a 'social seismograph' (p. 111), as an 'in-between' (*Dazwischen*), Greger explores the converging of artistic and ethnographic inquiry with life itself. It is moving how the essay works with literature, narration, and the appreciation of one person's lifeworld: Hell's performances and writings, the author argues, transform social sensibilities, from the preservation of natural resources to the valuation of traditional labor, into literature (p. 111). The piece exemplifies what many other contributions enact: a process of reflecting on the relation between fieldwork and form.

Several contributions also draw attention to the institutional conditions under which collaboration occurs. Simon Graf's reflections on the difficulties and potentials of applying jointly for research funding and the different paths that an artist and an anthropologist take throughout a project's lifespan and afterlife, for instance, reveal how the open-ended nature of artistic inquiry often conflicts with bureaucratic expectations and predefined notions of scientific accountability. Such attention to administrative frictions expands the notion of fieldwork to include the infrastructures that enable or restrict it, and we need more such analyses, especially when they offer solutions to constraints, or ideas for how to overcome unnecessary boundaries altogether.

The volume concludes with the only English-language text, 'Polyphonic Perspectives' by Tyyne Claudia Pollmann, an artist and professor for anatomy and morphology at the Weißensee Academy of Art in Berlin. In her discussion of student projects, including 'Visions4People,' a collaboration with her students and patients of the Charité Clinic for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Pollmann argues that transdisciplinary artistic research is not a field seeking assimilation into mainstream scientific knowledge, with its predefined rules and fabricated territories, but one that develops local and temporal strategies which unfold their impact in the specific (p. 266). Her

brief mention of patients refusing to fill in student questionnaires in ways that are legible or useful (p. 272), for instance, offers a small and funny but also a critical lesson in how resistance and misunderstanding can open new epistemic grounds. Though it also begs the question that I have raised elsewhere (Tinius 2021)—as to whether anthropological discussions of collaboration do not have to consider more seriously the potential unwillingness of interlocutors to work together, and to take into consideration the desire for detachment as a significant and pervasive aspect of social life.

While the range of perspectives in the book is remarkable, the introduction could have engaged more explicitly and in greater detail with the existing traditions of multimodal and creative anthropological practice. Multimodality here sometimes still appears as an emerging horizon rather than as part of a longer conversation within visual, sensory, and experimental anthropology. Likewise, the editors' emphasis on performance sits slightly at odds with other artistic registers and practices explored in the volume, such as design, curation, or participatory art, to name but a few.

Still, the book's strength lies in the nuance and ethnographic depth of its contributions. Unlike many edited volumes on method and collaboration that remain at the level of conceptual reflection, this book offers richly textured narratives of research-in-practice and accounts that make visible the negotiations, frictions, and learning and unlearning processes of cooperation and collaboration. Another of its virtues is the variation in writing styles: some essays read as analytical articles, others as reflective diaries, dialogues, or visual-textual experiments. This polyphony enacts the multiplicity the editors and authors theorize.¹

Performanzen & Praktiken situates itself within a German lineage of collaborative anthropology and empirical cultural research while contributing to wider debates on practice-based and multimodal work beyond the discipline, strictly speaking. For anthropologists, curators, artists, and cultural practitioners invested in how collaboration produces knowledge and how frictions of working together can create productive fieldwork, this is a thoughtful and valuable resource. In the spirit of Marcus's para-site, the book invites us to dwell in the awkward, generative spaces where anthropology continues to reinvent itself through experimental practice.

1. Though the book could have done with fewer footnotes, which is itself a stylistic choice.

Bibliography

1. Abu-Lughod L (1985) *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley and London, University of California Press.
2. Canclini NG (2014) *Art beyond Itself: Anthropology for a Society without a Storyline*. Durham, NC, Duke University Press.

3. Marcus GE (ed) 2000 *Para-Sites. A Case Book Against Cynical Reason*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
4. Rogoff I (2013) The expanded field. In: Martinon J-P, *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, pp. 41–48. London: Bloomsbury.
5. Sansi R (2015) *Art, Anthropology, and the Gift*. London, Bloomsbury
6. Sternfeld N (2022) How do we come together in a world that separates us? A conversation with Nora Sternfeld. In: von Oswald M and Tinius J, *Across Anthropology. Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial*, pp. 363–372. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
7. Tinius J (2021) The anthropologist as sparring partner: Instigative public fieldwork, curatorial collaboration, and German colonial heritage. *Berliner Blätter*, 83: 65–85.

Author's bio

Jonas Tinius is a social anthropologist working at the intersections of art, archives, and public culture. He is based at the Institute for European Ethnology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, where he directs the Berlin-Brandenburg Office for Everyday Culture (*Berlin-Brandenburgische Landesstelle für Alltagskultur*). His research explores curatorial and artistic practices, institutions, and collaborative forms of knowledge production. He serves as Secretary of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) and is currently a co-convenor of the EASA network *colleex—collaboratory for ethnographic experimentation*. His publications include *State of the Arts. An Ethnography of German Theatre and Migration* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), *Across Anthropology. Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial* (Leuven University Press, 2020, edited with Margareta von Oswald) and *Awkward Archives. Ethnographic Drafts for a Modular Curriculum* (2022, Archive Books, Milan, edited with Margareta von Oswald).

Address: Berlin-Brandenburgische Landesstelle für Alltagskultur, Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße 40/41, 10117 Berlin, Germany

E-mail: jonas.tinius@hu-berlin.de

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2725-1323>