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Ethnographic Film in the Advent of Multimodal Anthropology

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Over the past decade, the renaming of visual anthropology to multimodal anthropology has attracted considerable attention. The author defines multimodal research and, through a study of family life and parenting, examines the interplay between visual and written representations. She shows how different modalities in research complement and challenge each other, and she highlights their advantages and limitations.
▪ **Keywords**: ethnographic film, visual anthropology, multimodal research, mothering, parenting, housework

V zadnjem desetletju je preimenovanje vizualne antropologije v večnačinsko antropologijo pritegnilo posebno pozornost. Avtorica v članku opredeli večnačinske raziskave in na primeru raziskave družinskega življenja ter starševstva analizira razmerje med vizualnimi in besedilnimi načini reprezentacije. Avtorica s tem pokaže, kako se različni načini v raziskovanju medsebojno dopolnjujejo ali si nasprotujejo, hkrati pa opozori na njihove prednosti in omejitve.
▪ **Ključne besede**: etnografski film, vizualna antropologija, večnačinske raziskave, materinjenje, starševstvo, gospodinjsko delo

Introduction: A turn to the multimodal

Over the past decade, visual anthropology has experienced a wave of renaming that has attracted considerable attention among anthropologists. Anthropological journals such as *American Anthropologist* and academic programs such as the master's programs at the University of Leiden and the University of Tromsø have rebranded their visual anthropology sections or programs as multimodal anthropology. There has been a corresponding increase in the number of essays, articles, and other contributions that either promote multimodal research, methods, and publications, or critically examine their actual or potentially problematic aspects. Multimodality is addressed theoretically, methodologically, ethically, in practice, as a method, as a process, and as the result of research.

However, defining multimodal research, like defining ethnographic film, is far from a straightforward endeavor. In cultural and social anthropology, multimodal research emerges from diverse approaches to scholarly inquiry that challenge both conventional textual and visual representations. It introduces methodological innovations – for example, in experimental ethnography, anthropological writing, and the intersection of anthropology and art – and it explores new forms of (self-)representation of interlocutors in digital environments (Gill, 2019). These developments have been driven by the emergence of new technologies and the creation of new spaces for diverse forms of

scholarly output and publication. With technological advancement, the modes, speed, and volume of producing, using, storing, and distributing images have changed, and their omnipresence in everyday life has grown with the availability of video and photo cameras, mobile phones, and the internet. These developments have reshaped the ontological and epistemological status of images, as well as their cultural and social functions (Favero, 2014: 166). According to Jennifer Cool, the proliferation of digital technologies has transformed the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of media to such a "scope and magnitude that they constitute a whole new media ecology" (Cool, 2014: 173).

Similarly, in the invitation following the renaming of the Visual Anthropology section of *American Anthropologist*, Samuel Gerald Collins, Matthew S. Durington, and Harjant Gill highlighted the changes "in the media ecologies we engage as anthropologists" (Collins et al., 2017: 142), understanding multimodal anthropology not only as anthropology across multiple media, but also as engagement in public, reflexive, and collaborative practices through various platforms, media, and tools. "Multimodality involves new tools, and new tools create multimodality" (Collins, Durington, 2024: 11), but multimodality and multimedia are different. *Multimedia* refers to the final product, methods, and technologies, whereas *multimodality* denotes a process – an approach that foregrounds relationships, ethics, and participation throughout fieldwork (Collins, Durington, 2024: 12–14). Departing from social semioticians, the visual anthropologist Sarah Pink distinguished *modes* (resources for representation) from *medium* (the means by which representations are distributed) – for example, filming versus the final cut, or a draft versus the published work (Pink, 2011: 262). Pink's perspective on multimodality offers an early theoretical framework for understanding ethnography as a multimodal way of knowing, without focusing on media practices. The focus of the multimodal approach is not a particular medium or mode, but the real and potential connections between them (Dattatreyan, Marrero-Guillamón, 2019: 225). In this sense, the use of different media does not necessarily imply multimodality and, by the same token, new technologies do not presuppose new epistemologies.

In addition to spanning a range of technologies and ways of doing research, multimodal approaches aim to broaden disciplinary boundaries, extend existing methods, and embrace the potential of methodological plurality. Researchers acknowledge a lack of systematic recognition for scholarly contributions in non-textual, multimodal, or non-narrative forms of scholarly endeavor (see, e.g., Grimshaw, 2021). As Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón emphasized, "multimodality offers a line of flight for an anthropology yet to come: multisensorial rather than text based, performative rather than representational, and inventive rather than descriptive" (Dattatreyan, Marrero-Guillamón, 2019: 220). In addition to technological development, methodological plurality, the criticism of text-based research, and standard modes of scholarly publishing, there is a strong emphasis on ethically grounded research

that prioritizes collaboration, shared authorship, reflexivity, and thorough criticism of diverse and unequal power relations. Multimodal work "entails ethical labour" (Collins, Durington, 2024: 2), meaning that ethics are deeply embedded in the research, technological specificities, and processes of knowledge and meaning-making. Ethical reflexivity is evident in scholars' strong tendency to criticize colonial, patriarchal, racist, unethical, undemocratic, capitalist, and other aspects of everyday life that both interlocutors and researchers are embedded in (see Takaragawa et al., 2019).

The shift to multimodal thinking and operation has made possible greater interdisciplinarity and increased interest and cooperation among various subdisciplines of anthropology. However, although the shift from the visual to the multimodal may seem straightforward, it seems that the term *multimodal* often serves as an umbrella term for numerous approaches, methods, trends, ideas, and ideals. For Mark R. Westmoreland, *multimodality* can mean both everything and nothing, to the point of questioning its necessity: "These broad developments may indicate that the adjectival descriptor will become unnecessarily redundant" (Westmoreland, 2022: 174). In addition to its conceptual ambiguity, multimodality has prompted extensive debates about the publication and dissemination of diverse research outputs (Collins et al., 2017). The renaming generates uncertainty in evaluating multimodal research within educational programs and highlights a lack of experience, infrastructure, and platforms for assessing, publishing, and distributing diverse modes of research and representation.

The shift toward multimodality has highlighted underpinning structural inequalities, including the digital divide in access to technologies (Takaragawa et al., 2019). Despite its efforts to democratize collaboration processes and minimize the digital divide between researchers and interlocutors, the shift to multimodality also risks the often-overlooked structural and regional disparities within academia, in which uneven access to technological resources shapes the practice of visual anthropology and the production of ethnographic film. Although visual anthropology remains marginal within the discipline, its development depends heavily on access to technological infrastructure, funding, training, and institutional support. Such resources are unevenly distributed. As multimodal practices become increasingly valorized, scholars working in less well-resourced academic contexts face additional constraints, shaping both the production of ethnographic film and/or multimodal forms of collaboration. This raises the question whether the turn to multimodality in this sense reproduces rather than reduces asymmetries in authorship, visibility, and authority.

In light of these broader technological, epistemological, and methodological trends and questions, I consider the role of visual anthropology within the multimodal context and contextualize it through my own multimodal research on stay-at-home parents in Slovenia. In my research, multimodality emerged through ongoing fieldwork and analysis, rather than serving as an initial theoretical or methodological premise. Initially planned to employ visual ethnography (camera recording) during fieldwork, due to

specific circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, my research evolved into a multimodal and methodologically more pluralistic project. The results are correspondingly diverse, including a dissertation, a photo series, methodological reflections, and a film. The variety of research materials (e.g., photography, audiovisual recordings, fieldnotes, and participatory methods) informed the written component of my doctoral dissertation, and the audiovisual material contributed to the production of the ethnographic film *Šola za življenje* (School for Life; 2025, 60 min.). I examine how different modalities and research materials complement or challenge each other in conveying anthropological understanding. I begin by exploring the role of visual anthropology in the development of multimodality.

We have always been multimodal: The role of visual anthropology and ethnographic film in multimodal anthropology

The development of visual anthropology has shaped anthropology as a discipline by emphasizing participatory and non-verbal approaches, and by pinpointing the methodological reflexivity and intersubjectivity of the research encounter. Multimodal scholars have acknowledged approaches, studies, and concepts from sensory and visual anthropology (see, e.g., Dattatreyan, Marrero-Guillamón, 2019: 221; Westmoreland, 2022: 182; Collins, Durington, 2024: 21–24), positioning multimodality within a longer history of experimentation in visual anthropology. These authors most often refer to the experimental and collaborative approach of Jean Rouch and to the shift from verbalization to the sensory, emphasizing that the visual entails a distinct mode of epistemology – one that facilitates various ways of knowing, learning, and communicating experiences. Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón state that, although they are "indebted to a body of work that has reclaimed the epistemological specificity of different media (e.g., Taylor, 1996; MacDougall, 1998), [they] are more interested in identifying what these media *do* in our anthropological encounters and how they may enact the possibility of another anthropology – more public, more collaborative, more political" (Dattatreyan, Marrero-Guillamón, 2019: 221).

Visual anthropologists have long engaged with questions of representation, authorship, collaboration, and the limitations of the scholarly paradigm in ethnographic writing, seeking ways to move beyond the discipline's dominant linguistic focus (see, e.g., Crawford, 1992: 66, 72). Ethnographic film has continually adapted to changing technological conditions and methodological shifts since the 1960s, moving from observational cinema to essayistic and reflexive modes (see, e.g., Križnar, 1996; Pink, 2007; Grimshaw, Ravetz, 2009). There have been differing views on reflexivity in ethnographic filmmaking, ranging from the position that we must provide concrete and explicit explanations of our epistemological assumptions in film (Heider, 1976: 64–69;

Ruby, 1980: 153, 157) to the view that images in film are always reflexive because they represent a moment of intersubjective encounter (MacDougall, 2005: 3). Informed by phenomenological perspectives, later visual anthropological research has focused on concepts such as *embodimen*t (Jackson, 1996: 31–32), *emplacement* (Howes, 2005: 7; Pink, 2009: 33), and *immersion* (Viegas, 2009: 149–159) in the world of interlocutors, and the shared experiences established during research. For MacDougall, every film is already a collaboration, but the quality and scope of that collaboration vary (MacDougall, 2022: 96, 105, 110). In other words, if research is an encounter, then film is the result of that encounter (Valentinčič Furlan, 2015: 99). Although reflexive and participatory methods, such as Indigenous media and feminist approaches, have been widely discussed, they provide only partial responses to the ethical dilemmas and power asymmetries of fieldwork (Guzman, Hong, 2022). No universally applicable solution exists for these context-specific challenges; therefore, reflexive accounts of methodology remain important in visual anthropology, given the field's ongoing changes and diversity.

On the other hand, the work of the multimodal scholars mentioned above, which is commonly framed in terms of collaboration, ethics, and reflexivity, tends to focus much more on the use of emerging technologies, such as interactive documentaries and geolocational media,[1] and the ethical dilemmas these technologies generate. They devote less attention to intersubjectivity and representation, instead concentrating on the broader structural differences and inequalities that shape and constrain multimodal practice. Multimodal scholars seek to move beyond an explicit focus on the visual. Notably, the recent volume *Multimodal Methods in Anthropology* (Collins, Durington, 2024) includes only a single chapter on photography, which further focuses on participatory approaches such as photovoice.

These shifts raise several questions: To what extent does the role of visual anthropology and ethnographic film remain open to reconsideration in the context of the multimodal turn, given the field's historical development and trajectory? Is film inherently multimodal – combining sound, image, narrative, words, movement, and graphics – and does it therefore not need to be reconsidered? Or is it just the opposite? Audiovisual outputs allow for more open interpretation, facilitating multilayered understanding but also different responses and potential misunderstandings (see Filak, 2017). Etami Borjan (2020: 704) argues that meanings that emerge from film are contextual, dependent on an array of relations and shaped by the tension between indexical and relational aspects.

[1] Interactive documentaries or iDocs are interactive, non-linear digital documentaries that make it possible for viewers to navigate and shape the narrative using web-based platforms or applications. Geolocational media are location-based digital forms that link audiovisual content to specific GPS-tracked locations (Favero, 2014).

In light of these considerations, neither the reflexive turn in anthropology[2] nor the emergence of new technologies, storage practices,[3] screening formats, and publishing possibilities has clarified the status of visual and multimodal research in the academic representation of anthropological knowledge (Pink, 2008: 596, 2009: 134–138). Ethnographic films and multimodal research often do not conform to standard peer-review procedures or models of scholarly publication. This is due to the lack of opportunities[4] for unconventional forms of multimodal research to be treated equally within the discipline, especially in quantitative terms (Grimshaw, 2021: 52). Nevertheless, many scholars argue that, as an empirical fieldwork method, visual anthropology should remain part of anthropological training aimed at developing visual perception, including systematic observation and training of the gaze, with its own methodologies and objectives (Križnar, 1996; Ruby, 2000; Grimshaw, Ravetz, 2009; Grasseni, 2011), and should not merely replicate written anthropology (MacDougall, 2019: 138; Grimshaw, 2022: 214) or serve as its illustration (Cox, Wright, 2019: 126).

In visual research, the issue of open access remains unresolved because it is not consistently defined in the rapidly evolving field of film. The same applies to publishing visual and other multimodal material in written form, such as various publications. This is possible through the digital publication of research, which may include stable links or QR codes that allow direct viewing and new forms of interaction (see, e.g., Vávrová, 2014; Filak, 2019; Magnusson, 2021), but it also introduces potential misunderstandings and increased opportunities for misuse. One approach is to present findings obtained through different methods that encompass a specific dialectic between interpretation (text) and images, as seen in written and visual research (Crawford, 1992: 77). This is the approach I used in my own multimodal research, seeking complementarity through visual anthropology, which I discuss in the text, as well as the analytical potential of film that I recognized in montage and that is implicit in the structure and content of the final film. I discuss this further in the following sections.

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[2] In the late 1980s, scholars began to critically examine how ethnographic knowledge is produced and represented, challenging authoritative and ostensibly objective forms of research and writing, and prompting experimentation with more dialogical and open-ended forms of ethnography (Clifford, Marcus, 1986), what might be called multimodal. In this context, the period became known as the *reflexive turn* or the *crisis of representation*.

[3] The search for ethnographic films is hindered by their dispersion across numerous institutional, national, and festival collections and archives, as well as by differing accessibility regimes. There is no standardized system for storing multimedia material, nor are there joint databases or metadata repositories for ethnographic films.

[4] Ethnographic films, shown at international film festivals and research conferences, may be published in the peer-reviewed and open-access periodical *Journal of Anthropological Film* (*JAF*). Visual and multimodal research can be published in *Entanglements: Experiments in Multimodal Ethnography* or in *Anthrovision: Vaneasa Online Journal*. Photographs contextualized with text can be published as photo essays in peer-reviewed periodicals, such as *Visual Studies*, *Visual Ethnography*, and *Visual Anthropology Review*. Anthropological books and articles in which photography forms part of the narrative are rare (see, e.g., Holtedahl, 2023). These publishing options are a particularly dynamic and experimental field of inquiry.

Multimodal research on parenting, housework, and homeschooling practices

The presentation of my own multimodal research is structured into six sections referring to various stages of research: reflexivity, photography, filming, the sensory space, joint viewings, editing, and writing. In these sections, I examine how different modes and methods shape fieldwork relationships, areas of focus, and sensory engagement, as well as influence final analyses and outputs.

In my dissertation *Vizualna etnografija vsakdanjega življenja gospodinj v Sloveniji* (Visual Ethnography of Housewives' Everyday Life in Slovenia; Filak, 2025), I used photo and video cameras, participant observation, conversations, go-alongs,[5] and interviews to understand the everyday lives of stay-at-home parents in various parts of Slovenia. Most of my interlocutors[6] were mothers that had left their careers to stay at home and take care of the household and children, including their education. I was interested in housework, childcare, home-schooling and parenting practices, the division of labor among family members, family routines and rhythms, and the spatial-temporal organization of their daily lives. The research questions and fieldwork were shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting epidemiological measures. These altered the families' daily lives and their ideas about the future, as well as the course of the research and certain methodological and thematic focuses of the dissertation. This was partly interdisciplinary because it considered feminist and sociological research alongside anthropological research. It was also methodologically pluralistic, drawing on multimodal material, such as photos and audiovisual recordings, which were used to create the ethnographic film *School for Life*. The film complements the written part of the research, in which different types of material interact and engage with each other, whether in the form of fieldnotes, a series of photos, or film stills (see Figure 1). In the following sections, I examine the complementary potential of multimodal research, focusing on the use of photo and video cameras in ethnographic practice and the analytical, methodological, and epistemological challenges presented by multimodal outputs. I explore whether audiovisual methods can enrich written analysis and, conversely, how writing may inform filming and editing.

[5] The sociologist Margarethe Kusenbach has described accompanying interlocutors on their errands and other activities as go-alongs, an ethnographic practice in which, for a certain period, researchers observe the daily routines and interpretations of their interlocutors (Kusenbach, 2003: 463).

[6] The eighteen families included in the research did not form a community or network, except within the context of the study. Due to their diversity, they provided a comparative framework; eight families with more intensive contact offered a more focused understanding of the research questions.

Reflexivity in the sphere of the intimate

Research in and on the domestic sphere identifies particular sensitivities related to the exposure of privacy and intimacy within family and household settings, and it often involves the representation of children. Such research environments require heightened reflexivity and encourage diverse methodological approaches. More scholars than ever emphasize the benefits of multimodal, experimental, creative, and participatory methods in such settings, such as video tours (Pink, 2004), participatory photography (Luttrell, 2010; Turk Niskač, 2012), photo elicitation (Pink, 2009; Mannay, 2014; Mannay et al., 2018), video documentation and analysis (Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, 2013), immersive storytelling (Schillaci, 2019), analysis of family photo albums (Rose, 2016), visual ethnography (Filak, 2026), and autoethnography (Hillman, 2023), to study family routines, housework, parenting, and childcare. The intimacy of family life made my presence in households particularly sensitive, yet also crucial, given the close interweaving of daily routines, childcare, and educational practices. Participant observation offered a distinct advantage by allowing direct engagement with these everyday dynamics.

The sensitive and long-term nature of research in such a setting, as well as many ethical dilemmas and the need to contextualize visual representations, made reflexivity in writing essential throughout the research. The insights gained from filming extended beyond the footage, taking shape and being evaluated in a filming diary that formed the foundation for both the dissertation and the film. The diary contained detailed descriptions of the audiovisual material and reflections on my influence within the research. Because individual household tasks are performed alongside many other everyday family activities (also noted by Gullestad, 1985: 298), I frequently included extended fieldnotes in my written dissertation to emphasize how seemingly single activities are intertwined with multiple aspects of daily life (see Figure 1). This was especially important for mothers, for whom one activity, such as cooking, also encompassed others, such as childcare, education, organization, nursing, and cleaning. Beyond its documentary role, the diary notes capture and evoke sensations, emotions, and other affective elements that shaped the fieldwork experience.

Photography

Photography, whether my own[7] or participatory,[8] was an important element of the research conducted. It added complexity to my understanding of parenting and maternal practices, and it offered me a means to document various aspects of everyday routines and the immediate, tangible environment. In the analysis of the fieldwork material, the photos revealed that an important aspect of my interlocutors' roles as housewives, both spatially and temporally, was childcare and the socialization of their children. Taking photos was methodologically easier than filming, partly because of the smaller amount of material (a photo captures a brief moment), simpler selection (similar or poorly taken photos), and less invasiveness (taking a photo takes less time than shooting a video). In addition, photos required more written contextualization than video recordings.

Photography was also an important component of written research, appearing as extended photo series and film stills (see Figure 1). By reviewing and analyzing the material, and engaging with previous research, I have come to understand that photos convey more when presented in sequence because this juxtaposition constructs a chronological narrative of events and moves beyond the purely aesthetic or symbolic aspects that can otherwise dominate photographic representation and can be seen in visual or photo essays (see, e.g., Pixley, 2021). In this sense, I see photos as carriers of narratives, contextualized by text to create a multimodal and multilayered representation (see also Turk Niskač, 2011: 132; Lunaček Brumen, 2018: 96–98). This was a recurring issue in participatory photography, which was mainly used in response to the closure of inter-communal movement during the epidemics in Slovenia. Despite the aim of collaboration and amplification of interlocutors' voices, the photos often assumed a primarily illustrative role in the final written form. Nevertheless, some were more effective in foregrounding the participants' perspectives (see Figure 2).

[7] For still photography, I used a Sony Alpha A7 IV. I took more than nine hundred photos spontaneously, without staging situations, largely shaped by daily activities and children's interactions with me or among themselves. I also produced a series of family portraits at the family's request.

[8] I used participatory photography due to pandemic-related restrictions on travel and socializing. Three participants sent photos of daily moments with brief descriptions, focusing on routines, household chores, and time management. I deliberately avoided guiding them with specific questions, using the photos to elicit experiences difficult to verbalize.



Figure 1: Morning activities from a sequence in *School for Life* reveal an interplay of overlapping elements of the daily routine: picking and drying dandelions for tea, preparing a snack, hanging up laundry, free play, and childcare. Photos: Manca Filak; 29 March 2021.



Figure 2: One of the interlocutors shared two photos with captions (both from 17 August 2021). The first reads: "My laundry sits in the tub so long that it starts drying on its own". The second reads: "Sometimes I feel like the day is a pot full of water with sixteen holes, and I only have ten fingers to plug them – it's leaking everywhere else".

Filming

Filming[9] was accompanied by continuous review and analysis of the material, screenings and discussions with protagonists, and subsequent editing of the audiovisual material for the final film. *School for Life*[10] is an hour-long intimate ethnographic portrait of a six-member family, exploring how homeschooling practices are intertwined with daily routines, housework, and the broader rhythms of family life. The film observes how learning and upbringing unfold in spontaneous daily moments, shaping the family's rhythm between 2021 and 2022. Following the idea that collaboration influences the style of a film, in his recent book David MacDougall outlines seven types of collaboration in documentary filmmaking: dispersed collaboration, co-authorship, creative assistance, subject collaboration, sponsorship, complicity, and symbiosis (MacDougall, 2022: 94–114). In line with his framework, my filming approach can be categorized as the final form: symbiosis.

> Where it exists in a film, it gives an impression of a merging of the filmmaker's and subject's intentions, even a merging of consciousness. The making of the film creates an atmosphere of cooperation in which both filmmaker and subject are caught up. As in biological symbiosis, there is a process of exchange and interdependence between the two sides. (MacDougall, 2022: 110)

[9] I used a Sony PXW-Z90 camera for audiovisual recordings. Landscape shots and interviews were filmed using a tripod, and the remaining material was recorded handheld.

[10] The film is not publicly accessible due to its intimate portrayal of family life and children. It is stored in the Audiovisual Laboratory of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at ZRC SAZU and can be viewed upon request.

I therefore advocate a participatory approach grounded in mutual trust – one that remains attentive to the perspectives of interlocutors at every stage of the filmmaking process. Although they did not operate the camera or edit the footage, interlocutors actively shaped the final film through their insights, comments, and initiatives. I found filming at home required an even greater degree of sensitivity, awareness of the well-being of all participants, and a balance between my role as researcher with the camera and as a participant in the family's everyday life. The feelings I experienced while filming informed the footage and influenced the way I filmed because the family and I shared the same *sensory space* (MacDougall, 2019: 86). As a researcher with a camera, exchanging views and participating in the family's daily activities gave me new insights, ideas, and interests. I came to understand that my protagonist saw homeschooling as a long-term, fluid process, dependent on spontaneous moments when the child is ready to learn and cooperate, often during play and chores (see also Filak, 2023). It is like "the air you breathe" throughout the day, or the non-verbal knowledge passed on to children during their daily activities. This knowledge influenced both the filming and the written dissertation.

The sensory space

Filming and photography provided valuable insights into the immediate environment, capturing its spatial, sensory, and material dimensions while focusing on space as a direct, physical, and lived experience. I paid close attention to the perception of the atmosphere of spaces, sounds, landscapes, weather conditions, and other sensory impressions, which were recorded in the research diary and, even more frequently, in the audiovisual material. In this way, filming and writing complemented each other because I did not always write down certain information (such as the weather), but I remembered my sensations (e.g., wind, cold, rain, and fog). In addition, because I often had to change the camera settings and repeatedly viewed audiovisual material, the use of still and especially video cameras stimulated a particular evocation and perception or sense of space and appreciation of it due to the emphasis on the audiovisual, something often reflected in my filming diary notes.

> I arrive at half past nine, when the region is still shrouded in thick fog … Their garden is quiet; the leaves have almost completely fallen from all the trees. There are still some marigolds and a few large radicchio heads in the garden, which she grew from her own seedlings … Mornings in [the region] are extremely foggy during these autumn months, with low clouds only beginning to lift after nine o'clock, sometimes not until noon. Today, when I went to [my protagonist], I was enchanted by the mist rolling over the fields and stubble. (fieldwork diary notes, 27 October 2021)

With the rise of multimodal ethnography and the growing emphasis on the senses and the body, anthropologists have increasingly explored how to incorporate the auditory dimension into both representation and analysis (see, e.g., Feld, 2005; Samuels et al., 2010). Like the visual anthropologist Orsolya Veraart, I developed a form of auditory awareness that allowed me to recognize different sounds in the environment during filming, identifying their sources and contexts (Veraart, 2013: 44). Thus, when reviewing the recordings, I found that, simply by listening, I could determine when the recording was made and the circumstances of its creation. In addition to capturing images and sounds, I was aware of the pleasure I derived from filming the landscape. This involved not only documenting the family garden and its changes over time, but also attending to nearby meadows, fields, and the river. Spontaneous admiration for the landscape, also evident in my writing, helped refine the structure of the film, which is organized around the seasons, as evident from the filming diary.

> In the morning, we were awakened by a light blanket of snow that barely covered the landscape. It was still snowing lightly. I was actually pleased about the snow because I had wanted to take some static shots of the snowy landscape using a tripod … I took a few shots by the road and then went to the water. Unfortunately, I didn't catch any animals on camera, even though I saw them constantly along the way. Herons, ducks, and other birds quickly scatter when I am nearby, even though I try to remain calm and quiet. The fog was quite thick and low, as is usually the case along the [nearby] river. (entry from the filming diary, 10 January 2022)

Joint viewings

Filming, editing, and writing were also influenced by discussions during joint viewings with the family. This is a significant moment in visual ethnography because it helps the researcher understand how the participants perceive and experience media representations, media production practices, filming, and the content of the recordings (Pink, 2007: 101, 113; MacDougall, 2022: 36). For Jean Rouch, active participation in the production of knowledge was the only true and ethically possible methodological path in anthropology (Janssen, 2009: 44). He called this "audiovisual reciprocity" or "shared anthropology" (Fr. *anthropologie partagée*), in which the anthropologist became a facilitator of shared knowledge, together with the tangible involvement or responses of the protagonists (Lunaček Brumen, 2018: 92).

As viewers, my protagonists had certain expectations regarding the aesthetics, structure, and narrative of the film even before seeing the footage. They recognized a distinction between their own experience of family intimacy and the elements of the material I

considered significant. The joint viewings resembled rummaging through memories that quickly faded amid children and daily activities. Unlike me, who regularly and repeatedly watched the recordings, my interlocutors had forgotten many activities. While watching, they reflected on what and how they had changed, the gardening innovations they had introduced and their reasons, the differences in children's development, and the family's adoption of veganism. While watching the recordings, my protagonist began to reflect more consciously on different approaches to homeschooling, recognizing that the teaching practices she had taken for granted were not always immediately evident in the material. She even initiated some activities as a result.

Joint viewings provided insights not only into their way of life, but also into my own assumptions and interpretations, from which new understandings emerged. In this sense, they functioned as a form of video elicitation that influenced both the course of filming and the final editing. For example, frequent conflicts among the children – potentially made more visible by my presence with a camera – were emotionally demanding. As an outsider, I often hesitated to intervene or felt unable to resolve them, let alone film them. Over time, I began to record such conflicts as ordinary aspects of family life, although not all of these moments were included in the final film due to the protagonist's concerns about how her homeschooling approach might be represented or misrepresented. Moments of hesitation or children's playful interference raised questions about the dynamics of self-censorship on the one hand and shared authorship on the other. As a result, fewer conflicts were included in the final film than I might have considered otherwise, reflecting the interlocutor's view that such moments did not accurately represent the overall situation.

Editing and writing

The selectivity of the final film edit was based on three particularly salient factors: the technical aspect of selection, the narrative power of the footage, and its potential complementarity to the text. An important consideration during editing was balancing speech, storytelling, and activities. Speech is an indispensable component of most ethnographic films because people in films rarely refrain from speaking directly to the camera or to each other (Križnar, 2009: 135). With its silent presence and focus on the person, the camera poses a question that the person responds to either verbally or non-verbally (ibid.). In addition to balancing the visual and the verbal, selecting and condensing material to fit the conventional lengths of short, medium, and feature-length films (MacDougall, 2019: 84) proved challenging because the content was often shaped to meet formal requirements. One solution could be a multipart film to create a more open structure that accommodates the intrinsic narrative of the material (see also Grimshaw, 2021, 2022). While editing, I weighed several options: a film about homeschooling,

a film about housework, a film about isolation during the epidemic, and a multipart film that would follow the seasons and address all these topics.

Editing and writing took place simultaneously and in parallel, adhering to academic, textual, and grammatical standards that influence readability, as well as editing rules and technical aspects that affect the film's watchability. The understanding that the calendar year, as a closed and recurring cycle, is the longest unit of the social cycle, regulating the rhythmic structures of everyday life (Brumen, 2000: 59), informed the research, filming, and cyclical nature of editing. I recognized that the seasons and the school year were key factors in the daily rhythm of the families taking part in the research, as well as the narrative of the film. Editing also influenced filming because chronological editing and emphasis on the seasons made me more conscious of filming the landscape. The doctoral dissertation and the film were developed in parallel, each informing the other. Insights that emerged during film editing were incorporated into the written analysis, and reflections generated in writing prompted modifications to the film. Certain elements, such as the protagonist's ideas, ideals, and viewpoints, were easier to articulate in writing than audio-visually, given the distinct affordances of each medium. Methodologically, during filming, a reorganization of body and perspective occurred, allowing me to see and observe differently. I not only relied on a discursive approach to the world – that is, through language, explanations, and generalizations (MacDougall, 2005: 3) – but also engaged a phenomenological perspective, attending to embodied experience and critically reflecting on my own position behind the camera. Looking through the camera lens gave me a perception of the real and sensually perceptible expressions of space, time, relationships, and interactions. Filming, editing, and photography made it possible for me to review the material over and over again, each review revealing something new, such as seasonal changes in the physical environment. The presence of the camera intensified the relationship between myself and the protagonist, making me more aware not only of the fragility or vulnerability of the research relationship (MacDougall, 2022: 33), but also of its significance, particularly during subsequent screenings of the completed film, which fostered a more grounded and reciprocal relationship between us.

Although both components were developed in tandem, I did not treat the film merely as a visual illustration of empirical data, but as a complementary research method and an analytical process in its own right. Its form emerged in response to the dynamics of fieldwork, the characteristics of the collected material, its internal narrative, and my own shifting interests shaped by specific fieldwork conditions. The written discussion and the film have different emphases. The audiovisual material centered on homeschooling practices rather than housework, which I discussed in the written part of the research. The structure of the final film was influenced by the protagonist's unschooling approach, subtly integrated into the family's daily life. In the film, I did not attempt to offer a definitive explanation, but rather to convey fragmented excerpts of my own insights

and understandings that emerged from the circumstances of fieldwork and filming. Despite my initial concerns about intruding on family privacy, and ethical concerns about filming children, the process of visual ethnography was a positive experience for the family. The edited material was valuable to them as a personal archive, which they regarded as significant for their family heritage. They were not concerned by the diversity of the footage or its shortcomings because they understood that the final film might have been different had it been shot at another time or under different conditions. I conceive *School for Life* as a joint project because the protagonists contributed to its creation through their comments and decisions. The reflective and transparent approach to filming and editing empowered the interviewees, who were proud to see their family in the footage; it also informed my interpretations of the collected material through comparison of views, understandings, and positions.

Conclusion: Complementarity and multimodality in research

Anthropological fieldwork generates multimodal data – fieldnotes, images, sound recordings, and transcripts – that can be later transformed into multimodal outputs, including films, texts, or digital materials. Although anthropological writings are a scholarly genre, they often incorporate or experiment with various types of description, styles, genres, and formats, including fieldnotes, interview transcripts, theoretical and analytical sections, photos, screenshots, film stills, evocative descriptions, or vignettes, as well as (auto)biographical accounts and literary forms. However, multimodality should not be reduced to multimedia or diverse research outputs; its emphasis lies primarily on the research process, collaboration, and cultivating multiple ways of knowing and representation (Collins, Durington, 2024: 13). In addition to reflexivity, which is both a theoretical stance and a multimodal practice, special attention is given to ethics, collaboration, and accessibility, including authorship, participation, and the digital or structural inequalities inherent in multimodal work. Multimodality raises questions about who can participate, what infrastructures make it possible, and whose voices are amplified. Like anthropology in general, ethnographic film is inherently multimodal, combining sound, image, narrative, language, movement, graphics, sensory engagement, temporality, and affect, while emphasizing reflexivity, collaboration, and shared experience. In this sense, I understand multimodality not as a methodological novelty, but as a diversification or recognition of the discipline's trajectory – one profoundly shaped by rapid technological change. I regard visual anthropology as its epistemic predecessor, with a long and rich history of development, and as a field that continues to merit dedicated attention, theorization, and pedagogical engagement.

Since 2017, multimodality has become increasingly institutionalized, particularly within American academia, through rebranding sections (e.g., within the American

Anthropological Association) and various initiatives and platforms (see Collins, Durington, 2024). Although multimodal scholars critically address authorship, colonial dynamics, and uneven access to technology, these critiques tend to focus on fieldwork relations, methodology, and representation. By contrast, the diverse regional and institutional contexts in which resources, visibility, and access to platforms differ remain underexplored. Echoing broader discussions of the digital divide and epistemic inequality, it is clear that not everyone has equal capacity or infrastructure to engage in multimodal research. Despite efforts to foreground diverse experiences and approaches to multimodality in relation to visual anthropology, there is still little knowledge about regional multimodal production, even though regional cooperation is well established through initiatives such as ethnographic film festivals. While definitive answers are not offered here, these issues are closely tied to questions of visibility, technology, digital infrastructure, accessibility, funding, and the continued dominance of established forms of academic dissemination, in which writing remains the primary analytical tool.

Given the trajectory of existing multimodal studies, I examine how, in my own research, different modalities can complement or challenge each other in conveying anthropological understanding, highlighting both the value and challenges of multimodal ethnography – particularly its qualitative diversity, epistemological complementarity, and potential to open new forms of representing anthropological knowledge. To understand the complexities of a seemingly simple sphere such as family life, I needed to at least partially experience its routines. This was achieved through participant observation and by repeatedly reviewing the video material. Focused semi-structured interviews were more static and used to articulate the interlocutors' ideas, often in retrospect, whereas unstructured conversations provided much concrete and contextual information. Participant observation facilitated spontaneous interactions and insight into everyday routines, and the use of still and video cameras offered additional perspectives on family interactions and the sensory material environment. By recording, editing, and reviewing the material, my understanding of the family and their circumstances deepened, particularly regarding identification and intimacy. Editing also became an accumulation of memories and an evocation of the research experience.

Multimodality is integral to the written dissertation, with various types of material interacting and entering dialogue, whether as reflexivity, analytical discussion, fieldnotes, or a series of photos or film stills. Much of the filmed material does not appear in the final film but nevertheless informs the text and underpins the research. Conversely, elements captured only in writing shape the final dissertation without being represented in the film. Despite the methodological and representational complementarity of the audiovisual and written outputs of my research, the dialectic between the verbal or written and the visual, which Peter Crawford describes as a dialectic between explanation and understanding (Crawford, 1992: 70), remains unresolved. Although I was able to interweave the processes of filming, editing, researching, and writing in an analytical

and exploratory sense, in the final format (i.e., the dissertation and ethnographic film), they are still experienced – whether read or seen – separately. If presented in another form, such as a research catalogue, a multimedia platform, or an exhibition, the experience would possibly be different.

The analytical discussion of my research demonstrates the importance of heightened reflexivity throughout the research, whether made explicit in the film or articulated through accompanying written reflection. This was particularly important due to the long-term nature and sensitivity of the fieldwork, which revealed intimate aspects of everyday family life and children. Multimodality influenced the field experience because the frequent use of a camera made me more attentive to sensory perceptions and changes in the immediate environment, such as weather and light. This was reflected in frequent changes to the technical settings of my equipment, as well as in my fieldnotes detailing spatial and environmental perceptions. I developed a closer connection with the families I filmed or photographed, which also affects the reading experience because the depiction of the families' everyday life is partly shaped by the amount of visual material presented. Due to close proximity and long-term collaboration, it was possible to use audiovisual approaches, making these families more clearly present and easier for readers to distinguish from others, but also less anonymous. The insights gained from filming and editing the footage differed from those obtained through analyzing written material and writing. The integration of visual and written forms is not intended to achieve "completeness" or to substitute one mode for another, but to preserve the productive tension between them. I argue that ethnographic film and writing, when considered together, foster a richer and more nuanced anthropological understanding, keeping differences productive and generative.

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Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on ethnographic research materials that are not classified as research data. All additional information concerning the ethnographic research materials are available on reasonable request with the author.

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Etnografski film v času večnačinske antropologije

V zadnjem desetletju se vizualna antropologija vse pogosteje povezuje z večnačinsko antropologijo, kar odraža tehnološke, epistemološke in metodološke premike v vedi. Članek osvetljuje vlogo vizualne antropologije v tem kontekstu ter opozarja na njeno dolgo tradicijo ukvarjanja z vprašanji predstavljanja, refleksije, sodelovanja in etike. Večnačinskost v članku ni razumljena zgolj kot uporaba različnih medijev, temveč kot proces sodelovanja in skupne izkušnje. Članek na podlagi avtoričine večnačinske raziskave starševstva, skrbstvene nege in gospodinjskega dela pokaže, kako se vizualni in pisni načini medsebojno dopolnjujejo, preizprašujejo in bogatijo ter s tem omogočajo večplastne antropološke uvide. Avtorica zagovarja stališče, da je večnačinsko raziskovanje najplodnejše takrat, ko posamezni načini ohranijo svoje posebnosti, saj prav razhajanja in napetosti med njimi spodbujajo bolj poglobljeno interpretacijo. Večnačinska etnografija povezuje različne kvalitativne pristope v medsebojno dopolnjujoč se in refleksiven raziskovalni okvir, pri čemer ohranja pomen vizualne antropologije kot podvede. V ospredje obenem postavlja etično občutljivost in sodelovanje kot ključni načeli antropološkega raziskovanja.