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Introduction

Ana Svetel

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
ana.svetel@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7114-3365

Manca Filak

ZRC SAZU, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Slovenia
manca.filak@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0708-502X

It is nothing new to anthropology that not only how knowledge is produced, but also how it is represented and shared, matters. The discipline is therefore committed to continuous (self)reflection, which prompts us to question the methodological, epistemological, and representational foundations of anthropological practice. Who and how do we research? What do participatory engagements bring to the process? How do we "write culture", and for whom? What are the strengths and limitations of particular modes of representation? What can be filmed that cannot be written, and vice versa? What possibilities do new digital media open up for ethnographic depictions? Where is the boundary between ethnography and creative writing? These – and many other – questions are at the heart of the current turn towards multimodal anthropology.

We approach multimodal anthropology as an ongoing and unfinished stream of research that allows for new forms of representation, broadens our anthropological understandings, deepens our methods, and enables greater reflexivity and interdisciplinarity. It facilitates knowledge dissemination while employing diverse methods, working with different research materials, and designing outputs. Although multimodal research is not inherently ethical or participatory (see Collins et al., 2021), it can reveal existing hierarchies and possibilities in anthropological practice. It concerns relations as much as representations: collaboration, ownership, and visibility remain its central issues.

Multimodal ethnography can sometimes be understood as an extension of visual anthropology. Indicatively, the long-established Visual Anthropology programme at the University of Tromsø has recently become part of a new master's programme in Visual and Multimodal Anthropology. We, however, approach multimodality more broadly, as extending across visual, textual and other domains. The contributions to this issue demonstrate that privileging either visual or textual experimentation would narrow our understanding of multimodality and obscure the productive intersections and parallels between different modes of ethnographic knowledge-making and representation. After all, anthropological writing has long incorporated or experimented with different modes of description, styles, genres, and formats, including field notes, interview transcripts, theoretical and analytical sections, photographs, film stills, evocative descriptions or vignettes, as well as (auto)biographical accounts and literary forms.

While such experimentation has a much longer history, since around 2017 multimodality has become increasingly institutionalised as an explicit disciplinary framework, especially within U.S. academia, through the rebranding of sections (e.g., within the American Anthropological Association) and various initiatives and platforms (see Collins, Durington, 2024, for example).

Despite the relatively modest production of ethnographic films in Slovenia, partly due to the absence of a dedicated field of visual anthropology, the subdiscipline is well supported through institutions such as the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, and is internationally connected through initiatives such as the Days of Ethnographic Film festival. We still know little, however, about multimodal production in the region, despite well-established forms of regional cooperation. Although scholars working on multimodality have critically addressed questions of authorship, new forms of coloniality, and uneven technological accessibility (see Takaragawa et al., 2019; Westmoreland, 2022, for example), the critique is mainly focused on fieldwork relations, methodology, and representation. In contrast, regional and institutional contexts – such as Southeastern Europe, where resources, visibility, and access to platforms differ from Anglo-American academic settings – are not yet discussed in the literature.

Echoing broader critiques of the digital divide and epistemic inequality, we argue that not everyone has an equal capacity or infrastructure *to be* multimodal. Multimodality is therefore not merely a matter of methodological or representational choice; it is also conditioned by the institutional and material environments in which anthropological knowledge is produced and circulated. In this regard, it is important to note that journals such as *Worlds* (2025) and the *Bulletin of the Slovene Ethnological Society* (2026) have recently introduced new publication formats, including the Multimodal Research and Visual Essay sections, which explicitly enable and encourage multimodal forms of scholarly communication. Furthermore, in the 2026/27 academic year, a new course on Experimental and Creative Writing in Anthropology was introduced at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, broadening the range of approaches to writing within anthropological training and complementing the department's diverse and well-established courses in visual anthropology. We see these developments as reflecting broader shifts in anthropological and ethnological publishing and pedagogical practices, and as creating opportunities for methodological innovation.

This special issue emerged both as a response to these disciplinary transformations currently shaping anthropology and as an outcome of our collaboration within the bilateral project Addressing Human–Environment Relations through Multimodal Ethnography.[1] Our aim was to create a testing ground for examining the use of multimodal

[1] This special issue is an outcome of the bilateral research project Addressing Human–Environment Relations through Multimodal Ethnography (BI-NO/25-27-001).

methods, approaches, and reflections that may serve not only as indicators of ongoing changes within the discipline, but also as signposts of potential future developments. The contributions gathered in this special issue do not aspire to provide a comprehensive overview of all dimensions of multimodal research. Certain challenges, limitations, and unresolved questions are addressed only partially. Rather, we understand the issue as a starting point – a collection of exploratory perspectives that we hope will open space for further discussion, experimentation, and future contributions. The methodological reflections presented here are inseparable from broader theoretical and epistemological questions, demonstrating how multimodal practices not only expand the repertoire of research methods and representational forms but can also reshape the ways in which anthropological knowledge is produced, represented, and communicated.

Opening the special issue, Manca Filak offers a broader theoretical discussion of multimodality and its relationship to visual anthropology, drawing on her extensive doctoral research on the everyday lives of stay-at-home parents in Slovenia. Moving between her written research, photographs, audiovisual material and the ethnographic film *School for Life*, she shows how visual and textual representations can complement and challenge one another, producing different yet interconnected forms of anthropological understanding. Carolina Némethy takes this processual understanding of multimodality further through what she terms multimodal patchwork ethnography. Her research on medicinal plants and traditional Chinese medicine is presented through *Plant Denizens*, an interactive exposition on the Research Catalogue that brings together different ethnographic "patches" and makes the research process and the researcher's positionality more visible. Némethy thus asks how such a multimodal approach can enhance self-reflexivity through feedback and interaction. Barbara Turk Niskač, in turn, explores what happens when ethnographic material is translated into animation. Based on childhood memories of agricultural work and changing landscapes in Bela Krajina, six short animations created with illustrator and animation director Zarja Menart bring human-environmental relations into view. At the same time, Turk Niskač traces the collaborative process of selecting, interpreting, and transforming ethnographic material for a new medium.

Questions of collaboration and participation are central also in Ana Sarah Lunaček Brumen's contribution. Drawing on her long-term research with a Tuareg family in Agadez, Niger, she discusses photovoice as a method that allows interlocutors to foreground aspects of their everyday lives that matter to them. She shows how participatory photography can reshape research relationships and open new perspectives on gender, values, and aspirations. Sanja Potkonjak, Iva Grubiša, Petra Kelemen, Nevena Škrbić Alempijević, and Kristina Vugdelija move these questions into urban space and the classroom, using counter-mapping and co-theorizing to engage with postindustrial ruinous postscapes in Zagreb. Their workshops show the pedagogical potential of multimodality, as students collectively reimagine contested urban sites and their

possible futures. Finally, Nataša Rogelja Caf returns to the textual, while questioning the conventions of anthropological writing itself. Through essays produced within walkinars (*hodinars*) – walking-writing seminars situated between fieldwork and analysis – she approaches the essay as a method of inquiry in which analysis itself can emerge. Its nonlinear, meandering, slow, and "disobedient" qualities open questions about what may be lost when anthropological knowledge is confined to more conventional forms of scholarly writing.

Taken together, the contributions suggest that multimodality lies not simply in the multiplication of media or research outputs, but in the possibilities that emerge between different ways of researching, knowing, and representing.

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