

RETHINKING KNOWLEDGE

Dominique Vinck

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DOMINIQUE VINCK

With a view to better understanding and explaining the transformations under way in the knowledge society, the *Revue d'Anthropologie des Connaissances* has aimed to contribute to the study of knowledge and the conditions of its production, use, transmission and mobilization by human collectives. Sensitive to the practical, social, psychological, technical, economic and political dimensions of knowledge, it has sought to favour pluridisciplinary exploration. This special anniversary issue, marking ten years of scientific and editorial life, looks back on the initial project, the editorial choices, and what the journal has produced. It also opens its pages to the members of the advisory board of the RAC, who contribute to this self-evaluation and to identifying the relevant problematics that constitute the new challenges facing research on knowledge. Some of these challenges are particularly salient and we note them in this introduction.

Issues around the democratization of knowledge entail a rethinking of our conception of science – and also of politics – (Miquel Domènech), as well as the possibilities of collective action regarding world-wide public goods such as peace, health, the environment, and knowledge, which call for international forms of governance and a community to take care of them (Hebe Vessuri). The involvement of social groups possessing experiential knowledge and of scientific institutions that are making themselves aware of this knowledge are mechanisms through which the governance of research and innovation is being rethought (Vololona Rabeharisoa). Globalization and the articulation of heterogeneous knowledges, including so-called “local” or “traditional” knowledges, lead to a rethinking of our epistemologies and our politics and also our metaphysics, often based on a process of scientific and technical rationalization (John Law and Solveig Joks). This invitation leads emphasis to be placed on the study of other knowledge communities and the aim of seeking to understand the practical knowledges linked to specific regimes of visibility and invisibility (Silvia Gherardi). The articulation between different ways of apprehending the world and of producing and stating knowledge, all profoundly linked to practices, instruments and ways of organizing ourselves in societies, leads to a reversal of the point of view on infrastructures (Geoffrey Bowker). Finally, the work done in the anthropology of knowledge and in the sociology of the sciences and technologies raises the question of their various contributions to the social

sciences, although they seem relatively weak at a time when the issues around the production of knowledge touch on a very large number of social activities (Pablo Kreimer).

Ten years ago, our project saw itself very strongly as a research programme aimed at contributing to multidimensional understanding of the dynamics linked to knowledge; at the present time, the politics of the production and circulation of knowledge have a growing importance in the definition of the major questions that society puts to us. This leads to a constant rethinking of the scientific project of an anthropology of knowledge, a project that is radically unfinished because it entails a collective, distributed and always open inquiry. The members of the advisory board, often making reference to what the *RAC* has published, thus extend an unavoidable invitation in this direction.

The question nonetheless arises of whether, in so doing, we do not leave aside other major questions and issues related to knowledge, on which a journal such as the *RAC* could contribute. In this regard, we are tempted to point out that the understanding of the production, statement, circulation and mobilization of knowledge is very far from being exhausted and that all the authors' contributions only form a partial, evolving groundwork. This incompleteness is thus not a weakness but an invitation to go further, all the more so since not only are the universes of production and mobilization of knowledge diverse but their study bears on the totality of human activities, be they social, political, economic, cultural, spiritual, technological, etc. It is indeed an anthropology in the strong sense, an anthropology that must aim to take account of the forms of knowledge of less visible actors, on the margins of the great challenges of modernity or so deeply attached to the devices used to process this knowledge that they become its silent servants. An anthropology that must remain attentive to the study of scientific activities, their organization, or their style of thinking when they envisage particular or common futures; and also attentive to the proliferation of disciplines and research fields. An anthropology that must not falter in the understanding of the engineering knowledge and techniques that set it among increasingly specific technologies and which must take up the challenge of understanding the technoscientific enterprise that has so far remained very focused on the societies of the North, while the geography of the sciences and technologies is being transformed. Finally, an anthropology that cannot ignore the digital: the laboratory sciences, which had barely been subjected to ethnographic study thirty years ago, are no longer what they were, for the overwhelming impact of the digital has profoundly changed all activities related to the use, sharing and production of knowledge in business, in the street, in research, in the (new) media, and in old and new collectives. A form of geopolitics of knowledge capacities is now at work, flowing through channels and modes of circulation of people, knowledge and techniques whose economic, political and social motors radically question the centres of power and their specific infrastructures.

Very clearly, there is much to be done – by all the disciplines, but also, and increasingly, within collectives that cut across the old internal and external boundaries of the sciences, types of expertise, the arts and crafts, forms of practical and technological know-how, and neglected knowledges (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011). Never, it seems, has the question of knowledge been so much at the heart of everything that makes up the life of societies and the planet. And yet it seems still to be very little taken into account in most of our disciplines. This too is a question to which we must return.

Moreover, our own academic research is based on professional practices subject to new injunctions, pressures, incentives, invitations and challenges. Our editorial work has endlessly returned to these questions and has striven to open up for discussion things that are too often left to epistemological considerations or emotional reflexivity, but much remains to be done to open up this area of reflection. Articles in the *RAC* have also examined the issues of scientific publication, echoing our own initial choice in favour of free and open access to our own knowledge, among other reasons in order to facilitate dialogue with colleagues less well endowed or not served by the economy of access to academic articles in the human and social sciences. These choices have now been confirmed by the last general assembly of the *Société d'Anthropologie des Connaissances* and give a new impulse to the *RAC* in the world of open access to knowledge.

The aim is also to favour a wider appropriation of this academic production and explore forms of dialogue with other knowledge producers (Pérez-Bustos, 2017). There is every reason to think that, in the coming years, we shall see a considerable revival of academic and public debates about knowledge, if only because of the challenges arising from the development of artificial intelligence, the mobilization of voluntary or involuntary “work crowds” captured or recruited to enable this expansion of the impending data sciences and the necessary machine learning that is entailed by a cognitive delegation to algorithms. This already concerns scientific production as much as many everyday jobs and activities whose traceability leads to a re-use of data that raises many questions. The *RAC* could therefore also join a mobilization of the academic communities and heterogeneous collectives to produce knowledge enabling us to reflect collectively on the epistemic and political dynamics at work in this “datification” of experiential worlds (Pontille, 2017).

A vast undertaking of research and publishing thus opens up before us, as it does for a large number of comparable journals. The project that inspired the creation of the *RAC* ten years ago must therefore be strengthened and renewed, acknowledging the need for greater dialogue among journals working on a similar scientific project. It will undoubtedly be echoed by many authors and readers, whose commitment we thus hope to support.

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Dominique VINCK, Director of *Revue d'Anthropologie des Connaissances*, full Professor at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland.
