Overflowing Anthropology: A Manifesto

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ABSTRACT

THIS MANIFESTO URGES ANTHROPOLOGY TO UNDERGO TRANSFORMATION. CURRENTLY CONFINED TO MERE DESCRIPTION, THE DISCIPLINE SHOULD EMBRACE CREATIVE ACTION. BY COLLABORATING WITH RESEARCHED COMMUNITIES AND EMPLOYING DESIGN THINKING, ANTHROPOLOGISTS CAN CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE RATHER THAN MERELY DOCUMENTING THE PAST AND PRESENT. THE AIM IS TO SHIFT FROM BEING **"SPECTATORS"** TO BECOMING AGENTS OF CHANGE.

AT ITS CORE, THIS TEXT SERVES AS AN INVITATION TO RETHINK THE VERY FOUNDATIONS OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND TO EMBRACE A BROADER SPECTRUM OF PERSPECTIVES AND FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE, DRAWING FROM DIVERSE HUMAN EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS.

It is impossible for me to theorise or think critically about anthropology without acknowledging my own situated perspective as a designer who transitioned to anthropology after my postgraduate studies (Haraway 1988; Gledhill 2019; 2016). I highlight this because one of the conditions that may have impeded a more transformative reach of the discipline of anthropology is precisely that it has been conceived almost exclusively by anthropologists (Ingold 2013; Murphy 2016). This is, of course, a rather obvious point for any field of knowledge.

Similarly, I write this on a chilly autumn morning in the southern hemisphere, in Chile, Latin America, reflecting on how anthropology is experienced from colonised territories (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel 2007; Escobar 2018; Costanza-Chock 2020; Restrepo 2010). I wonder: How much influence do European Western ideas have on my thinking? Or how much does Andean, Mapuche, or Aztec thought shape my worldview? I pause, recognising that thinking about decoloniality as part of the colonised is not an easy task, but it is a worthwhile exercise when considering the possibilities for transforming anthropology. In this framework, the Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo (2010) emphasises the concept of 'Border Thinking,' which emerges from those who are directly affected by coloniality and its subaltern conditions. This concept involves generating knowledge from positions of subal-

ternity or colonial difference, highlighting the importance of both the location (locus of enunciation) and the critical perspective adopted in the production of knowledge.

When considering the future and its challenges, which inevitably compel us to transform reality—particularly the current reality characterised by extreme scenarios such as massive migration crises that bolster nationalism and authoritarian governments that question democracy and foster discrimination against foreigners, or, from an anthropological perspective, engender a profound rejection of otherness—one must also consider the climate crisis. This crisis prompts questions about the role of solidarity and the nature of accumulation encouraged by neoliberal systems.

In this context, the idea of inviting "the others" to reflect on our own discipline, understanding this otherness as individuals with ideas from fields of knowledge outside anthropology, seems imperative. Our societies demonstrate an inability, or at least a difficulty, in dealing with differences across various social dimensions, as illustrated by the examples previously described.

Much has already been said by literature and theorists regarding the ontological limitations of anthropology to effectively transform social reality (Hunt 2011; Clark 2011; Merzali Celikoglu & Hamarat 2022). This is precisely because its disciplinary foundations entail an ethical and methodological condition to operate in the social field while minimising its impact on the researched communities. Even though there is a growing interest within anthropology itself to contribute disciplinarily to social change and future transformation, it lacks tools and methodologies to actively engage in shaping the future, as it does not possess the transformative character of other disciplines, such as education or design (Gatt & Ingold 2013; Tarek & Marcus 2010; Clifford & Marcus 2010). While the descriptive practice of anthropology operates at a descriptive and analytical level, it fails to transform the realities it studies.

Moreover, another crucial aspect to consider is how collective the outcome of anthropological research is in order to impact the world. Once again, we observe that anthropology has traditionally been associated with individual research work, where the anthropologist conducts fieldwork individually and writes alone, disconnected from the researched communities (Ingold 2018; 2020). This dimension requires us to open ourselves to alterity—literally—by including others in our theoretical construction, not only through observation, description, and interpretation, as has historically been the case. Therefore, efforts to construct collaborative ethnographies or fieldwork alongside communities, as developed in Design Anthropology, pave new ways for advancing towards a broader disciplinary framework (Akoglu & Dankl 2021; Barab et al. 2004; Costard et al. 2016; Ibarra 2019; Wasson 2002).

I advocate for the necessary inclusion of others in the process of theorisation and subsequent implementation of findings in communities. This is akin to the idea of Correspondence proposed by Tim Ingold (2020), but in my view, it should not be limited solely to ethnographic exercise as a mutual learning experience; rather, it should encompass transformative perspectives that transcend research and written reflection to include the implementation of initiatives relevant to the researched communities, addressing various themes that drive our research. For example, Brazilian anthropologists are empowering indigenous communities in the Amazon through their ethnographic film project, Vídeo nas Aldeias (2024). This initiative involves providing cameras to the communities so they can create recordings for their own use, training them in video editing, and supporting them in the production process. The goal is to enable the communities to produce films on their own terms, respecting their self-determination and viewpoints. From the outset, the project's aim has been to support indigenous political struggles, strengthen their identities, and safeguard their territorial and cultural heritage through audiovisual resources and collaborative production.

However, my reflection goes deeper, inviting us to rethink the disciplinary foundations and limits of anthropology so that this approach to research can completely transform the discipline. This is not by denying or undermining its historicity, but by complementing it, offering a new dimension of professional action where anthropological practice adds a projective, creative, or educational dimension to develop instruments that enable us to move towards a transformation of the societies we investigate. This involves moving beyond theoretical reflection and interpretation, from being mere spectators of the social to becoming instruments in the service of transforming these theoretical ideas into concrete actions of social change.

Undoubtedly, my thinking is influenced by Design Anthropology (Tunstall 2013; Wallace 2015; Van Dijk 2010; Singh et al. 2021; Otto & Smith 2013; Murphy & Marcus 2013; Clark 2011). Not only because I have a background in design, but because it is— from my situated point of view—one of the most concrete and pragmatic ways to translate it into reality. Adding to the anthropological tradition, typically associated with the recent past and present of culture, the methods of creation and projection offered by design, proposing an interdisciplinary field of knowledge with reflexive and theoretical capacity, along with creative and projective skills, allows us to add a temporality associated with the future to our research (Ingold 2013; Murphy 2016). This translates into a toolkit of concrete tools to think about future social transformation and the projection of future scenarios that can improve the fractures we encounter in our chaotic present.

Finally, I raise the question: Why overflow? Because, I believe, we need to surpass the limits of the anticipated. Investigating recent pasts and the present of our societies has not been enough. Therefore, in the future, history cannot repeat itself by merely staying in reflection and interpretation. We need to embrace the challenge of transformation with concrete tools and with the disciplinary conviction that the paradigm shift must lead us to take a more active and participatory role in shaping the future. To do this, thinking about our theoretical production with the possibility of prototyping solutions alongside the people we investigate, and co-creating prospective possibilities, emerges as an urgent and necessary demand for the perspectives of our anthropological research work.

How many of us have returned to a researched community after publishing an article or book to offer our knowledge in their service and collaborate in formulating an improvement project for their territory? How many editorial boards of indexed journals have a content section that offers dissemination or synergies to collaboratively work on projects with research communities that need structural changes to improve their development conditions? I know this is not the focus of science, let alone anthropology, many might declare. However, the invitation is precisely to open the discussion and ask ourselves if perhaps it is time to rethink our ontology and transcend our limits, overflowing our beliefs and assumptions, to add more ideas, people, and minds in our research work on/with people and culture.

It is about rethinking the visibility of the invisible not only in empirical description but also in a prospective exercise. The Portuguese theorist Souza de Santos (Santos 2010) introduces the concept of the sociology of absences, which aims to show that what does not exist is, in fact, actively produced as nonexistent, or rather, as an incredible alternative to what exists. It is about transforming impossible objects into possible ones, and absent objects into present ones. I advocate for this to be our perspective towards the future and the seemingly impossible scenarios

of transformation. To move them from the invisibility of their nonexistence to a visible space of possibilities—which, even though speculative, transform them into intelligible alternatives with a prospect of existence—is a significant step.

Lastly, I return to the reflection of Peruvian writer Patricia de Souza (De Souza 2016), who, in her text "Decolonizing Language," raises questions and reflections regarding this 'other perspective' that we eagerly seek to decipher in anthropology. She questions what we know and believe to be unmovable, as in the invitation I have attempted to weave into this manifesto. I hope it also encourages you to challenge your own beliefs so that from that place, we can reconstruct a new anthropology to materialise actions of social transformation towards the future:

Of course, it is obvious that all my culture is Westernized, what I like is that the experience has put me in doubt and that it helps me to think against what I have acquired. This step is important. It's like a new journey. An inner journey. There's something being traced, but I still don't know what it is

DE SOUZA, 2016, P. 53, AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION

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