ANR project ETKnoS (2016-2020)

Call for Applications for a post-doctoral position in Social/Cultural Anthropology

ETKnoS-Encoding and Transmitting Knowledge with a String
A comparative study of the cultural uses of mathematical practices in string-figure making (Oceania, North & South America).

ETKnoS is a four-year research project funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR 16-CE27-0005-01). It is devoted to the study of "string-figure making" practices—which consist in producing a figure or design with a loop of string, by carrying out a succession of operations on this loop, using mostly fingers. Known of in numerous societies where an oral tradition prevails, this practice brings into play gestural sequences akin to algorithms, while enunciating terms and even specific stories or chants. The overall objective of ETKnoS is to understand the mathematical dimension of such practices, by considering their place in specific cultural and linguistic contexts (cf. http://www.sphere.univ-paris-diderot.fr/spip.php?rubrique170&lang=en).

Based on anthropological and ethnolinguistic analyses of data (to be) collected in several Oceanian societies (in Papua-New-Guinea and in Vanuatu), in South and North America (including the Arctic), ETKnoS examines the relationships between operational sequences and the words that are spoken or sung during these sequences. One particular goal here is to gain an improved understanding of the extent to which, in these societies, the practice of string-figure making constitutes/constituted a method for the organization and transmission of knowledge (be it mythological, cosmological, sociological geographical, etc.), involving the use of mathematical concepts.

ETKnoS' interdisciplinary team is coordinated by ethnomathematician Eric Vandendriessche (CNRS), and currently includes two anthropologists (specialized in Inuit and Papua-New-Guinean societies), and two linguists (specialized in Inuit and Melanesian languages).

ETKnoS is soliciting applications for a full-time postdoctoral position in Anthropology which will be hosted at Paris Diderot University in the "Science, Philosophy, History" laboratory (SPHERE, UMR 7219, CNRS & Université Paris Diderot).

Planned duration of the position: 2 years, consisting in a one-year contract, renewable for a further 12 months pending a positive evaluation.

The appointment is expected to start March 1, 2018, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Net monthly salary from 2000 to 2500 euros, commensurate with experience.

To qualify for the position, candidates are required to have completed their PhD in Social/Cultural (or Linguistic) Anthropology, with a specialization in a South Amerindian society, preferably in the Amazon or in the Chaco. However, any application pertaining to oral tradition societies from South America will be carefully considered. The candidates should have significant experience in conducting ethnographic fieldwork. Experience in ethnolinguistic research and/or competence in an Indigenous language will be an asset.

The selected candidate will start out by reviewing and analyzing the existing sources (ethnographic, ethnological/ethnolinguistic and anthropological data) on string-figure making as practiced in a specific cultural area, determined by the candidate's expertise. Subsequently the candidate will carry out 'participant-observer' ethnographic research over a significant period of time, in order to gather original data on string figure-making (*i.e.* the procedures leading to the figures, as well as any material concerning relationships with the cosmology, mythology, knowledge system and/or other practices of the designated group).

Applications should be sent no later than December 22, 2017 to Eric Vandendriessche (eric.vandendriessche@univ-paris-diderot.fr).

They should include: an application letter, a short CV (2-3 pages, with a list of publications), a written sample of academic work (e.g. thesis and/or a recent paper), and contact information for two possible references (name, institution, email contact).

The result will be published on January 15, 2018.

For further information, please contact Eric Vandendriessche
eric.vandendriessche@univ-paris-diderot.fr.