# Traditiones

**55** | 2 | 2026

TRADITIONES

ISSN 0352-0447 (tisk / print) | ISSN 1855-6396 (splet / online)

**TRADITIONES**

Zbornik Inštituta za slovensko narodopisje in Glasbenonarodopisnega inštituta Znanstvenoraziskovalnega centra Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti / Journal of the Institute of Slovenian Ethnology and Institute of Ethnomusicology at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

*Glavni in odgovorni urednik / Editor-in-Chief*
Miha Kozorog

*Glavni urednici / Chief Editors*
Tatiana Bajuk Senčar, Rebeka Kunej

*Urednici tematskega zvezka / Guest Editors*
Ana Svetel, Manca Filak

*Uredniški odbor / Editorial Board*
Saša Babič, Barbara Ivančič Kutin, Mojca Kovačič, Drago Kunej, Rok Mrvič, Marjeta Pisk, Dan Podjed

*Mednarodni uredniški svet / International Editorial Council*
Regina Bendix (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen), Tatiana Bužeková (Univerzita Komenského), Jurij Fikfak (ZRC SAZU), Valentina Gulin Zrnić (Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku), Lojze Lebič (SAZU), Helena Ložar – Podlogar (ZRC SAZU), Maria Małanicz-Przybylska (Uniwersytet Warszawski), Susana Sardo (Universidade de Aveiro), Ingrid Slavec Gradišnik (ZRC SAZU), Jaro Stacul (Uniwersytet Warszawski), Marija Stanonik (SAZU), Kendra Stepputat (Kunstuniversität Graz), Maruška Svašek (Queen's University Belfast), David Verbuč (Univerza v Ljubljani)

*Naslov uredništva / Editorial Address*
Traditiones, ZRC SAZU, Novi trg 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija
Spletna stran / Website: http://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/traditiones

*Založnika / Publishers*
Založba ZRC in / and Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti / Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

*Letna naročnina / Annual Subscription*
Za posameznike 30 €, za ustanove 90 €, za študente 15 €; posamična številka: za posameznike 15 €, za ustanove 40 €. Revija izhaja letno v treh zvezkih. / 30 € for individuals, 90 € for institutions, 15 € for students; Single issue: 15 € for individuals, 40 € for institutions. The journal is published yearly in three issues.

*Naročila / Orders*
Založba ZRC, Novi trg 2, SI–1001 Ljubljana, Slovenija, e-pošta / e-mail: narocanje@zrc-sazu.si

*Tisk / Printed by*
Cicero Begunje, d. o. o.

*Naklada / Print Run*
300

Copyright 2026 avtorji



Revija *Traditiones* je vključena v naslednje podatkovne zbirke / The Journal *Traditiones* is included in the following databases: Anthropological Index Online; ERIH – European Reference Index for the Humanities; FRANCIS – Institut de l'information scientifique et techniques (CNRS); IBZ – International Bibliography of Periodical Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences); MLA International Bibliography; Ulrich's International Periodical Directory; Scopus.

Revija izhaja s pomočjo Javne agencije za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije. / The Journal is published with the support of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

# Traditiones

**55** | 2 | 2026

TRADITIONES

ZRC SAZU

SLOVENSKA AKADEMIJA ZNANOSTI IN UMETNOSTI

# Contents / Vsebina

## MULTIMODAL RESEARCH AND REPRESENTATIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGY
## VEČNAČINSKE RAZISKAVE IN REPREZENTACIJE V ANTROPOLOGIJI

Guest Editors / Urednici tematskega zvezka: Ana Svetel, Manca Filak


Ana Svetel, Manca Filak
7 Introduction (*Uvodnik*)

Manca Filak
11 Ethnographic Film in the Advent of Multimodal Anthropology (*Etnografski film v času večnačinske antropologije*)

Carolina Némethy
33 Expositions for a Multimodal Patchwork Ethnography (*Predstavitve za večnačinsko mozaično etnografijo*)

Barbara Turk Niskač
57 Multimodal Encounters: Animating Childhood Memories in Changing Landscapes (*Večnačinska srečanja: oživljanje spominov na otroštvo v spreminjajočih se krajinah*)

Sarah Lunaček Brumen
83 Photovoice as a Complementary Approach with a Tuareg Family in Agadez, Niger (*Fotopripoved kot dopolnilni pristop z družino Tuaregov v Agadezu v Nigru*)

Sanja Potkonjak, Iva Grubiša, Petra Kelemen, Nevena Škrbić Alempijević, Kristina Vugdelija
109 Counter-Mapping and Co-Theorizing Ruinous Postscapes (*Protikartiranje in skupno premišljevanje krajin ruševin*)

Nataša Rogelja Caf
133 On the Essay's Place in Scientific Writing: Toward a Disobedient Epistemology (*O mestu eseja v znanstvenem pisanju: k neposlušni epistemologiji*)

# MULTIMODAL RESEARCH AND REPRESENTATIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGY



# VEČNAČINSKE RAZISKAVE IN REPREZENTACIJE V ANTROPOLOGIJI

Traditiones 55 (2): 7–10 | COBISS: 1.20 | CC BY 4.0 | DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2026550201

# 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.

## References

Collins, Samuel, Matthew Durington, and Harjant Gill. 2021. The Uncertain Present and the Multimodal Future. *American Anthropologist* 123 (1): 191–193. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13535.

Collins, Samuel Gerald and Matthew Durington. 2024. *Multimodal Methods in Anthropology.* London, New York: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003330851.

Takaragawa, Shion, Thomas L. Smith, Kate Hennessy, Pilar Alvarez Astacio, Jin Chio, Clare Nye, and Sucharita Shankar. 2019. Bad Habitus: Anthropology in the Age of the Multimodal. *American Anthropologist* 121 (2): 517–524. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13265.

Westmoreland, Mark R. 2022. Multimodality: Reshaping Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 51: 173–194. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-121319-071409.

Traditiones 55 (2): 11–32 | COBISS: 1.01 | CC BY 4.0 | DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2026550202

# Ethnographic Film in the Advent of Multimodal Anthropology

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

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.

---

[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.

## Acknowledgements

The film *Šola za življenje* (School for Life) and the dissertation *Vizualna etnografija vsakdanjega življenja gospodinj v Sloveniji* (Visual Ethnography of Housewives' Everyday Life in Slovenia) were funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding no. P6-0088).

## 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.

## References


Borjan, Etami. 2020. Izazovi dokumentarnog filma u doba novih medija. *Filozofska Istraživanja* 40 (4): 699–711. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21464/fi40403.

Brumen, Borut. 2000. *Sveti Peter in njegovi časi: socialni spomini, časi in identitete v istrski vasi Sv. Peter.* Ljubljana: Založba /*cf.

Clifford, James and George E. Marcus. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Collins, Samuel Gerald, Matthew S. Durington, and Harjant Gill. 2017. Multimodality: An Invitation. *Multimodal Anthropologies* 119 (1): 142–153. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12826.

Collins, Samuel Gerald and Matthew S. Durington. 2024. *Multimodal Methods in Anthropology.* New York: Routledge.

Cool, Jennifer. 2014. Gardening Metadata in the New Media Ecology: A Manifesto (of Sorts) for Ethnographic Film. *American Anthropologist* 116 (1): 173–178. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12081.

Cox, Rupert and Christopher Wright. 2019. Blurred Visions: Reflecting Visual Anthropology. In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Anthropology* 2, eds. Richard Cox, Christopher Wright, Rupert Fardon, and John Gledhill, 116–129. London: SAGE.

Crawford, Peter Ian. 1992. Film as Discourse: The Invention of Anthropological Realities. In *Film as Ethnography*, ed. Peter Ian Crawford, 66–84. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press.

Dattatreyan, Ethiraj and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón. 2019. Introduction: Multimodal Anthropology and the Politics of Invention. *American Anthropologist* 121 (1): 220–228. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13183.

Favero, Paolo. 2014. Learning to Look beyond the Frame: Reflections on the Changing Meaning of Images in the Age of Digital Media Practices. *Visual Studies* 29 (2): 166–179. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2014.887269.

Feld, Steven. 2005. Places Sensed, Sensed Places: Toward a Sensuous Epistemology of Environments. In *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes, 179–191. Oxford, New York: Berg.

Filak, Manca. 2017. A Long Term Visual Ethnography in a Bosnian Village: Tracking Epistemological and Ontological Issues. *EthnoAnthropoZoom* 16: 252–303.

Filak, Manca. 2019. On the Fields of Tobacco: Changing Perspectives and Expanding Methodologies through Visual Ethnography. *Entanglements: Experiments in Multimodal Ethnography* 2 (2): 101–110.

Filak, Manca. 2023. Gospodinje, matere in učiteljice: upravljanje s časom pri družinah, ki svoje otroke šolajo na domu. *Etnolog* 33: 39–59.

Filak, Manca. 2025. *Vizualna etnografija vsakdanjega življenja gospodinj v Sloveniji.* PhD thesis. Ljubljana: Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

Filak, Manca. 2026. Home, Family, and Intimate Spaces. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Ethnographic Film and Video*, ed. Phillip Vannini, 319–328. London: Routledge.

Gill, Harjant. 2019. Multimodality and the Future of Anthropological Research and Scholarship. *Arts & International Affairs* 4 (1). URL: https://theartsjournal.net/2019/03/28/multimodality-anthropology/ (accessed 2.9.2021).

Grasseni, Cristina. 2011. Skilled Visions: Toward an Ecology of Visual Inscriptions. In *Made to Be Seen: Perspectives on the History of Visual Anthropology*, eds. Marcus Banks and Jay Ruby, 19–44. London: University of Chicago Press.

Grimshaw, Anna and Amanda Ravetz. 2009. *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life.* Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Grimshaw, Anna. 2021. The Multipart Film: Extended Anthropological Analysis and Non-Textual Forms. *Visual Studies* 36 (1): 51–62. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2020.1763195.

Grimshaw, Anna. 2022. Extending the Frame: Ethnographic Film and the Potential of Multipart Work. *Visual Anthropology Review* 38 (2): 212–232. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12276.

Gullestad, Marianne. 1985. *Kitchen-Table Society: A Case Study of the Family Life and Friendships of Young Working-Class Mothers in Urban Norway.* Oslo, New York: Oxford University Press, Irvington-on-Hudson.

Guzman, Elena H. and Emily Hong. 2022. Feminist Sensory Ethnography. *Visual Anthropology Review* 38 (2): 184–210. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12273.

Hillman, Rosie Reed. 2023. Emotion, Identity, and the Dissenting Gaze: Documenting the Self in Early Motherhood. *MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture* 5. URL: https://maifeminism.com/emotion-identity-the-dissenting-gaze-documenting-the-self-in-early-motherhood/ (accessed 25.11.2024).

Holtedahl, Lisbet. 2023. *Maïné-Soroa*. Tromsø: Madame Lisbet.

Howes, David. 2005. Introduction: Empire of the Senses. In *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes, 1–17. Oxford, New York: Berg.

Heider, Karl G. 1976. *Ethnographic Film.* Austin, London: University of Texas Press.

Jackson, Michael. 1996. Introduction: Phenomenology, Radical Empiricism, and Anthropological Critique. In *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, ed. Michael Jackson, 1–50. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Janssen, Toril. 2009. *Behind the Eye: Reflexive Methods in Culture Studies, Ethnographic Film, and Visual Media.* NAFA Series 4. Aarhus: Nordic Anthropological Film Association & Intervention Press.

Križnar, Naško. 1996. *Vizualne raziskave v etnologiji.* Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU.

Križnar, Naško. 2009. Podobe kulture v vizualni etnografiji. *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnography SASA* LVI (1–2): 131–140.

Kusenbach, Margarethe. 2003. Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool. *Ethnography* 4 (3): 455–485. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/146613810343007.

Lunaček Brumen, Sarah. 2018. V iskanju skupne antropologije. *Glasnik Slovenskega etnološkega društva* 58 (3–4): 91–106.

Luttrell, Wendy. 2010. "A Camera Is a Big Responsibility": A Lens for Analysing Children's Visual Voices. *Visual Studies* 25: 225–237. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2010.523274.

MacDougall, David. 2005. *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses.* Princeton, New York: Princeton University Press.

MacDougall, David. 2019. *The Looking Machine: Essays on Cinema, Anthropology and Documentary Filmmaking.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

MacDougall, David. 2022. *The Art of the Observer: A Personal View of Documentary.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Magnusson, Jón Bjarki. 2021. Saved by the (Half) Elves. *Anthrovision: Vaneasa Online Journal* 9 (2): 1–27. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/anthrovision.9091.

Mannay, Dawn. 2014. Who Should Do the Dishes Now? Exploring Gender and Housework in Contemporary Urban South Wales. *Contemporary Wales* 27: 21–39.

Mannay, Dawn, Jordon Creaghan, Dunla Gallagher, Ruby Marzella, Sherelle Mason, Melanie Morgan, and Aimee Grant. 2018. Negotiating Closed Doors and Constraining Deadlines: The Potential of Visual Ethnography to Effectually Explore Private and Public Spaces of Motherhood and Parenting. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 47 (6): 758–781. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241617744858.

Ochs, Elinor and Tamar Kremer-Sadlik. 2013. The Good Enough Family. In *Fast Forward Family: Home, Work, and Relationships in Middle-Class America*, eds. Elinor Ochs and Tamar Kremer-Sadlik, 232–252. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pink, Sarah. 2004. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life.* Oxford, New York: Berg.

Pink, Sarah. 2007. *Doing Visual Ethnography*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Pink, Sarah. 2008. More Visualizing, More Methodologies: On Video, Reflexivity and Qualitative Research. *The Sociological Review* 49: 586–599. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.00349.

Pink, Sarah. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography.* Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington, DC: SAGE. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249383.

Pink, Sarah. 2011. Multimodality, Multisensoriality and Ethnographic Knowing: Social Semiotics and the Phenomenology of Perception. *Qualitative Research* 11 (3). SAGE. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111399835.

Pixley, Tara. 2021. Reframing the Homescape: Documenting Domesticity during Photography's COVID Turn. *Visual Studies* 36 (2): 106–115. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2021.1915704.

Rose, Gillian. 2016. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Ruby, Jay. 1980. Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology, and Film. *Semiotica* 30 (1–2): 153–178. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.1980.30.1-2.153.

Ruby, Jay. 2000. *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Samuels, David W., Louise Meintjes, Ana Maria Ochoa, and Thomas Porcello. 2010. Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (1): 329–345. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-022510-132230.

Schillaci, Rossella. 2019. Telling a Different Motherhood. *G/s/i Gender/Sexuality/Italy.* URL: https://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/11-raccontare-una-maternita-diversa/ (accessed 22.3.2021).

Takaragawa, Shion, Thomas L. Smith, Kate Hennessy, Pilar Alvarez Astacio, Jin Chio, Clare Nye, and Sucharita Shankar. 2019. Bad Habitus: Anthropology in the Age of the Multimodal. *American Anthropologist* 121 (2): 517–524. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13265.

Turk Niskač, Barbara. 2011. Some Thoughts on Ethnographic Fieldwork and Photography. *Studia Ethnologica Croatica* 23 (1): 125–148.

Turk Niskač, Barbara. 2012. Predšolski otroci kot soudeleženci v raziskavi: pristop vizualne antropologije. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 249 (3–4): 33–44.

Valentinčič Furlan, Nadja. 2015. Vizualna antropologija in vizualizacija nesnovne kulturne dediščine v Unescovem okviru. In *Dokumentiranje in predstavljanje nesnovne kulturne dediščine s filmom*, ed. Nadja Valentinčič Furlan, 97–108. Ljubljana: Slovenski etnografski muzej.

Vávrová, Daniela. 2014. *Skin Has Eyes and Ears: Audio-Visual Ethnography in a Sepik Society.* PhD thesis. James Cook University. URL: https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/28025/ (accessed 20.7.2018).

Veraart, Orsolya. 2013. *Man of Nature and Me: Research on the Boundary between Anthropology and Art.* MA thesis. Tromsø: University of Tromsø, Arctic University of Norway. URL: https://munin.uit.no/handle/10037/5656 (accessed 12.8.2018).

Viegas, Susana. 2009. Can Anthropology Make Valid Generalizations? Feelings of Belonging in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest. *Social Analysis* 53 (2): 147–162.

Westmoreland, Marc R. 2022. Multimodality: Reshaping Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 51: 173–194. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-121319-071409.

**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.

Traditiones 55 (2): 33–56 | COBISS: 1.01 | CC BY 4.0 | DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2026550203

# Expositions for a Multimodal Patchwork Ethnography

***Carolina Némethy***
Arctic University of Norway, Norway
carolina.nemethy@uit.no
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5224-4806

Based on the author's own Research Catalogue exposition, *Plant Denizens*, this article introduces the Research Catalogue by asking whether and how a multimodal patchwork ethnographic approach can enhance self-reflexivity in ethnographic research. I argue that this methodological approach hinges on the Research Catalogue's shareability and interactivity, allowing feedback on audiovisual material prior to publication, thereby strengthening self-reflexivity through this discursive, negotiatory process.
▪ **Keywords**: TCM (traditional Chinese medicine), multimodality, multispecies ethnography, multimodal patchwork ethnography, research catalogue

Članek na podlagi avtoričine interaktivne predstavitve *Plant Denizens* predstavlja platformo Research Catalogue predstavlja platformo in zastavlja vprašanje, ali lahko večnačinski mozaični etnografski pristop poglobi samorefleksivnost v etnografskem raziskovanju in na kakšen način. Avtorica trdi, da ta metodološki pristop temelji na deljivosti in interaktivnosti platforme Research Catalogue, kar omogoča pridobivanje povratnih informacij o avdiovizualnem gradivu pred objavo. Diskurzivni in pogajalski proces v ozadju posamičnih objav po avtoričinih ugotovitvah prispeva k poglabljanju samorefleksivnosti v etnografskem raziskovanju.
▪ **Ključne besede**: TKM (tradicionalna kitajska medicina), večnačinskost, večvrstna etnografija, večnačinska mozaična etnografija, raziskovalni katalog

## Introduction

This article explores the overlap between multimodal and patchwork ethnography as methodologies, offering opportunities to rethink the researcher's personal sphere in relation to the field as a productive component of knowledge production. It does so through the author's ethnographic exposition *Plant Denizens* on the Research Catalogue (RC)[1] – an open platform that allows collaborative artistic research, as well as self-publishing and peer review, and is well suited for assembling and displaying heterogenous audiovisual media alongside texts. I examine the Research Catalogue in line with multimodal methods that seek to engage with the diverse media forms that are continuously expanding alongside traditional forms of ethnographic writing (Collins et al., 2017) as well as patchwork ethnography, which explores the links between researchers' lives and working conditions and ethnography.

[1] *Plant Denizens* is available at https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3291338/3291339.

Ethnographic writing can be explored as a multifaceted process, layered in and beyond text, weaving in our senses and ourselves. Academic institutions have long imposed a barrier between the researcher's subjective entanglements in the field and the abstractions of research (Storaas, 2009), labeling any encroachment as some form of navel-gazing self-indulgence. However, the circumstances surrounding researchers, as well as their positionality, have grown increasingly relevant. Ever since the *Writing Culture* turn of the 1980s and 1990s which challenged anthropological authority, important discussions about researchers' positionality have developed (Clifford, Marcus, 1986; Abu-Lughod, 2006). Over the years, the importance of documenting the research process while reflecting on who the researcher is and how they relate to the field and the discipline has grown and developed. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of considering how researchers' diverse working conditions impact their research became a key concern from which the patchwork ethnographic methodology stems. Patchwork ethnography considers the changing lives and working conditions of researchers to be an important reflexive component in ethnographic writing (Günel, Watanabe, 2024). It offers "a new methodological and theoretical approach to ethnographic research, which attends to how changing living and working conditions are irrevocably transforming knowledge production" (Watanabe et al., 2019). As such, it reconstitutes the researchers as an inevitable part of their research. The Research Catalogue offers potential to create space for research material often deemed too personal or marginal to text written in formal, academic terminology. It does so by embedding various discursive practices into one interactive and multimodal exposition, in which video, text and other media may be explored in parallel.

In the exposition presented here, my ethnographic research on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) at a Chinese medical university reveals frictions between my positionality as a foreign researcher while drawing on ways in which various contexts converge with my personal family stories. This example reveals how the disseminated elements are part of the ethnographer's negotiations in the field. The videos, for instance, were sent back to the informants for review, and various translations were negotiated while producing the subtitles. Furthermore, the ethnographer's positionality becomes an inevitable part of these negotiations. The Research Catalogue can accommodate various ethnographic elements that researchers gather, reflect on, and use to craft stories. These elements may be photos, sketches, fieldnotes, or videos, among many other materials that make up ethnographic fieldwork as well as how researchers relate to it.

This article is based on my own ethnographic research experience that was part of my dissertation on the importance of intergenerational ethnobotanical knowledge in establishing a sense of belonging through the relationship between people and plants. As part of this work, I published the exposition *Plant Denizens* to illustrate my research process and think through worlds built around medicinal plants through TCM. I addition, I created a semi-animated ethnographic film, the discussion of which goes

beyond the scope of this article.[2] The journey started with a Chinese journal entry in my mother's drawer, documenting her treatment for follicular lymphoma from 2002 onward. Through the course of my research, I explored the herbs she gathered as part of her lifelong healing journey[3] while unpacking the journal entry's context of institutional TCM at a Chinese medical university in Zhejiang, China. On the one hand, the journal entry[4] inspired my mother's practice of gathering herbs associated with her homeland in Poland, despite living in Sweden. This highlighted not only belonging through migration, but also how some herbal medicinal plants transcend national boundaries, drawing foragers like my mother into territories where specific plants spread. On the other hand, the journal entry itself included herbs grounded in TCM. This institutional context differed radically from gathering herbs in Sweden. In my work, I found how two radically different ontologies, like that of Polish herbs and TCM could merge and contrast in surprising ways, yielding transformative potential. The journal entry served as a starting point in my field research, which I conducted at my mother's home in Sweden and at a TCM institution in China. Each time I was presented to someone new at the institution, my interest in my mother's journal entry was reiterated as an explanation or even justification for what I was doing in China. I argue that this process of creating a particular self-narrative is necessarily a "patchwork" (Watanabe et al., 2019), drawing on the self-reflexive process through which a researcher's positionality and sometimes even personal relationships to the field are revealed as part of their research.

Following a brief description of the background to my doctoral research experience, patchwork, and multimodal ethnography, and how I negotiated the content of the Research Catalogue with my informants, I introduce the opportunities offered through the Research Catalogue in terms of user engagement and production of ethnographic material. I guide the reader through the various sections of the exposition *Plant Denizens*, reflecting on how the material came about, the open-endedness offered by situating the audiovisual elements alongside text, and the opportunity to negotiate self-presentation through the heterogenous elements displayed on the Research Catalogue. I finally conclude that a patchwork ethnographic approach is inherently self-reflexive, yet the multimodality offered through the Research Catalogue's interactivity and sharing features makes it possible to respond to the material presented. A multimodal patchwork ethnographic approach hinges on the Research Catalogue's shareability and interactivity, allowing respondents to comment and give feedback on audiovisual material prior to its publication, thereby enhancing self-reflexivity through this discursive, negotiatory process.

---

[2] The film *Weedy Kin* will be available at film festivals, and it may be published online in the future. The Research Catalogue only presents the trailer.

[3] This is presented separately in *Weedy Kin* and elaborated on in the dissertation.

[4] See the upper left image in Figure 1, or the upper left image of the exposition *Plant Denizens* on the Research Catalogue.

## Background

My doctoral research began during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like many other researchers, the restrictions posed by the pandemic were a deciding factor in my decision to start fieldwork from home in Sweden, where I was staying with my mother and grandmother. I was among the many anthropologists who had embraced the patchwork ethnographic methodological approach during COVID-19, when discussion around the patchwork approach led to publications discussing methodology (Fratini et al., 2022; Günel et al., 2024; Günel, Watanabe, 2024). Although I initially understood patchwork ethnography as a use of both online and offline ethnographic approaches, it was not so much the physical limitations that defined the methodology as the urgency it spurred among researchers. The working conditions of the researchers themselves, together with the conditions they worked in, were becoming an increasingly important matter of discussion. However, it also became clearer that ethnographic researchers have always done patchwork ethnography (Günel et al., 2024). Defining the methodology as a patchwork revealed the nonfinality of the ethnographic process, essentially exposing the inner, intimate lives of researchers as an essential part of doing ethnography. Coming to terms with my own patchiness along this ethnographic journey, interrupted and disrupted by the pandemic, global crises, and the impossibility of long-term fieldwork, meant writing with rather than against these obstacles.

The "manifesto for patchwork ethnography" (Günel et al., 2020), published during the COVID-19 pandemic, spoke to the lives of many researchers working from home at the time. When it was published, a stream of researchers started responding, articulating the consequences of their working conditions during the pandemic.[5] From research experiences of transnational family mobility (Ammann, 2021; Howald, Jousset, 2024), anthropologists' self-fictions during fieldwork (Chua, 2021), and vulnerability and fatigue (Alava, Robertson, 2022) to grieving the death of one's own ethnographic fieldwork (Fratini et al., 2022), patchwork ethnography resonated with researchers from around the world. These works revealed that working from home was in no way unique to the pandemic. Anthropologists have long been doing fieldwork from home (Hannerz, 2010; Pink, 2020). However, the patchwork methodology approaches reflections of "what forms of knowledge and methodologies emerge *in* and *through* researchers' life and work commitments" (Günel et al., 2024: 212). These realities highlight that requirements to do long-term fieldwork are fetishized and in fact far from common ethnographic research experiences (Günel, Watanabe, 2024). In doing so, they recognize the potentials of stitching together fragments of fieldwork and personal life. Building on this methodological approach, I suggest a multimodal patchwork ethnography to accommodate

[5] In the years following the manifesto, a community of patchwork ethnographers emerged; see https://www.patchworkethnography.com.

the various media and methodological media engagements of the patchwork approach. Drawing on *Plant Denizens*, I suggest that the Research Catalogue is an exceptional tool for engaging with and presenting a multimodal patchwork ethnography.

What is meant by the multimodal aspect of this methodology extends beyond the digital dissemination offered by the Research Catalogue. Multimodality refers to "the fact that ethnographic representation and co-production is itself multimodally embedded in diverse media" (Grasseni et al., 2021: 2). As such, it emphasizes the processes of co-producing ethnographic representation, rather than reducing it to the representation in and of itself. My doctoral material included the use of audiovisual material as a communicative modality, enabling me to share work in progress with informants from China with whom I would negotiate any adjustments. Photos, videos, texts, and audio recordings were part of a negotiatory process through which my presentation of TCM took form. Eventually, these diverse media were presented on the Research Catalogue. Gathering this diverse collection of media was both challenging and helpful. On the one hand, it offered a sense of transparency between me and those involved because I was obliged to share all content and data gathered at the institution. On the other hand, it necessitated complex ethical considerations of studying at a Chinese institution while also, in a sense, studying with students and researchers and being studied by medical specialists. *Plant Denizens* allowed me to engage with these considerations separately, elaborating on them in my dissertation while presenting the final constellation in one exposition with text and conceptual visualizations.

At first, the multimodal approach seemed to involve everything, and my main concern was how to organize such heterogenous media – videos, photos, sounds, drawings, and fieldnotes, among other data – while also making sense of the material, deciding how to put it together, and keeping track of all the ethical considerations, which often differed depending on the material gathered. This process reflects an inherent tension between abundance and analytical coherence that characterizes multimodal work through an ongoing sorting of diverse media (Waltorp, 2021). My initial attempt was to make an ethnographic film following the journal entry from my mother's drawer by tracing its context back to China, where the herbs originate. This was naïve in that it did not consider the interests of the TCM institution I was engaged with. The heterogeneity initially manifested as a conflict between my own interests in learning about the journal entry's contents and the TCM institution's interest in promoting TCM. This meant I needed to engage with the face of TCM that the institution wanted me to present to the world. This negotiation of face became the process through which my exposition took form, as a collective self-presentation of the TCM institution through the people I engaged with. The work reveals this process of moving away from the family story while also accommodating it as part of a self-reflexive journey during my stay researching TCM in China.

The Research Catalogue presents a selection of media that highlight a key analytical tension through which the patchwork methodological process is revealed. The tension explored here is twofold. First, it carries a personal element through the Chinese journal entry from my mother's drawer, documenting her treatment and recovery from 2002. This aspect becomes not only a point of encounter between my mother and TCM, but also a representation of my "self" in encountering the TCM institution in China as an outsider. Second, the institution itself engages in forms of self-presentation throughout my stay in China because informants highlight its distinctly Chinese aspects. My role transforms into that of a mediator with the task of presenting TCM as a modern, national project, responding to the collective self-presentation of the institution.

As an outsider in China, bringing my mother's Chinese journal entry revealed a personal link to the topic; however, my distance to the institutional context highlighted important differences through which my lack of expertise necessitated a form of "studying up" (Nader, 2018) and approaching managers, researchers, and doctors at the TCM institution. Through an openness to learn about TCM through my mother's journal entry, my position as a visiting doctoral student in China was liminal in that my body and my work did not fit neatly into the academic categories of the medical institution I was in, occupying the "interstices [...] the betweenness or in-between spaces of academia" (Howald, Jousset, 2024). I navigated this liminality through occupying a fluid role, spending time with students while joining managers and scholars on field trips to factories and cultivation centers, and being a patient at the local clinic. Being a patient was a deliberate choice to use health issues such as sleep deprivation as part of an embodied methodology, allowing me as a researcher to become vulnerable to and experience TCM treatment firsthand. Although my intention as a patient was to come closer to the experience documented in my mother's journal entry, my body's state became a topic of discussion between the practitioner and other researchers, revealing surprising comments related to my positionality as a foreigner with a body connected to a different place and lifestyle. I only briefly touch on this aspect here because it goes beyond the scope of this article. For more detail, see the dissertation linked in *Plant Denizens*. In this sense, I was studied as a patient and listed to lectures as a student while studying with researchers and giving presentations at the medical university. Navigating what was expected of me as a visiting scholar while not fitting into the medical university's categories of academic work, my engagement with audiovisual media became part of a process of negotiating the self-presentation of TCM in China through patchwork ethnography. The material comprising my exposition is a result of these negotiatory efforts through which informants commented on the material and how it should present them as well as how it should represent TCM as China's national medicine.

## Engaging users

The Research Catalogue platform exposes artistic practices as research through "expositions", promoted by the *Journal for Artistic Research* (*JAR*)[6] through which Research Catalogue expositions are published on the same interface. Although my own research was not artistic research per se, the audiovisual elements and ethnographic conceptual drawings likewise reveal otherwise unconventional research practices in a discipline of words (Mead, 2009; Saxer, 2024). Each exposition – derived from Latin *exponere* 'to set forth' (Borgdorff, Schwab, 2013) – could be described as a comprehensive display of research. As such, it exposes the patchwork that is essentially part of all ethnographic fieldwork, however black-boxed it may have seemed until recently (Günel, Watanabe, 2024). Not only does this patchwork consist of doing ethnography from home, but it includes the ethnographer herself as a patchwork; that is, "a figure composed of different parts that move constantly in and out of view, while sustaining multiple fictions and relations" (Chua, 2021: 153). As Chua points out, ethnographers sustain self-fictions that reveal only certain aspects, but which come to comprise themselves in negotiating relationships throughout fieldwork. My exposition begins with how I came to present myself through a Chinese journal entry and my family story behind it at a medical university in China. This presentation is harnessed by the TCM institution to involve me in presenting TCM as a modern, national project in China. The journey from my own affiliation with TCM through the journal entry to my gradual affiliation with the TCM institution required a constant consideration of potential users navigating the open-ended trajectories of two worlds in-the-making, converging and contrasting.

*Plant Denizens* is an interactive poster (see Figure 1). The collage of images, sounds, videos, and texts can be explored by users. Engaging with users, the Research Catalogue is an interactive form of dissemination, allowing an engaged audience to "co-produce" (Grasseni et al., 2021) the experience of the interface. Users engage in acts of "modification and reciprocal change" (Favero, 2014: 167), granting them a sense of control in navigating the digital content. The degree of control depends on how the material is presented and the kinds of choices users are given. However, the interactive placement of images already ties the images to broader social, material, and spatial contexts, inviting users to further bridge theory and practice (Favero, 2014). Rather than only being a means of dissemination, I saw this as an opportunity to document my research process, eventually integrating it into the final output. Not only did this goal motivate me to gather and organize heterogeneous media, but it helped me think through my material with constant consideration for how it may make sense to a potential user.

Although the exposition is not an interactive documentary, or iDoc, multimodal anthropology explores similar user engagements in the context of iDocs. Paulo Favero

[6] Available at http://www.jar-online.net.

(2017) explored them as tools for producing ethnographic evidence. He argues that it is the open-endedness of thin description that should be embraced and that writing generates unavoidable reductions. iDocs provide an opportunity for viewers to navigate documentaries as they desire, lending them a sense of agency in how the story progresses, and thus a more "open-ended observation" (ibid.: 61). Collins et al. (2017) looked into how the shift from visual anthropology to multimodality has the potential to transform disciplinary boundaries, demanding that anthropology be highlighted as a "work in progress" (ibid.: 4). This open-endedness and nonfinality allows researchers to enter a dialectic with a viewer, demanding that researchers lose control of their "story" (Favero, 2017: 58). The loss of control is precisely what manifested during my fieldwork and became good to think with as both a methodological approach and an analytical tool. Consideration for the user puts emphasis on the self-presentation of TCM, which became an important aspect of my dissertation because my interlocutors focused on its presentation to potential users.

Although I carried with me the story of my mother's Chinese journal entry and her recovery, it played an entirely different role at the TCM institution. My interlocutors in China agreed to publish the work as part of my research under the condition that it remain a research-oriented part of my dissertation, and that I would present TCM in a positive light. This process of negotiating how I presented TCM with others at the institution and the integration of the final material into the Research Catalogue is what I mean by the self-presentation of TCM here. Despite being requested to present a coherent image of TCM, the material is divided and presented one context at a time, breaking with the idea of one coherent self-image. Although the Research Catalogue allows me to publish the material as research, how I presented it demanded negotiations. In no way could I present the entirety of what TCM is about in one dissertation, let alone one exposition. I was guided through various institutional contexts, a selection of which ended up being presented on the Research Catalogue after complex ethical considerations between individuals and the institutional context that go beyond the scope of this article. Here, I limit my inquiry to the negotiation processes that informed the presentation of TCM in *Plant Denizens*. In what follows, I summarize the exposition's layout, the parts of which I gradually elaborate through this article.

The contexts included in the exposition are a TCM institution, a pharmacy, a factory, and an herb identification fieldtrip with students. These contexts were included for acceptance of the footage, images, and texts by the people involved. I later added the video collage *Fragile Roots* to the Research Catalogue, presenting an example of complex environmental considerations through a medicinal orchid, as well as a link to a game called Spot the Plant,[7] revealing a "cryptic" medicinal plant that responds to

[7] This game was shared with me by a biologist I interviewed, who agreed I could link to the game on the Research Catalogue and in the dissertation.

human extraction through camouflage, decentering the otherwise all-too-human perspective of plants as passive resources. As the user scrolls from the top left image of the exposition, the embodiment of medicinal plants is revealed through various contexts, eventually reaching a selection of environments where medicinal plants grow. To illustrate this move, I included two conceptual drawings and the poem *Ode to the Weeds*. These sketches and creative writing were part of my research process in making sense of the material. The horizontal axis at the top leads through a brief description of my mother's relationship to the journal entry to the trailer for an ethnographic film called *Weedy Kin*.[8] An English translation of the journal entry reveals my mother's bodily transformation throughout her treatment. Alongside the translation, various "gatherings" reveal contexts in which various herbs are brought together – be it in a prescription, at a pharmacy, in a factory, or outside. Because gathering medicinal plants was familiar to me from home, and this was the reason my mother found TCM familiar, I saw the various institutional contexts as "gatherings", in which herbs were brought together. This focus highlighted the relationships between herbs, the body, and the environment rather than following an individual species. The additional environmental contexts were to situate TCM within the environmental tensions the institution was dealing with, further elaborated in the dissertation itself. This ethnographic patchwork illustrates a tension between national forms of belonging and a planetary belonging, in which plants are agential coresidents. The face of TCM revealed on the Research Catalogue is one that grapples with this tension in response to the rapidly transforming modern world. This is a process that is open-ended, partial, and essentially a work in progress.

## A multifaceted patchwork

As a configuration of ethnographic patches, *Plant Denizens* resembles the patchiness of the scattered plants explored in the project, encompassing the multiple sites presented in parallel. These patches consisted of medicinal plants used at home and in China, presenting the ethnographic exploration of the researcher's personal sphere of home in relation to the field. Although the two contexts diverge along separate axes, their various elements converge and contrast. In this section, I gradually break down each element of *Plant Denizens*.

### *The journal entry*

The exposition *Plant Denizens* unpacks a Chinese medical prescription in a journal entry found in my mother's drawer during the COVID-19 pandemic. The prescription

[8] *Weedy Kin* is a film that constitutes another part of my dissertation, focusing on how the journal entry informed my mother's own herbal practices. This is a separate narrative beyond the scope of this article.

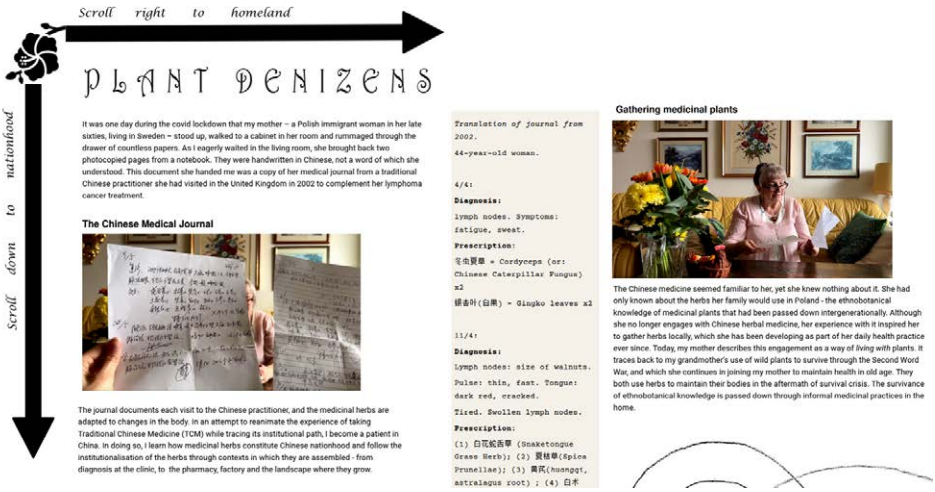


Figure 1: Screenshot of the exposition *Plant Denizens*.

was given to her in 2002, as part of complementary treatment for follicular lymphoma. Following this treatment, she began a lifelong practice of gathering medicinal herbs. The Research Catalogue centers around that experience through highlighting the transformative capabilities of medicinal plants – knowledge of which is often passed on intergenerationally. Although my mother knew nothing about the traditions of Chinese medicine that inspired her to gather herbs, the journal entry is a point of encounter through which these unfamiliar remedies transformed her body. Beginning with the document itself, the user may either scroll right to explore the brief "homeland" trajectory or scroll down to explore the "nationhood" trajectory and a translation of the journal entry from Chinese to English. These trajectories complement and reflect the analytical paths explored in my dissertation.

In my dissertation, the layout of the exposition *Plant Denizens* mirrors my own journey to making sense of how the Chinese journal entry becomes a point of contact between two otherwise distinct ontologies – that of TCM and my family's practice of gathering herbs. This is not unlike what Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing described as "ontic enactments" (Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2019), in which divergent temporalities emerge from friction between disparate differences, eventually coordinating "both difference and touching" (ibid.: 241). I refer to this "touching" to approach my initial wonder at what makes TCM seem so familiar to an herbal practitioner like my mother, referring to an embodied and multisensorial aspect of this familiarity in which the senses are not divided (Dureau et al., 2013). Moving from the impersonal focus on the journal entry itself, it made sense to openly recognize that my mother had been the focus all along. Perhaps her transformative encounter with TCM could be understood as a point

of "touching" in quite a literal sense. After having translated the journal entry, it was clear that it documented her treatment, including intimate, bodily details of her gradual recovery – the beat of her pulse, the color of her tongue, and her complexion—all centered around her body. I purposely blurred this idea of touch to communicate the embodied aspect of my inquiry, in which the overlap between the senses may work to reveal both the effect and affect of medicinal plants, one not being able to exist without the other (Grasseni, 2021). I intended to explore how medicinal herbs come in touch with, and thereby also mediate, our experience of the world. Using heterogenous media, combining audiovisuals and text, was an attempt to come into closer touch with that encounter, and to highlight the agency of medicinal plants. The patchwork could be described as a configuration of differences and "touching" through which the unfamiliar is made familiar, making the Research Catalogue an exemplary tool for disseminating material collected from seemingly divergent sites. This configuration is inevitably sensorial because it attends to the body.

Attending to the researcher's personal sphere has long been explored through works relating to "intimate ethnography" (Waterston, Rylko-Bauer, 2006; Waterston, 2025), paving the way for doing ethnography from home through intimate others at home.[9] My turn toward a more intimate ethnographic approach from the home initially started as an outward-oriented journey, only to come full circle into a "dialectical" (Waterston, 2025) relationship between my personal sphere and the sociopolitical conditions that encompass it, including the otherwise distant context of TCM in China. In this way, intimate others such as family and kin, as well as other species (Ramirez, 2025), may come to be connected to larger events in surprising ways (Walley, Elliott, 2025). The journey is nonlinear and part of a reflexive process through which the researcher becomes aware of her own involvement. This nonlinearity aids ethnographic exploration (Favero, 2017). In the context of interactive forms of dissemination, as Federico Musso suggests, the user is provided with "an agency over narration" (Grasseni et al., 2021: 150). Following the anthropologist's research path through interactive interfaces such as the Research Catalogue may complement classic "thick description" (Geertz, 2005) with sensory, so-called "thin" elements – the elements I initially relegated to my personal folder. This thin description embraces "nonknowing as a stance of suspending the ethnographer's analytic certainties" (Hartigan, 2017: xvi). As part of the embodied experience of doing fieldwork, involving the senses becomes a personal matter involved in exposing the researcher's uncertainties. In my own fieldwork, multisensoriality came to attend to the body embedded in the journal entry itself as simultaneously personal and made tangible. The Chinese journal entry is both material and bodily. On the one

[9] The term *intimate ethnography* variously refers to anthropology at home, autoethnography, native anthropology, or ethnographic memoir (Walley, Elliott, 2025: 122). I refer to intimate ethnography for the sake of simplicity, and also because I find the work of the authors that coined the term, Barbara Rylko-Bauer and Alisse Waterston (2006), relevant to the intimate stories in my work.

hand, it is an artifact from my home that I could carry to China to investigate further, connecting to the topic on a personal level. On the other hand, it documents my mother's bodily transformation that could be explored through her in terms of affect, and through the TCM institution in terms of effect.

***The homeland trajectory***

The homeland trajectory is the upper horizontal axis of the exposition *Plant Denizens*. This trajectory reveals how the Chinese journal entry came to inspire my mother's lifelong practice of gathering medicinal plants to maintain her health in the aftermath of illness. The content is mainly descriptive because the film *Weedy Kin* constitutes a separate part of the dissertation, introduced on the Research Catalogue but presented as a separate work. However, the trailer to the film is viewable and users can search for after it is published online. The exposition summarizes the film, revealing the main story behind the prescription in the journal entry. This story is about my mother's cancer recovery and became an important aspect of my self-presentation at the TCM institution. This self-presentation also became an important aspect of the research process in negotiating my role as a foreign researcher.

The fieldwork began with an outward-facing focus on translating the journal entry, followed by a tentative plan to eventually travel to China to trace the institutional context of the journal entry. This initial plan was impersonal, and I hesitated to make any direct association with myself, my family, or my life. What I had not realized at the time was that the journal entry was already personal, and that what had been handwritten in Chinese was a detailed account of how my mother's body transformed during her treatment. Having already planned a visiting scholarship at a Chinese medical institution to attempt a "follow-the-thing" methodology, I tried in all ways possible to avoid contaminating my research with the personal sphere of home, limiting the journal entry to the drawer where it was found and its broader ties to TCM. Upon doing so, the void of untold stories haunted my dissertation. These stories were recorded, noted, and hidden in a separate folder that I would visit out of my own personal interest. The pieces I eventually sought were in this personal folder, where recordings of my family's testimonies and the trips to gather herbs were becoming increasingly relevant. Journeying into their internal lives seeped into my own reflections on being a researcher.

During fieldwork at the institution in China, I was often expected to be skeptical toward TCM, and people would emphasize TCM as a modern institution with advanced technologies. They often wondered what I was doing there. In response, I reiterated my story from home: "My mother is a cancer survivor. She received TCM as a complementary treatment and I am curious to learn about TCM and the various herbs documented in her journal entry." The reason was concise yet personal. It reveals affect while expressing an openness to learn more and stepping away from the personal, familiar narrative. Because the prescription my mother received was from a clinic in the United

Kingdom in 2002, it did not represent the national, upscaled institution of TCM. This was often pointed out to me as an important difference because so much has changed since then, particularly in response to various crises that transformed TCM. My use of the Research Catalogue mirrors a process through which my story offered an entry to understanding TCM in China, only to be harnessed by the narrative of a modern nation that is nonetheless vulnerable in the context of the Anthropocene.[10]

***The nationhood trajectory***

Throughout my fieldwork at home and in China, the face of TCM was under public scrutiny throughout Western media when stories of the COVID-19 pandemic's origins sought blame in China's trade in exotic animals for TCM. These stories held Orientalist assumptions that were a result of sampling rather than scientific scrutiny: "Scientists were looking for coronaviruses in exotic animals, and they found them" (Kirksey, 2020: 14). However, upon having my mother's journal entry translated and hearing her story, it was revealed to me that all animal ingredients were substituted with plants, minerals, and fungi due to import restrictions at the time. I became curious to know how a plant could possibly substitute for an animal in TCM. This possibility seemed at odds with the media's single-species focus on animals. The exposition reveals a wide range of species, most of which are plants, used in TCM and how they are assessed in assemblages of various herbs rather than single-species narratives. Although I felt lucky to have been officially invited to a Chinese medical institution as a visiting scholar, my recordings, notes, and sketches from that period felt distant and impersonal. Busy researchers, clinical workers, doctors, pharmacists, and factory managers had been incredibly generous to guide me through the institution of TCM. Worried that a foreigner like me would harbor suspicion toward TCM and its legitimacy, they focused on the face work of TCM as a modern, technologized medicine. Having only three and half months to explore the topic, the patches of institutional field sites tracing the trajectory of herbs from field to clinic reflected my own distance as a foreigner.

A contrast between the labeled trajectories as "homeland" and "nationhood" emerges as personal versus impersonal, respectively. This contrasting distance is sensed by the user and distinguishes the family context from that of the institution in China. Scrolling down, one encounters the infrastructures built around the TCM herbs they sustain. The worlds built around the herbs reflect the power herbs are perceived to hold, including and supported by the national narratives around TCM. The further one scrolls down from the initial image of the medical prescription, the more detached it seems from my mother's own, informal practice of gathering herbs. The videos presented reposition my mother's story in the present context of TCM as a modern, upscaled industry while

[10] The term *Anthropocene* was coined by Nobel Prize–winning Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000 to propose a name for the current geologic epoch, in which humans are greatly influencing the Earth's ecology.

touching on brief moments when the two trajectories align – the clinic, the dried herbs in the pharmacy, the challenging identification of herbs, and the ongoing consideration for species and environmental tensions. Despite these convergences, the trajectories ultimately diverge and require distinct, place-specific considerations. The exposition's layout thus highlights a key tension between the personal and the institutional context, bringing personal experiences into exchange with broader environmental issues and questions of scale.

Much of the content presented in the exposition is footage I could not use as part of one coherent film. This was due to the complex ethical considerations and sheer complexity of the topic that demanded a more open-ended contextualization, as in interactive platforms. The Research Catalogue affords this possibility and makes it possible to present content often relegated to a visual anthropologist's archive. Several videos along the nationhood trajectory present people through a cartoon filter. While editing the videos, I had initially intended to use animation to anonymize footage in China. This turned out to be possible through the use of the cartoon filter, anonymizing faces in the editing program.[11] This footage is only included on the Research Catalogue, in which many participants preferred not to be identifiable, and in which animation holds the capacity to ensure their anonymity (Hamdy, Moll, 2024). The footage that had not been anonymized in this way was often seen in terms of promotional potential or as a pedagogical tool. The videos were sent back to informants for review on an ongoing basis, becoming a kind of communicative modality through which their presentation of TCM was negotiated. Using my own familiarity with gathering medicines as a starting point, I found the idea of gatherings in terms of assemblages more tangible to follow throughout the contexts. Eventually, I presented the exposition in a way that mirrored how I tried to think through the material. The user may read the text and choose to watch the videos for a more immersive experience.

***The gatherings***

As one scrolls down *Plant Denizens*, four "gatherings" unfold various assemblages of TCM herbs across different contexts. These contexts reveal the diverse practices through which medicinal herbs are gathered, beginning with the body in the clinical encounter, the pharmacy where herbs are assembled for patients, the factory where herbs are processed and prepared, and an herb identification class in which herbs are identified and gathered. Each gathering considers the herbs beyond singular species and traces a trajectory of TCM herbs from clinic to field. It made sense to enter into dialogue with the conceptual and methodological tools of science and technology studies (STS), which has long delved into how humans and nonhumans "hold together". This use of "gatherings" is inspired by the STS approach to assemblages to illustrate how holding

[11] DaVinci Resolve was used for video editing.

together may look through these diverse contexts. The point of this was not to explain what TCM is, but to trace how capturing contexts throughout the TCM institution may reveal a sense of continuity and familiarity. Herbs were indeed gathered, although in different ways. At the same time, discontinuity and difference incidentally emerged into tension within these tropes – for instance, in the different forms of specialized knowledge required in each context.

***Gathering one: The clinic***

Scrolling down the Research Catalogue, one can choose to read the translated prescription from the journal entry and watch a clip of my own clinical diagnosis as a patient. Taken together, these excerpts complement one another, providing details on what clinical diagnosis and treatmentat a TCM clinic may involve. This informs users about the effect of medicinal plants through focusing on the body and the various ways these effects are sensed. The text under the video highlights an ethnographic detail that reveals how TCM theory categorizes the herbs into Confucian hierarchical principles of imperial governance for structuring herbal formulas, each with a specific effect on the body. The names of these categories reveals the broader institutional cultivation of Chinese nationhood through TCM. The purpose of participating as a patient was an attempt to come closer to the embodied experience my mother had of being a patient at a TCM clinic. The direct observation of diagnosis and how it manifested on my own body made the concepts more tangible to someone like me, with no background in TCM theory. Connecting my own illness experience based on specific symptoms to the practitioner's explanation, as well as my own treatment journey, provided sensorial depth to the fieldwork and topic. My mother's journal entry began to feel more familiar, and it became easier to discuss its contents with the practitioner. The diagnostic experience sparked a greater dialogue between me and the practitioner, who could reflect on her observations during my visit.

***Gathering two: The pharmacy***

Gathering two presents the pharmacy where herbal formulas are assembled. The distance posed by the industrialized, high-paced rhythm of work conveyed the institution's large scale. However, the tactility of herbs and the constant opening of drawers and sorting convey an act of gathering and bodily engagement. The pharmacy video was filmed in a way that excluded their faces. This is because the workers wished me to do so, but it also amplified my focus on their rhythm of work, their hands, and the rhythmic soundscape of wooden drawers, rustling herbs, and shuffling feet. The text following the video quotes the lead pharmacist, who explained the coexistence of traditional work with modernized industry. It is an ethnographic excerpt from an interview, emphasizing the centrality of the body in the work, including contamination from herbs and how the drawers are arranged to follow common prescriptions.

***Gathering three: The factory***

The factory clip is followed by two quotes from the factory managers, highlighting the work involved in modernizing China's national medicine. The distance between me and the workers is clear because I could only take photos and promised to anonymize the worker's faces in editing. As such, the images capture only fragments of movement, whereas the audio forms a rhythmic, patterned collage of sounds sampled directly from the factory. The distance sensed between me and the workers mirrors my distance as an outsider being shown factory labor and work processes. An excerpt from one of the factory managers presents how industrial processes follow strands of continuity with traditional practice while also adapting to technological change. The use of technologies in Western medicine is referred to as a strength that TCM harnesses to its own advantage.

***Gathering four: Identifying herbs***

Finally, a video of an herb identification class explores foraging for herbs as a sensorial, bodily practice that is as much defined by "touching" and knowing as it is by the struggle to differentiate and the limits to knowing. Gathering the wrong herbs could have consequences because some plants are poisonous. This practice of gathering plants aligned most with what I was familiar with from home. Despite obvious differences in plant species and the level of formality, I could join students in learning to explore various plants through their sensorial engagement with the environment. The user joins my journey with the class, observing the various ways students learn to differentiate medicinal plants, often in a playful manner. The teacher Guan guides the students throughout the trip, sometimes emphasizing the difference between informal and formal terminology to distinguish the elevated status of institutional TCM. Explanations often include how the herbs affect the body. The text below the video is an excerpt from the trip when the teacher Guan refers to a common Chinese saying, referencing a classical novel, to describe the difference between an herb and its deceptive look-alikes.

***Video collage: Fragile roots***

The lowermost presentation, *Fragile Roots*, is a video collage following a medicinal orchid across two contexts – a tea tree forest in which it thrives with little human intervention, and a cultivation space within the university where it is planted. The section serves as a methodological contrast to the assemblage model discussed earlier. The video collage begins with another separate video created by Sun Fei as part of the promotional purposes of the tea forest owner, Chunliang, on the Chinese social media platform WeChat. It features me while I film him presenting various medicinal orchids in his forest. Following the promotion, the researcher Zhu Bo introduces the cultivation of orchids in the institutional context, after which my video of Chunliang concludes the collage. Each of the videos presents different perspectives – Chunliang's promotion of medicinal herbs growing in his tea forest, the researcher Zhu Bo's institutional

authority and formal knowledge, and my observational video of Chunliang, including my conversations with him. Interestingly, the orchid was seen as somewhat invasive in Chunliang's forest, despite being an endangered species. Upon reviewing the video, the tea forest owner was interested in getting in touch with the researcher presented in the video. The researcher likewise expressed curiosity about the orchid varieties and informal terminology used to describe the orchids. My inclusion of the collage reveals best how my research process took place, traveling between informants and in conversation with their perspectives. The negotiation expanded beyond my own work to become part of a mediated conversation between Chunliang and the researcher.

Although one context presents another institutional cluster, it is instead contrasted with a context in which the same plant thrives in its own habitat in Yunnan, in southwestern China. In both cases, the plant is admired for its medicinal power and is a source of national pride for traditional medicine in China. Focus on one species presents a stark contrast to the previous "gatherings". The video collage reveals what the previous contextual videos could not. The focus is on understanding how the contrast between these contexts reveals important environmental tensions that emerge in single-species narratives that are never just about one species. The orchid was no longer just a medicinal herb, but first and foremost an upscaled commodity, used for cosmetic and medicinal purposes and no longer limited to TCM practice. These environmental tensions lay beyond the formal TCM clinical practice, which emphasizes the substitutability of herbs, and the reason the video collage is placed on the outermost edge of the exposition to follow the conceptual layout.

***A cryptic plant***

The bottom right section of the exposition presents a cryptic plant, the highland fritillaria, which, according to a botanist I met, responds to human harvesting through camouflage. This botanist's theory decenters the otherwise all too human perspective of plants as passive resources. A game, Spot the Plant, created by the botanist's research group, is linked, inviting the user to attempt to find the plant within a limited time. Below the photo and game, an excerpt from our conversation reveals social and environmental tensions with human predation for TCM. The section is placed under conceptual drawings to emphasize the environmental focus and perspectives gained from outside the institutional context. This is the only section in which the user can play a game, engaging with the form of sensory enskillment the botanist is referring to. This enskillment draws on an important tension between skill and environmental vulnerability. Although the game spreads awareness of important environmental issues associated with the plant's endangerment, it also trains the user to recognize a plant that is camouflaging itself from human predation. Tensions between knowledge of plants and the limits to knowing are brought up in different ways throughout the exposition.

***Conceptual drawings and poem***

In between the trajectories, a drawing presents how the two contexts overlap conceptually, reflecting the setup of the exposition itself, in which the agency of medicinal plants extends from the "body" to the "Earth" in an artistic rendering. This visualization was intended to highlight the transformative capabilities of medicinal plants on humans, despite the disproportionality of human influence on the Earth's ecosystem conveyed in the overall work. The drawing is accompanied by another sketch featuring various plants mapped on a body. The two sketches represent how I saw a visceral overlap between the two contexts because the way medicinal plants were approached often mapped onto the human body. Sketching while brainstorming was one way I made sense of my material through my attempts to visualize conceptual links, providing a glimpse into an important part of my research process. The poem *Ode to the Weeds* is a personal expression of how I connected to medicinal plants and sought others that may have connected in similar ways, seeing them as more than mere weeds.[12]

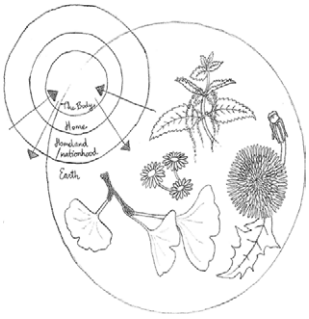


Figure 2. Conceptual illustration from *Plant Denizens*. Illustration by the author.



Figure 3. Conceptual illustration from *Plant Denizens*. Illustration by the author.

[12] This is what I refer to as "more-than-weed" entanglements in my dissertation to highlight medicinal plants in terms of their belonging.

## Conclusion

*Plant Denizens* showcased my application of multimodal methodologies to convey a multifaceted patchwork ethnography. The exposition on the Research Catalogue presents people that know medicinal plants in different ways. Part of this has to do with the diverse specialized knowledge required to industrialize and upscale TCM, as opposed to the informal herbal medicine practiced at home. Taking these clear differences into account, I was curious to know what made TCM seem so familiar to my mother, who knew nothing about it. It was her familiarity with gathering local herbs and drinking Polish herbal teas that led her to feel TCM had the potential to help her recover. This familiarity had everything to do with the senses, and there was no direct rationalization behind her choice, apart from that it felt right. Gathering plants and having some idea about medicinal plants was something she assumed is universal. This collapse between the affect and effect of medicinal plants revealed important motivations behind the practices of gathering medicines presented in this work. In an attempt to locate that sense of familiarity, I decided to approach TCM in terms of the materialities built around the medicinal plants, but that nonetheless depends on the plants' ability to transform humans. This approach resonated with the patchwork ethnographic methodology that informed my perspectives from home, and how they changed in the institutional context of TCM in China. This gradually became evident as I was shown factories, clinics, and large-scale systems built around TCM by the professionals guiding me, while also requesting that I present these contexts as proof of TCM's modernity. Regardless of my personal story about my mother's Chinese journal entry, my positionality as a foreign researcher from Europe placed me on the receiving end of China's institutionally performed facework of modern TCM. The exposition reflects this journey of two divergent trajectories, related to very different traditional medicines, developing from a single document from my mother's drawer.

This article began with the question of whether and how a multimodal patchwork ethnographic approach can enhance self-reflexivity in ethnographic research. Although my personal ties to the research topic may have constituted my self-presentation as a foreign scholar in China, the story eventually lost its personal relevance. In other words, my mother's journal entry was a tangible piece of evidence through which I could define my positionality to TCM to others. In response to my interest in the topic, I was met with the self-presentation of TCM as a national medicine, emphasizing my position as a foreigner. I was being lectured as a student and a foreigner, and I studied with students and researchers, while being studied as a patient. This face was negotiated between the people I met but also involved my presentation of TCM as part of the multimodal work. My role as a researcher became a medium through which to present TCM to the world, and the audiovisual material circulated between informants as part of our negotiations. I emphasized the negotiatory aspects of my approach to presenting TCM as an open-ended part of the research process.

The Research Catalogue may also be seen as part of the negotiatory dimension of my approach. As mentioned earlier, the Research Catalogue's interactivity allows users to respond to the content and navigate in various ways. Furthermore, all content presented on the Research Catalogue had already been negotiated by me and those involved. In this way, its final presentation could be thought of as the final, yet open-ended, negotiation with a potential user. The exposition allows images, texts, and videos to be presented alongside one another, inviting users to explore the exposition in a nonlinear fashion. Navigating the exposition, the user explores the intersection at which the document from my mother's drawer reveals the far-reaching, modern industry and institution of TCM. Despite the institution's expectation that I would portray an image of TCM, the opportunities afforded through the Research Catalogue allowed me to display a dynamic patchwork that defies homogeneity while revealing tensions, questions, and vulnerabilities in a world in transformation. I invite researchers to explore the possibilities of a multimodal patchwork ethnographic approach, in which the portrayal of self-reflexivity exposes elements of the research process while becoming subject to open reflection, loss of control, and part of the negotiatory process of doing ethnographic research.

## 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.

## References

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2006. Writing Against Culture. In *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Ellen Lewin, 153–169. Malden, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Alava, Henni and Megan Robertson. 2022. Family, Failure and Fatigue in the Field: A Patchwork of Omissions. *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 28 (1): 98–107. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14426/ajgr.v28i1.1353.

Ammann, Carole. 2021. Patchwork Life: Balancing Migration, Family, Fieldwork, and an Academic Career during a Global Pandemic. *Curare: Journal of Medical Anthropology* 44 (1–4): 15–25.

Borgdorff, Henk and Michael Schwab, eds. 2013. *The Exposition of Artistic Research: Publishing Art in Academia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/9789400600928.

Chua, Liana. 2021. Selfies and Self-Fictions: Calibrating Co-presence in and of "the Field". *Social Analysis* 65 (1): 151–161. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2020.650111.

Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Collins, Samuel Gerald, Matthew Durington, and Harjant Gill. 2017. Multimodality: An Invitation. *American Anthropologist* 119 (1): 142–146. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12826.

Dureau, Christine, Julie Park, and Susanna Trnka, eds. 2013. *Senses and Citizenships: Embodying Political Life*. New York: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203374658.

Favero, Paolo. 2014. Learning to Look Beyond the Frame: Reflections on the Changing Meaning of Images in the Age of Digital Media Practices. *Visual Studies* 29 (2): 166–179. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2014.887269.

Favero, Paolo. 2017. In Defence of the "Thin": Reflections on the Intersections between Interactive Documentaries and Ethnography. In *Refiguring Techniques in Digital Visual Research*, eds. Edgar Gómez Cruz, Shanti Sumartojo, and Sarah Pink, 51–65. Cham: Springer International Publishing. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-61222-5_5.

Fratini, Annamaria, Susan R. Hemer, and Anna Chur-Hansen. 2022. Peeking Behind the Curtains: Exploring Death and the Body through Patchwork Ethnography. *Anthropology in Action* 29 (3): 1–13. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3167/aia.2022.290301.

Geertz, Clifford. 2005. Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight. *Daedalus* 134 (4): 56–86. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/001152605774431563.

Grasseni, Cristina. 2021. Learning to See. In *Audiovisual and Digital Ethnography*, eds. Cristina Grasseni, Bart Barendregt, Erik de Maaker, Federico De Musso, Andrew Littlejohn, Marianne Maeckelbergh, Metje Postma, and Mark R. Westmoreland. London: Routledge, 12–34. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003132417-2.

Grasseni, Cristina, Bart Barendregt, Erik de Maaker, Federico De Musso, Andrew Littlejohn, Marianne Maeckelbergh, Metje Postma, and Mark R. Westmoreland. 2021. *Audiovisual and Digital Ethnography: A Practical and Theoretical Guide*. London: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003132417.

Günel, Gökçe and Chika Watanabe. 2024. Patchwork Ethnography. *American Ethnologist* 51 (1): 131–139. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.13243.

Günel, Gökçe, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe. 2020. *A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography*. Society for Cultural Anthropology. URL: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography (accessed 15.7.2026).

Günel, Gökçe, Chika Watanabe, Kat Jungnickel, and Rebecca Coleman. 2024. Everything Is Patchwork! A Conversation about Methodological Experimentation with Patchwork Ethnography. *Australian Feminist Studies* 38 (115–116): 211–229. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2024.2372622.

Hamdy, Sherine and Yasmin Moll. 2024. Visualizing Erasure: Co-creating Comics and Animation from Revolutionary Street Art to Nubian Memories of Displacement in Egypt. *Visual Anthropology Review* 40 (2): 264–280. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12343.

Hannerz, Ulf. 2010. *Anthropology's World: Life in a Twenty-First-Century Discipline*. London: Pluto Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.26530/oapen_625233.

Hartigan, John, Jr. 2017. *Care of the Species: Races of Corn and the Science of Plant Biodiversity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816685301.001.0001.

Howald, Claudia and Amanda Jousset. 2024. Rethinking "Home" and "Field": Patchwork Research Experiences as Mothers and Ethnographers on the Move. *Paideuma* 70/71: 275–298.

Kirksey, Eben. 2020. The Emergence of COVID-19: A Multispecies Story. *Anthropology Now* 12 (1): 11–16. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2020.1760631.

Mead, Margaret. 2009. Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words. In *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, ed. Paul Hockings, 3–10. Berlin, Boston: Walter de Gruyter. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110290691.3.

Nader, Laura. 2018. Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up. In *Contrarian Anthropology: The Unwritten Rules of Academia*, 12–32. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9781785337079-004.

Pink, Sarah. 2020. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003085614.

Ramirez, Renya K. 2025. Family/Tribal Ethnography: Combining Family/Tribal History and Intimate Ethnography. *American Anthropologist* 127 (3): 487–494. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.28084.

Saxer, Martin. 2024. Home/Transit. In *The Multi-Sided Ethnographer: Living the Field beyond Research*, eds. Tim Burger, Usman Mahar, Pascale Schild, and Anna-Maria Walter, 193–216. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839466773-012.

Storaas, Frode. 2009. Antropologi, kommunikasjon og multimodale tekstar. *Norsk Antropologisk Tidsskrift* 20 (3): 179–189. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1504-2898-2009-03-04.

Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anna. 2019. A Multispecies Ontological Turn? In *The World Multiple: The Quotidian Politics of Knowing and Generating Entangled Worlds*, eds. Keiichi Omura, Grant Jun Otsuki, Shiho Satsuka, and Atsuro Morita, 233–247. New York: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429456725-15.

Walley, Christine J. and Denielle Elliott. 2025. Unsettling the Self: Autoethnography and Related Kin. *American Anthropologist* 127 (1): 121–130. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.28050.

Waltorp, Karen. 2021. Multimodal Sorting: The Flow of Images across Social Media and Anthropological Analysis. In *Experimenting with Ethnography: A Companion to Analysis*, eds. Andrea Ballestero and Brit Ross Winthereik, 133–150. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478013211-014.

Watanabe, Chika, Gökçe Günel, and Saiba Varma. 2019. Patchwork Ethnography. *Patchwork Ethnography*, Online Publication. URL: https://www.patchworkethnography.com (accessed 25.9.2026).

Waterston, Alisse. 2025. Intimate Ethnography: What's It Good For? *American Anthropologist* 127 (2): 300–307. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.28065.

Waterston, Alisse and Barbara Rylko-Bauer. 2006. Out of the Shadows of History and Memory: Personal Family Narratives in Ethnographies of Rediscovery. *American Ethnologist* 33 (3): 397–412. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2006.33.3.397.

**Predstavitve za večnačinsko mozaično etnografijo**

Članek raziskuje preplet večnačinske in mozaične (ang. *patchwork*) etnografije kot metodoloških pristopov, ki ju imenujem večnačinska mozaična etnografija. Preplet pristopov prikazuje primer etnografskega raziskovanja v okviru interaktivne spletne predstavitve *Plant Denizens*, ki je objavljena v mednarodni bazi Research Catalogue (RC). Raziskovalno-umetniško zasnovana predstavitev

je dostopna prek iskalnika na spletni strani Research Catalogue, bralcem pa priporočam, da jo raziskujejo med branjem tega besedila.

Moje doktorsko raziskovanje se je začelo med pandemijo covida-19 in ravno s pandemijo povezani ukrepi so bili odločilni dejavnik, da terensko delo začnem na Švedskem – v domačem okolju, kjer sem živela z mamo in babico. Prvotni načrti za terensko delo na Kitajskem so bili začasno ustavljeni. V tem času mi je mama pokazala dnevniški zapis iz leta 2002 o svojem zdravljenju folikularnega limfoma s tradicionalno kitajsko medicino (TKM). Njen zapis je postal nova tema moje doktorske disertacije.

Spadam med antropologe, ki so med pandemijo covida-19 sprejeli metodološki pristop t. i. mozaične etnografije, in sicer ravno v času, ko je o tem pristopu nastajala dolga vrsta publikacij (Fratini idr., 2022; Günel idr., 2023; Günel, Watanabe, 2024). Ta metodologija omogoča premislek o raziskovalčevi osebni sferi v odnosu do »terena« kot produktivne sestavine v produkciji védenja.

Pojem večnačinske metodologije presega zgolj digitalno diseminacijo, ki jo omogoča RC. Večnačinskost se nanaša na »dejstvo, da sta etnografska reprezentacija in koprodukcija sama večnačinsko umeščeni v različne medije« (Grasseni idr., 2021: 2), zato poudarja procese soustvarjanja etnografske reprezentacije, namesto da bi se osredotočala zgolj na njeno končno obliko. Večnačinska mozaična etnografija tako izpostavlja, kako terensko delo od doma vključuje večnačinsko koprodukcijo. To se jasno kaže v moji osebni pripovedi o materini bolezni in kitajskem medicinskem dnevniku, ki odpirata možnosti za terensko delo na Kitajskem ter postopoma preoblikujeta moje raziskovanje.

Ob ponovnem premisleku o razmerju med osebnimi okoliščinami raziskovalca in izkušnjo terenskega dela članek zastavlja vprašanje, ali in kako lahko večnačinski mozaični etnografski pristop poglobi samorefleksivnost v etnografskem raziskovanju. Članek RC obravnava kot metodološko orodje za razkrivanje raziskovalnega procesa, odpiranje prostora za povratne informacije ter prispevek k raziskovalčevi samorefleksivni poti. Ta proces naredi raziskovalčev položaj opaznejši in ga vključi v samo raziskavo, s čimer ponazarja mozaično etnografsko metodologijo. Trdim, da uporaba tega metodološkega pristopa v okviru RC slednjega vzpostavlja kot nekaj več kot zgolj platformo za diseminacijo raziskovalnih rezultatov.

*Plant Denizens* je zasnovan kot interaktivna razstava oz. predstavitev. Uporabnik lahko raziskuje kolaž podob, zvokov, videoposnetkov in besedil. RC kot interaktivna oblika diseminacije uporabnikom omogoča aktivno sodelovanje in s tem »soustvarjanje« uporabniške izkušnje (Grasseni idr., 2021). V predstavitev so vključeni različni konteksti: klinika tradicionalne kitajske medicine, lekarna, tovarna, terenska ekskurzija za prepoznavanje zdravilnih rastlin s študenti, video kolaž o zdravilni orhideji ter botanikovo raziskovanje

skrivnostnih rastlin. Ti konteksti so bili vključeni na podlagi soglasja oseb, ki so sodelovale pri nastanku posnetkov, fotografij in besedil.

*Plant Denizens* kot konfiguracija etnografskih delčkov mozaika z več vzporedno predstavljenimi lokacijami odraža razpršenost rastlin, ki jih raziskava obravnava. Ti lokalni konteksti razkrivajo, kako lahko nabiranje zdravilnih rastlin – praksa, ki mi je bila dobro znana že iz domačega okolja – oblikuje etnografsko raziskovanje skozi različne osebne pripovedi in refleksije, ki spremljajo raziskovalno pot.

Traditiones 55 (2): 57–81 | COBISS: 1.01 | CC BY 4.0 | DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2026550204

# Multimodal Encounters: Animating Childhood Memories in Changing Landscapes

***Barbara Turk Niskač***

ZRC SAZU, Institute of Anthropological and Spatial Studies, Slovenia
barbara.turk-niskac@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9228-7218

This article explores animation as a multimodal representation emerging from collaboration between ethnographic research and artistic practice. It presents six animations produced from original memory stories recorded during an ethnographic study of childhood participation in southeastern Slovenia's domestic agricultural economy. Framed alongside written accounts, photographs, and video clips from walking ethnography, the article examines animation's role in multimodal ethnography.

▪ **Keywords**: childhood memories, animation, walking ethnography, photography, multispecies landscape

Članek obravnava animacijo kot večnačinsko reprezentacijo, ki je plod prepleta med etnografsko raziskavo in umetniško prakso. Predstavljenih je šest animacij, nastalih na podlagi spominov, ki so bili zabeleženi med etnografsko raziskavo o vključevanju otrok v kmečko gospodarstvo v jugovzhodni Sloveniji. Članek preučuje vlogo animacije v večnačinski etnografiji s pomočjo konkretnih animacij, ki so predstavljene ob zapisanih spominih ter fotografijah in videoposnetkih etnografskih sprehodov.

▪ **Ključne besede**: spomini na otroštvo, animacija, etnografija s hojo, fotografija, večvrstna krajina

## Introduction

This article discusses animation as a form of multimodal representation emerging from ethnographic research, showing how collaboration between academia and artistic practice can reconfigure both the process and the representations of ethnographic study, fostering openness to the unexpected and the co-production of knowledge. Although such collaboration is not without tensions, it offers possibilities to challenge "the siloing of anthropological knowledge that can result from keeping within disciplinary borders" (Haapio-Kirk, 2022). While research participants were consulted to a certain extent during the process of making the animations, as described in the proceedings, the animations featured in this article are not examples of collaborative co-creation with participants. Instead, they represent an interdisciplinary collaboration between the researcher and the illustrator and animator Zarja Menart, along with Finta Film, a production studio specializing in stop-motion animated films.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, it situates animation as an alternative mode of storytelling within the broader graphic narrative turn. Second, it illustrates how animation can communicate insights that extend beyond the constraints of other multimodal approaches, particularly with respect to the multisensorial, emplaced, and

affective aspects of research participants' past experiences. The article opens with a brief overview of the use of animation in ethnography and situates this approach within the broader graphic narrative turn. It then shares the background of the ethnographic study and describes the creation of animations based on collaboration with the illustrator and director Zarja Menart at the intersection of ethnographic and artistic practice. Finally, the animations are presented alongside written accounts of narrated memories, as well as photographs and video taken during walking ethnography, to demonstrate how animation can help us more vividly imagine research participants' past experiences, including their multisensorial and affective dimensions, and bring to life both their memories and environmental changes unfolding over their lifetimes due to modernization and deagrarisation (for further contextualisation, see Turk Niskač, Millei, 2025; Turk Niskač, Rautio, 2025). The article concludes by reflecting on the role of animation in multimodal ethnography and its potential for sharing academic research with diverse, wide-ranging audiences. In doing so, it contributes to discussions on how multimodal approaches, particularly through animation, can infuse our work with wonder and curiosity, open possibilities of creative collaboration, forge new avenues for disseminating research, and create opportunities to make our work more resonant and meaningful for the research participants and communities it seeks to represent (Powis, 2017; Moretti, 2021; Haapio-Kirk, 2022; Bates et al., 2023).

## Situating animation within the multimodal ethnographic approach

As a methodological approach, multimodal ethnography acknowledges the multisensory nature of human experience, perception, and knowledge-making. It employs a combination of various modes, including audio, sound, video, illustrations, drawings, graphic novels, animations, ethnographic writing, photography and digital media. Furthermore, according to Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019), a multimodal ethnographic approach challenges conventional notions of authorship, representation, and academic dissemination by embracing experimental forms, collaborative practices and diverse audiences. Rather than documenting pre-existing ideas or phenomena, multimodal ethnography enacts encounters where new meanings, relationships, and possibilities emerge through the creative use of audiovisual, multimedia, and performative strategies.

The graphic narrative turn has grown since the second decade of the 21st century, alongside other creative approaches such as imaginative ethnographic practices, live methods, and multimodal practices (Dix, Kaur, 2019; Theodossopoulos, 2022; Theodossopoulos, Bonnano, 2026). A growing interest in illustration, drawing, comics and animation within anthropological research and communication reflects their narrative potential to return research to the communities with whom anthropologists work, to engage audiences through storytelling, and to share scholarship beyond academia

(Atalay et al., 2019; Bates et al., 2023). By acknowledging that "in our hypervisual culture, presenting research in a visually engaging way can have a powerful and democratizing impact" (Atalay et al., 2019: 769), graphic-ethnographic experiments combine image and text in various ways. Some researchers produce these independently (e.g., Spray, 2021, 2025), while others rely on artistic collaboration (e.g., Rumsby, Thomas, 2022). Some of the possibilities of ethno-graphic production are demonstrated by Illustrating Anthropology[1] and the ethnoGRAPHIC series published by the University of Toronto Press.[2] For instance, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos uses graphic ethnography to popularise and analytically re-conceptualise ethnographic production (Theodossopoulos, 2022; Theodossopoulos, Bonnano, 2026). Benjamin Dix and Raminder Kaur proposed a theory and practice for graphic novel production termed *vérités graphiques* (literally, graphic realities), representational practice encompassing "collaborative and interactive engagement with participants' contributions and views, and their distillation and fictionalization through sequential art" (Dix, Kaur, 2019: 90). Charlie Rumsby (2020) integrated participatory visual research methods with stateless children of Vietnamese descent in Cambodia, collaborating with an illustrator to retrospectively produce an ethnographic novel grounded in her ethnographic research. Rumsby argues that using alternative modes of (re)presentation beyond the ethnographic text allows us to engage with affective details embedded in stories that would otherwise go unnoticed (Rumsby, 2022).

Animation holds similar expressive potential, translating words, emotions, and affects into images (Bates et al., 2023). Similar to graphic novels, animation conveys events through reenactment and reconstruction, enriching the viewer's experience with vivid artistic expression (Wang, Zhang, 2022). Especially when we want to recount past events, memories, difficult stories, emotions, and other psychological experiences, animation can bring research to life on a more emotional, personal level and capture sensory dimensions of social life (Honess Roe, 2016; Haapio-Kirk, 2022; Rumsby, Thomas, 2022; Theodossopoulos, 2022; Hamdy, Moll, 2024). As Charlotte Bates and her colleagues emphasize, "playful and poetic, enchanting and engaging, animation can bring research to life in more personal and immediate ways, making research tangible and creating new spaces of relation and engagement" (Bates et al., 2023: 988). Yet compared to ethnographic novels, animations remain less common in ethnographic research. For example, Yasmin Moll directed the short animation *Hanina/Homesick* in collaboration with Egyptian Nubian musician Ahmed Sayed Gayer and US-based animator and illustrator Karson Schenk. Part of a larger project at the University of Michigan project exploring multimodal approaches to intangible heritage and social memory, *Hanina* explores the historic losses following the repeated displacement of

[1] Illustrating Anthropology website can be accessed at: https://illustratinganthropologycom.wordpress.com.

[2] EthnoGRAPHIC series can be accessed at: https://utppublishing.com/series/ethnographic.

Nubians from their ancestral homeland along the Nile River due to dam constructions. Moll argues that animation is "especially apt as a visual method of recovering and presenting erased landscapes like Nubia in ways that are resonant for new generations" (Hamdy, Moll, 2024: 274). Most notably, Camilla Morelli (2025) has developed an innovative methodology based on the co-production of *ethnographic animation* in collaboration with a UK-based animation director, Latin American academics, junior indigenous researchers and Amazonian artists. She applies this approach ethnographically to examine how young people in Amazonia envision the future amid the critical challenges they face in the present, while teaching them new digital skills through which they can tell their own stories and share them with others, including policymakers. Thus, as Morelli shows, animation can be simultaneously a participatory research method and an impact tool.

## Animation at the intersection of ethnographic and artistic practice

The animations presented in the proceedings are based on an ethnographic study exploring memories of children's participation in domestic agricultural economy in the latter half of the 20th century in Bela Krajina, a region in southeastern Slovenia. I conducted memory-sharing workshops and life history interviews with thirty-four research participants born between 1940 and 2006.[3] The majority of research participants were born between the 1940s to 1960s, so this article reflects their childhood experiences. During workshops and interviews, research participants were also asked to share old photographs or family albums to elicit and contextualise their memories. Following these encounters, I asked some of the research participants to take me to the places that were related to their childhood memories of participation in work, or those cultivated and abandoned lands, which were particularly meaningful to them. During walks, which sometimes also included driving by car to more remote locations, we discussed memories related to their participation in agricultural work, and multiple relationalities with plants, animals, and land. We also observed how the landscape has transformed in the interlocutors' lifetimes and scrutinised contemporary land cultivation practices. Walks were photo and sometimes video documented and all the conversations were audio recorded and transcribed. Some of the walks and accompanying memories were published on a project blog.[4] As part of the research project, a museum exhibition in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum

[3] Based on the Ethical Principles of Research with Human Participants and Ethical Review in Human Sciences in Finland, it was determined that the study did not require ethical review. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical code of conduct of Tampere University. The templates for the information sheet and the privacy notice are available on the research project's website (https://projects.tuni.fi/patchwork/ethics).

[4] Blog can be accessed at: https://blogs.tuni.fi/patchwork.

was also planned.[5] I decided to focus the museum exhibition on *steljniki*, plots of land covered with common bracken and birches used for grazing and harvesting of bracken, as they illustrate the interplay between human activities, grazing animals, plants seeking suitable habitats, and the landscape features of Bela Krajina, including soil composition and Karst-characterized topography. Thinking about the material that could be used for the museum exhibition, I was particularly intrigued by intimate, place-based childhood memories and the transformations that had occurred within the landscapes over the lifetimes of the research participants. As I gathered childhood memories, I noticed that they often took the form of short, complete stories or anecdotes, sometimes resurfacing and being retold in different situations. Furthermore, as I asked research participants to walk me to the places related to their memories, the transformations in landscape occurring in the lifetimes of one generation became obvious. Had I walked the same routes alone, I would have often thought I was walking through young forest. Yet much of what is nowadays secondary forest in a region where I conducted research used to be pastures, meadows, *steljniki*, arable and other extensively farmed land when research participants were young. Through childhood memories, these overgrown patches of land acquired new, intimate meanings, also revealing the perceptual skills and environmental knowledge of the research participants. Furthermore, as we paid attention to the interweaving of memory, embodied experience and sociality described in memories, the entanglement of human and more-than-human activities gained increased prominence (for more detailed accounts on the walking ethnography used in this research see Turk Niskač, 2025). Through intergenerational shifts in socioeconomic and environmental conditions, both childhood experiences narrated in memories and the landscapes they reference have receded into the past. Yet these memories hold significant potential for fostering intergenerational dialogue on socioecological entanglements between humans, domestic animals and their shared ecosystems. Thus, although I did not initially plan the production of animations, the idea took shape during the research process. At the museum exhibition, I also used old photos from the museum archives and research participants' personal archives. However, old pictures taken at the locations of their memories were scarce to non-existent. I incorporated Franciscan cadastres and aerial footage from the Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia to illustrate landscape transformations over time. Yet these offered only detached bird's eye views and failed to capture intimate stories. While considering how to bring personal memories and changing places of the past to life in a museum exhibition, I realized animation would be a particularly suitable medium. I therefore approached illustrator and animation director Zarja Menart to create short animations based on the original memory stories recorded during the interviews. With the legal services of Tampere

[5] The museum exhibition entitled Stories of *Steljniki*: The Interweaving of Common Bracken, Animals and Humans was exhibited in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana from 21 February to 19 October 2025.

University, we agreed that Finta Film production studio would apply for funding to the Slovenian Film Centre in co-production with RTV Slovenia. The form and length of the animations were determined by the Slovenian Film Centre call, which specified six animations 1–2 minutes long. At this stage, the participants whose memories I had in mind were tentatively asked whether they would permit their recollections to be translated into animations. When the studio successfully obtained funding to produce the animations, I selected six narrated memories based on the criterion that each was told as a short, self-contained story and was connected to a different patch of land, illustrating various forms of land use in extensive farming. Together with Zarja, we visited research participants to obtain formal consent for creating animations based on their narratives. In one case, Zarja visited a participant on her own.[6] Since one of the memories was originally in written form, we had to record it anew. During these visits, informal conversations took place in which Zarja asked for additional details about the narrated stories to better contextualize them – such as the appearance of the animals, the nature of the relationship between children and animals, children's clothing, the season in which the events occurred, etc. Some research participants also shared family albums or selected old photographs, which helped to more vividly imagine the visual aspects of the stories. Zarja also consulted photographs from the Slovene Ethnographic Museum Documentation Department, the Bela Krajina Museum and online sources to study how people dressed, how they worked, what animals looked like, and what the local architecture looked like at the time the memory stories took place (see Figures 1 and 2).

When certain details remained unclear during the animation production process, research participants were contacted by phone for clarification. Additionally, Zarja attended the annual harvesting of bracken in Vinomer *steljniki* organized by the local community in Drašiči, to observe the techniques of harvesting and stacking bracken, which she needed for the animation titled *Steljnik*. To gain a better understanding of the landscape and the visual impressions of the locations associated with the memory stories, Zarja visited some sites in person, while I also shared photographs from the walking ethnography with her. The embodied, sensory experience of Zarja walking through the landscapes, their topography and vegetation also enriched the portrayal of these landscapes in the animations (see Figure 3). While with Zarja we agreed to make considerable effort to preserve documentary value by capturing historical period and

[6] As the production of the animations was not planned at the outset of the project, the researcher and animation director, upon receiving funding from the Slovenian Film Centre, revisited the research participants to present additional information on the animations and obtain further consent. A separate informed consent form was signed, specifying the use of participants' recorded narratives for the purpose of animation production, noting authorship, and outlining the dissemination of the animations and their open access. Participants were also given the option to decide whether their names could appear in the credits. All participants discussed in this article consented to the publication of their real names and years of birth. To acknowledge their authorship of the stories presented in the animations, and in accordance with their permission, I use their real names throughout this article.

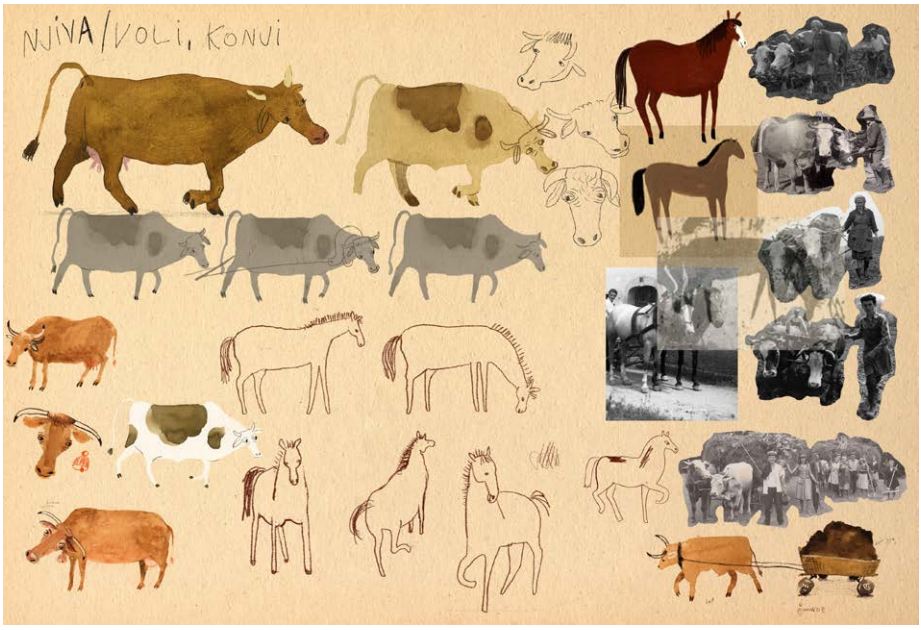


Figure 1. A moodboard of draught horses and oxen. Photo: Zarja Menart, 2024.




Figure 2. A moodboard of a mother working in a field. Photo: Zarja Menart, 2024.

landscape features as accurately as possible, animation's multimodality doesn't relay past memories literally, but "rather a fragmentation and diffraction of memories so that they can enter new circuits of meaning and take on new resonances, affective and embodied" (Gupta, 2021, after Moretti, 2021: 256). In addition, Zarja followed my interpretation of the research material that children, domestic animals and landscape co-constituted each other (see Turk Niskač, Millei, 2025; Turk Niskač, Rautio, 2025). While the animations focus on childhood memories and the places associated with them, animals frequently appear as the main protagonists in these narrated recollections. By emphasizing the shared agency of animals and children, these memory stories highlight how humans and animals inhabited, shared, and shaped joint rural landscapes. To emphasize the corporeal experiences of memory (Grossman, 2013), details from other research data were also incorporated, as in the animation entitled *Steljnik*, where Zarja depicted children climbing a young birch tree, bending its trunk and swinging to the ground. While the original narrator does not mention this, the detail was drawn from interviews with other research participants recalling bracken harvesting and climbing the birches, and it serves to convey a sense of playfulness in the children's work-related activities. Finally, Zarja shared working versions of the animations with me so that I could provide feedback and suggest possible changes. After this, each animation was sent to the author of the corresponding story and they were later contacted by phone to ask whether they were satisfied with it and whether they have any comments and corrections, emphasizing that any corrections or overlooked details could still be addressed at this stage. As it took two years to produce all six animations, three were screened at the opening of the museum exhibition at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in 2025 and included in the exhibition itself. In 2026, all six were screened at the opening of the museum exhibition in the region where the research took place. Since the animations were produced by Finta Film studio, I was not involved in all aspects of production, such as screenplay, storyboard, dramaturgy and post-production including music which also involved other artists. Despite the above described collaboration with Zarja, the process allowed a great degree of artistic freedom, for example in selecting animation techniques, shortening narratives for better flow, and filling in visual details. Ultimately, two versions of the animations were produced; one presented in this article, and a shorter version combining different animations without original narration, created for international animation festivals.[7] Although the latter displays greater artistic freedom, it also reflects the different expectations of professional animation production funded by the Slovene Film Centre in co-production with RTV Slovenia, particularly regarding technical aspects like sound quality, as the original versions use narration I recorded during interviews with a simple audio recorder.

[7] Animations can be accessed at Bear With Me Distribution website: https://www.bearwithmefilm.com/project/a-wily-ones/.




Figure 3: The process of illustrating landscapes of memory stories. Photos: Zarja Menart, 2024.

## Bringing fading memories and changing landscapes to life through animation

All the recounted memories presented through animations in the proceedings are tied to specific places, some of which have undergone significant transformations over the narrators' lifetimes. As was noted by Bodenhorn and Lee, memory can play an important role in shaping a personal sense of responsibility toward place. Places, in turn, can serve as important sites for storytelling – or they may be the subjects of the stories themselves (Bodenhorn, Lee, 2021). In what follows, I present the animations produced based on childhood memories recorded during ethnographic research. I deliberately first describe the memories behind each animation, situating them alongside photographs and, in some cases, short videos of places visited during walking ethnography, before providing links to watch the animations. Rather than offering analytical explanations of the different modes, i.e., written accounts, photography, video clips and animation, I invite the reader/viewer to reflect on what each mode evokes for them, before moving to the conclusion. There, I present my perspective on animation's role in studying and representing childhood memories situated within multispecies landscapes.

***Steljnik*** (pl. *Steljniki*; Bracken stands)
Bela Krajina, the region where this research was conducted, is characterised by mosaic, or patchy landscape, formed through centuries of extensive farming. The farming households of research participants typically had vineyards, arable land, pastures and meadows, forest and *steljniki* – plots of land where bracken or eagle fern grows. *Steljniki* are inherently connected to animal husbandry. Sometimes they were used as grazing areas, but more importantly, every autumn, bracken was cut and used as bedding for stable animals. When bracken harvesting stops, *steljniki* enter successive stages of overgrowing and within 40–50 years transform into forests of oak and hornbeam, which was the natural forest communities of the lowlands in Bela Krajina (Čarni et al., 2007). *Steljniki* that are still preserved are recognised for their rich biodiversity, yet their maintenance depends on the cutting of the bracken. They are also a distinctive feature of Bela Krajina, which, according to one explanation, got its name from the white birch trees, also associated with *steljniki*. Although a handful of farmers still cut bracken and use it for bedding, there has been a rapid transformation of *steljniki* since the 1960s, when they were converted into coniferous forests through afforestation or agricultural land through liming. As livestock farming declined and agricultural practices changed and bracken ceased to be harvested, *steljniki* also underwent a process of natural regrowth since the 1970s. A handful of farmers still cut bracken for bedding and some *steljniki* are maintained only to preserve their appearance. This is the case with Vinomer *steljniki,* which have been designated a natural heritage site and are part of the European Natura 2000 network. Here, the local community in Drašiči organizes the harvesting of bracken, which Zarja attended to observe the cutting and stacking process needed for the production of animation, and which was documented in a short film available in Video 1.

Video 1: https://youtu.be/2daDDqtEfOE. Harvesting bracken in the Vinomer *steljniki*. Produced by Barbara Turk Niskač, 2024.

While this video depicts well-preserved *steljnik*, when conducting walking ethnography with research participants, I frequently visited places which once used to be *steljniki*, but are now secondary forest. This was also the case when Anica, born in 1952, took me to her family's *steljnik*, where she used to cut bracken as a child (see Figure 4).

The first animation is based on the narration of Anica, and represents a visual description of what *steljnik* is, and the agricultural work it entailed. The animation also serves as an introduction to the patchy landscape and its disappearance occurring with overgrowing. Anica explains that areas closer to the village were arable land, while lower-quality meadows blended with *steljniki,* where bracken grows, before the forest began. Here, the soil was stony, shallow and acid and therefore not suitable for ploughing and growing crops. The word *stelja* in the Slovene language refers to all



Figure 4: *Steljniki* from Anica's memory story have been transforming into oak and hornbeam forest since bracken stopped being harvested in the 1980s. Photos: Barbara Turk Niskač, July 2023.

forest material used for animal bedding including dry leaves, moss and other undergrowth. However, in Bela Krajina, the word *stelja* refers specifically to bracken, also known as eagle fern (*Pteridium aquilinum* or *orlova praprot* in Slovenian language). The name *steljnik* also derives from *stelja* and denotes plots of land where bracken was harvested. Anica emphasised that when bracken is young, it is a lovely plant with beautiful, furled fiddleheads. By autumn, when it was cut, however, it turned into a nasty, rough plant, commonly causing injuries. Anica described:

> *It grows high, it grows all year, and its roots are also quite deep. The stems get woody, so it was difficult when we were harvesting it* [as children]. *They used to cut it a bit higher, there was often thorny bush. You easily got scratched.*

Anica recalled that when she came from school, they did not even have time to eat. The days were short, with autumn moisture dominating the air and soil. The entire family hurried to the *steljnik* to complete the bracken harvesting before nightfall. Men cut bracken by hand with two-handed scythes. As nothing was to be wasted, women and children went to spots where, due to the rocky surface, the men could not use scythes,

and cut the bracken with a hand sickle. The women and children then raked the bracken, which was usually stored in the *steljnik* and left to dry in stacks a few metres high with a single birch tree or erected pole to support the stack. In this way, it was protected from rain, waiting to be transported to the barn with a cart or sleds during the winter as needed. Sometimes, the bracken was also stored on the farm in a bracken shed, as was the case in Anica's story. It was important though that the bracken was thoroughly dried before storage, as moist piled bracken posed a spontaneous combustion risk.

Animation 1: https://vimeo.com/1141114911 (password: Belokranjske_zgodbe). Bracken Meadow. Produced by Finta Film, RTV Slovenija, 2025.

***Njiva*** (Field)

When bracken was used as bedding material in stables, it mixed with livestock manure and turned into precious fertilizer to improve the soils in vineyards and arable land where crops and vegetables grew. The next animation brings to life a memory story related to carrying manure to the field. Marija, born in 1962, shared this story during a memory sharing workshop explaining that she often tells it to her grandchildren. She recalled that when she was a child, horsedrawn carts with rubber wheels were still in use. Her father would load manure onto a cart, cover it with plastic sheeting, and then place a blanket over it so that they could sit on it. Marija was about seven or eight years old, and as they drove to the field, she leaned over, watching the wheel spin. Suddenly, she slipped and fell to the ground. Her father stopped the horse just in time so the wheel did not run over her. He then lifted her onto his knee and spanked her. Although father had punished Marija because she fell under the cart, she was fond of this memory as it is connected to her family's field, where she and her siblings often accompanied their parents to work. Marija inherited this field and to this day continues to cultivate it; she emphasised that it means a lot to her because she got it from her parents. When I asked her if we could visit the field, she awaited me there with her grandchildren and daughter-in-law. She prepared home-made flatbread *belokranjska pogača* and wine, and was happy that we visited the field just before the oat harvest (see Figure 5) so she could demonstrate how before mechanization they used to harvest oats with a sickle and bind the sheaves as can be seen in Video 2 and Video 3. Similar to other place-based memories, the story presented in this animation also reflects the attachment to the land and the emotional aspects of working on it, as is illustrated in the high value this field, as well as memory presented in the animation, holds for Marija.

Video 2: https://youtu.be/Ue-OpGdu33Q. Sharpening the sickle. Produced by Barbara Turk Niskač, 2024.



Figure 5: Because of land consolidation in the 1980s, which aimed to make small, fragmented plots – previously ploughed by draught horses and oxen – more suitable for mechanization, the field where Marija's story took place is now much larger and differently shaped. At the time of our visit, Marija's family cultivated oats and maize in these fields. Photos: Barbara Turk Niskač, July 2023.

Video 3: https://youtu.be/ys6eivIKy10. Binding the sheaves. Produced by Barbara Turk Niskač, 2024.

Animation 2: The animation produced based on Marija's narrative is available at: https://vimeo.com/1141114197 (password: Belokranjske_zgodbe). Field. Produced by Finta Film, RTV Slovenija, 2025.

***Kal*** (Pond)

Children participated in almost all work in the agricultural domestic economy, and until the 1970s it was common for them to be responsible for the seasonal grazing of cows, oxen, and sheep. The research participants usually had fond memories related to time spent on the pastures because far from the gaze of adults they often found themselves immersed in play, foraging, hunting small animals and engaging in all sorts of unruly activities. Rajko, who was born in 1953, shared on several occasions a story when, as a child, he took cows to pasture with other boys from the village and, on their way

back home, they stopped by a pond. Ponds were primarily water sources for cattle; however, children sometimes used them for bathing. In a memory story upon which the third animation was based, Rajko recalled that there was an elderly neighbour who did not like to see children bathing in the pond because they made the water cloudy and then the cattle did not want to drink it. It therefore happened that this neighbour came to the pond and found the children bathing in it with their shorts and shirts hanging from the tree. Angrily, he took their clothes and headed towards the village. The boys followed him naked, begging him to return their clothes. He stopped and asked: "*Will you bathe in the pond again?"* After the children reassured him that they would not, he finally returned their clothes. However, Rajko added that the next day, the boys were again bathing in the pond. Only this time, they hid their clothes, so that the neighbour could not find them.

Ponds which gather rainwater were typical in the karst landscape, where due to a bedrock consisting mainly of limestone and dolomite, most of the precipitation that falls on the surface seeps directly underground. The limestone and the water that dissolves it played an important role in the formation of the landscape in Bela Krajina. The ponds formed where the shape of the surface and the clay in the soil enabled rainwater to gather. They were maintained by the cattle themselves when they came to drink and trampled the clay at the bottom, making the beds of ponds impermeable to sustain the rainwater collection in the pond. Once these ponds were no longer used by cattle, the soil underneath them became permeable, and the ponds gradually disappeared,



Figure 6: The location of a pond from Rajko's childhood story. Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač, November 2022.

becoming overgrown. This was also the case with the pond from Rajko's childhood memory. When I asked him to take me to the location of this story, I realized that I had already passed this place several times on my own. The site of the former pond is by the gravel road that leads from the village through the woods and is now completely overgrown with thorny bushes and surrounded by secondary forest (see Figure 6).

In Rajko's childhood, cows grazed here, and the pond was surrounded with pastures with bushes and scarcely grown trees. Having been recognised as important habitats supporting biodiversity, some ponds in the region have recently been restored, yet it has proved difficult to maintain them without actually being in use by the cattle and village community which cleaned them annually. In this sense, the story of a pond, like other patches of land depicted in the animations, also highlights the children's role in co-constituting the ecologies that have sustained multispecies life.

Animation 3: The animation produced based on Rajko's narrative is available at: https://vimeo.com/1141113731 (password: Belokranjske_zgodbe). Pond. Produced by Finta Film, RTV Slovenija, 2025.

***Pašnik*** (Pasture)

During grazing, children had to ensure the animals got well fed, while also taking care of cultivated land. Since the land was not fenced, they had to make sure the cows did not stray.

> *She was a real doe, she was a 'šarf' cow* [from the German scharf, meaning she was fiery, she had a character one should not mess around with]. *That's why she had a chain around her neck. The other cows didn't have a chain* [...] *Srna was a leader; she was always the first everywhere.*

So, when the neighbour said he would take a cow, he seized Srna by the chain. That was when she showed her character: she snorted, pawed the ground and charged at the neighbour. He got scared and ran home, with Srna chasing him through the fields threaded with creeks. Alojz concluded the story:

> *We didn't need the thousand dinars anymore, nothing. He barely escaped the cow. We watched to see what would happen next, because when the neighbour jumped over the first creek, the cow jumped right after him. Golly, he jumped over another creek, and there she stopped. I wouldn't know if that creek was wider, but she stopped there, jumped back over and returned to grazing clover.*



Figure 7: Fields where Alojz's cows grazed on a neighbour's clover. In the distance, the creek runs beneath a line of trees. Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač, February 2024.

Like Marija's story of carrying manure to the field, this one takes place in the flatlands, where the soil is richer and therefore more suitable for intensive agriculture which continues to this day. In the 1980s, the area underwent land consolidation to facilitate mechanization as farming shifted from draught animals to machinery. The plots of land are now larger and less fragmented, yet when we visited the site with Alojz, he could still point out where the cows grazed, and the creek where he fished with his friend was still there (see Figure 7). Yet this story also emphasizes the relationships children formed with animals and their knowledge of them. As they worked and lived together, animals – like the children – were attributed with personhood and agency and, in some cases, as in this story, ultimately saved the day.

Animation 4: The animation based on Alojz's recollection is available at: https://vimeo.com/1141114661 (password: Belokranjske_zgodbe). Pasture. Produced by Finta Film, RTV Slovenija, 2025.

***Gmajna*** (Pastures belonging to village commons)

Often it was animals themselves, particularly cows and oxen, that were the main protagonists in memories related to animal husbandry and grazing. This was true for Srna, as well as for Lisko, the ox featured in Andreja's memory story. Andreja, who was born



Figure 8: An expanse of bracken surrounded by secondary forest, where Andreja as a child watched over grazing cattle and cut bracken, and where her memory story unfolded. Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač, July 2023.

in 1969, recalled that as a girl of about eight or ten years old, her parents told her that when she came from school, she should go to the *gmajna* (the term used for pastures that belonged to village commons), chop some juniper and bring it home. It was a time when her family was smoking sausages, and juniper was used as a flavour. She recalled that it was winter with lots of snow, and she could barely walk to the *gmajna*, which was about a kilometre away from their home. When she finally reached her destination, she wanted to make an impression on her parents and cut a branch too big to carry on her own. As she was walking home in the snow without the juniper, she remembered that Lisko the ox could assist her. In the stable, she untied Lisko, put a yoke on him and took a string to tie the juniper. She reached the *gmajna* with Lisko, collected the juniper and returned home. Her parents noticed that she was missing, and seeing that the stable was empty, they panicked and looked for her and the ox all over the village. When Andreja finally appeared with the ox and juniper before nightfall, they were surprised at how she had managed to untie and harness the ox, as she had never done this before. Like all memories presented through animations, this story also highlights the interconnected lives of humans, animals, and landscapes. When I asked Andreja if her parents were angry she had disappeared like this, she replied they were not, adding jokingly that they were mostly relieved because the ox had come home, suggesting that Lisko was of more concern to the parents than she was. Others who were present when Andreja shared this story in a memory-sharing workshop commented that it was

the ox that had led her in fact, and not the other way around, emphasising Lisko as the protagonist (see Turk Niskač, Rautio, 2025 for a more detailed account on relations between children and animals).

The title of the animation is *Gmajna*, since this is how Andreja referred to the place. The word *gmajna* comes from the German word *Gemeinde* and denotes land that belonged to the village commons, tracing its origins to the Middle Ages, usually consisting of lower-quality pastures with stunted bushes and trees. Thus, it also illustrates the relationship between grazing areas and *steljniki* where bracken was harvested. When I visited the place where this story happened with Andreja, it was an expanse of bracken surrounded by encroaching secondary forest (see Figure 8). Bracken grew there in abundance, as her brother at the time still used that patch of land for spring grazing and bracken harvesting in the autumn. There were also some spruce trees, but no juniper was found. Juniper favours open spaces, so with overgrowing it is also disappearing from the landscape.

Animation 5: The animation produced based on Andreja's narrative is available at: https://vimeo.com/1141113487 (password: Belokranjske_zgodbe). Common Land. Produced by Finta Film, RTV Slovenija, 2025.

***Košenica*** (Meadow)

The final animation also unfolds in a landscape shaped by animal grazing, marked by the alternating pattern of meadows and *steljniki*. Its title, *Košenica* (meadow), refers to the dry grassland that was typically mowed only once a year and then grazed. Martin, born in 1948, recalled taking a flock of sheep there for grazing. By the road, there was a spot where beautiful grass used to grow – especially in the sinkholes, where it was sheltered from drought and always grew lush and green. As a little shepherd, up until the age of twelve, he enjoyed spending time with his flock of sheep here. By the roadside, the grass was all grazed down and smooth, like a neat green lawn. A bit further along, the road workers had planted some apple trees, and there was nice grass there as well. There were even some apples, and everything was green so the sheep liked to linger there. Martin proudly recalled wearing his father's big hat when he once saw a car approaching and a man looking out. He moved the sheep aside so they could graze, and the man asked him whose boy he was. When Martin told him, the man asked if he had any lambs. Straightening up, Martin said he did. Then the man asked whether he would sell him one. Martin agreed, but growing worried what his father would say if he actually sold a lamb, he named such a high price that the man refused. The man drove off and Martin went back to the pasture. In the evening, as it was getting dark, he came home – and there was the man, waiting with his father at their house. The man said, *"Ah, so this is your mischievous boy who tried to overcharge me for a lamb."*



Figure 9: Photos above show the area where Martin's sheep grazed in the animated story on the way to the *košenica*. Photos below depict the *košenica* where Martin remembered playing football as a child. While the surroundings in the photos above have undergone natural regrowth, the adjacent plots of the *košenica* pictured below were afforested with spruce trees, which can also be seen in Video 4. Photos: Barbara Turk Niskač, February 2024.

It turned out he had already made a deal with Martin's father and had come to their place to pick up the lamb.

While Martin still watched over grazing animals during his childhood, these lands gradually ceased to be used for grazing and bracken harvesting since the 1970s. With changes in agriculture under the Yugoslav modernisation, Martin's family shifted from a flock of around twenty sheep to around ten cows and milk production in his late childhood. At the time, the government, seeking greater productivity, encouraged the conversion of *steljniki* and less favourable meadows into coniferous forests through afforestation. As a result, the meadows of Martin's childhood have since grown into mature spruce forests, while other plots in the area, once grazing ceased, naturally regenerated into oak and hornbeam woodlands. The Figure 9 shows the place where the story Martin recalled from his childhood happened; as we can see, the area is now surrounded by secondary forest. In Video 4, Martin demonstrates the shepherd's games in his spruce forest that used to be a meadow in his childhood. Thus, Martin's memory story, like many others, attests to the transformations in rural livelihoods and their manifestations in landscape.

Video 4: https://youtu.be/R04U5pWJn_w. Shepherd's games. Produced by Barbara Turk Niskač, 2024.

Animation 6: The animation produced based on Martin's narrative is available at: https://vimeo.com/1141113943 (password: Belokranjske_zgodbe). Hay Meadow. Produced by Finta Film, RTV Slovenija, 2025.

## Conclusion

The memory stories presented above have been used in various settings, including scientific articles, lectures, conference presentations, museum exhibitions, and outreach activities for children and adults. They appeared either as standalone written texts (e.g., Turk Niskač, Rautio, 2025), standalone animations (museum exhibitions and outreach activities), or in combination (lectures, conference papers, this article). My aim was for animation to bring past childhood experiences to life and animate the "empty" and often "overgrown" places depicted in the photographs and video from the walking ethnography. In this article, I have presented the animations alongside narrated recollections, photographs, and video to create a dialogue between different modes of engaging with narrated memories. While the photographs depict "empty", often "overgrown" places, the animations bring these same places to life, conveying intimate stories of both humans and animals who have inhabited and co-constructed them. Placing photographs of the contemporary locations where memories were situated alongside the animations illustrates the landscape changes that occurred within a single generation. Thus, both photos and animations encourage viewers to empathetically engage with material, social, sensory, and emotional environments of research participants (Pink, 2009; Pink et al., 2010) and the transformations that have occurred across their lifespans. Moreover, animations as narrative visualizations add affective, multisensorial, emplaced, and aesthetic dimensions (Theodossopoulos, 2022; Bates et al., 2023). They enable viewers to better imagine what it *felt* like to dwell in the depicted landscapes and raise awareness of economic and environmental changes unfolding within a single generation's lifespan. Far from playing a merely supporting role, animation complements other modes by enlivening and critically enriching writing and talking about research participants' memories – allowing readers and viewers to see and feel what words cannot explicitly capture (Theodossopoulos, Bonanno, 2026: 131). I share Charlotte Bates and colleagues' view that animations

> can make us attentive to different things, open up different choices, and expand the ways we represent our research beyond the dominance of words. Evocative and lively, the animation is a powerful reminder that

> good ethnographic representation should evoke the liveness of the world. (Bates et al., 2023: 988)

While memory is commonly understood as situated in or belonging to the past, it also comes to matter in the present (Moretti, 2021). As Hamdy and Moll note, that which no longer exists "may be palpably experienced by our interlocutors yet remain invisible to the ethnographer's gaze or camera lenses" (Hamdy, Moll, 2024: 264). In this sense, animation is especially well-suited to capture "the intangible elements of participants' everyday lives" (Rumsby, Thomas, 2022) and past realities, methodologically bridging "the gap between what can be absent in various ways in our field sites, but still important to our interlocutors" (Hamdy, Moll, 2024). When situated alongside walking ethnography, photos and video, animations do more than depict past events. Compared to other presentation modes, animation "works in a different affective and emotive register" (Bates et al., 2023: 988). Animations therefore do not serve as exact representations of factual events but rather actively reenact and reconstruct past experiences and landscapes through vivid artistic expression. This article thus contributes to contemporary discussions on multimodal approaches by showing how the integration of animation into ethnographic practice not only represents but also interprets, embodies, and communicates multisensory and affective experiences of research participants.

Finally, animation as an alternative mode of storytelling makes ethnographic accounts more engaging and accessible to public audiences, especially younger generations, while offering new spaces of engagement (Atalay et al., 2019; Rumsby, Thomas, 2022). Through artistic collaboration, the presented animations remain embedded in ethnographic data yet provide a more sensory, aesthetic, and expressive mode of representation (Bates et al., 2023). The animations were included in the museum exhibition of the research project at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana, as well as in the follow-up exhibition at the Cultural Centre Semič in the Bela Krajina region, where the research took place. Many research participants attended the exhibition openings, making this a meaningful way to acknowledge and conclude their contributions to the research. Animations proved to have strong appeal in the museum setting, engaging audiences across generations and resonating with efforts to make the study more meaningful for both the research participants and the communities it represents (Powis, 2017). The research participants whose memories were transformed into animations each received a personal copy for their own use. In this way, their memories took on a tangible form, with the potential to be passed down across generations. The animation in this case has been both a way of giving back to the community and of making ethnographic research public in *felt* ways (Bates et al., 2023: 987). With Finta Studio, we agreed that the animations will be made openly accessible online for educational purposes after they are featured at international animation festivals and broadcast on the Slovenian national television. Thus, the multimodal approach exemplified here through animation

production bridges academic disciplines and art by helping us better imagine the multisensorial, emplaced, and affective aspects of research participants' experiences, while making ethnographic research results more engaging and accessible to diverse, wide-ranging audiences.

## Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this article were supported by the European Union's Horizon Europe MSCA postdoctoral fellowship (HORIZON-MSCA-2021-PF-01) under Grant Agreement 101061450 and a follow-up project under Grant Number MN-0033-618, funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU within the framework of the Recovery and Resilience Plan, Investment (Co)financing projects to enhance the international mobility of Slovenian researchers and research organisations and to promote the international involvement of Slovenian applicants. The production of animations featured in this article was funded by the Slovenian Film Centre in co-production with RTV Slovenia.

## 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.

## References

Atalay, Sonya, Letizia Bonanno, Sally Campbell Galman, Sarah Jacqz, Ryan Rybka, Jen Shannon, Cary Speck, John Swogger, and Erica Wolencheck. 2019. Ethno/Graphic Storytelling: Communicating Research and Exploring Pedagogical Approaches through Graphic Narratives, Drawings, and Zines. *American Anthropologist* 121 (3): 769–772. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13293.

Bates, Charlotte, Kate Moles, and Lily Mae Kroese. 2023. Animating Sociology. *The Sociological Review* 71 (5): 976–991. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261231156688.

Bodenhorn, Barbara and Elsa Lee. 2022. What Animates Place for Children? A Comparative Analysis. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 53 (2): 112–129. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12409.

Čarni, Andraž, Petra Košir, Aleksander Marinšek, Urban Šilc, and Igor Zelnik. 2007. Changes in Structure, Floristic Composition and Chemical Soil Properties in a Succession of Birch Forests. *Periodicum Biologorum: An Interdisciplinary International Journal of the Societas Scientiarum Naturalium Croatica* 109 (1): 13–20.

Dattatreyan, Ethiraj Gabriel and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón. 2019. Introduction: Multimodal Anthropology and the Politics of Invention. *American Anthropologist* 121 (1): 220–228. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13183.

Dix, Benjamin, and Raminder Kaur. 2019. Drawing-Writing Culture: The Truth-Fiction Spectrum of an Ethno-Graphic Novel on the Sri Lankan Civil War and Migration. *Visual Anthropology Review* 35 (1): 76–111. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12172.

Grossman, Alyssa. 2013. Filming in the Light of Memory. In *Transcultural Montage*, eds. Rane Willerslev and Christian Suhr, 198–212. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Haapio-Kirk, Laura. 2022. Introduction. Special Theme Ethnographic Collaborations: Crossing Borders with Multimodal Illustration. *Trajectoria* 3. DOI: https://doi.org/10.51002/trajectoria_022_01.

Hamdy, Sherine and Yasmin Moll. 2024. Visualizing Erasure: Co-Creating Comics and Animation from Revolutionary Street Art to Nubian Memories of Displacement in Egypt. *Visual Anthropology Review* 40 (2): 264–280. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12343.

Honess Roe, Annabelle. 2016. Animated Documentary. In *Contemporary Documentary*, eds. Selmin Kara and Daniel Marcus, 42–56. London, New York: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315725499-5.

Morelli, Camilla. 2025. Animating the Future: Amplifying Youth Voices Through Ethnographic Animation. *Visual Anthropology* 38 (1–2): 90–108. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2025.2510858.

Moretti, Cristina. 2021. Sensate Memory: An Introduction to the Special Issue. *Multimodality & Society* 1 (3): 245–265. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/26349795211028039.

Pink, Sarah, Phil Hubbard, Maggie O'Neill, and Alan Radley. 2010. Walking across Disciplines: From Ethnography to Arts Practice. *Visual Studies* 25 (1): 1–7. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14725861003606670.

Pink, Sarah. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Powis, Richard. 2017. Heartened by Iconoclasm: A Few Preliminary Thoughts About Multimodality: Multimodal Anthropologies. *American Anthropologist* 119 (2): 359–361. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12870.

Rumsby, Charlie. 2020. Retrospective (Re)presentation: Turning the Written Ethnographic Text into an 'Ethno-Graphic'. *Entanglements: Experiments in Multimodal Ethnography* 3 (2): 7–27.

Rumsby, Charlie. 2022. Graphic Ethnography: Tuning into the Melody. *Theorizing the Contemporary, Fieldsights*, July 28. URL: https://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/graphic-ethnography-tuning-into-the-melody (accessed 16.11.2025).

Rumsby, Charlie and Ben Thomas. 2022. Waters of Death and Life: The Evolution of an 'Ethno-Graphic'. *Trajectoria* 3. DOI: https://doi.org/10.51002/trajectoria_022_03.

Spray, Julie. 2021. Drawing Perspectives Together: What Happens When Researchers Draw with Children? *Visual Anthropology Review* 37 (2): 356–379. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12244.

Spray, Julie. 2025. Love and Agency in Ethnographic Fieldwork with Children. *Ethnography* 26 (4): 644–669. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/14661381221120209.

Theodossopoulos, Dimitrios. 2022. Introduction: Graphic Ethnography on the Rise. *Theorizing the Contemporary, Fieldsights*. URL: https://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/introduction-graphic-ethnography-on-the-rise (accessed 16.4.2026).

Theodossopoulos, Dimitrios, and Letizia Bonanno. 2026. On the Compositional Relationship of Text and Image in Graphic Anthropology: The Promise of 'Sequential' and 'Unrestrained' Perspectives for Unsettling Representation. *American Anthropologist* 128 (1): 130–147. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.70054.

Turk Niskač, Barbara. 2025. The Value of Commoon Bracken Revisited: A Walking Ethnography of *steljniki*. *Suomen Antropologi: Suomen Antropologisen Seuran Julkaisu = Antropologi i Finland: Antropologiska Sällskapet i Finland* 49 (2): 90–105. DOI: https://doi.org/10.30676/jfas.141505.

Turk Niskač, Barbara and Zsuzsa Millei. 2025. Children, Common Bracken and Cows at Work: Re-Considering Work in Multispecies Relations through Childhood Memories. *Children's Geographies* 23 (1): 69–82. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2024.2425325.

Turk Niskač, Barbara and Pauliina Rautio. 2025. "If You Were Always with Them, You Were Their Friend": Cows and Oxen Co-Constituting Childhoods in Grazing Memories of Rural Slovenia. *Southeastern Europe* 49 (1–2): 74–98. DOI: https://doi.org/10.30965/18763332-49010004.

Wang, Yijing, and Yin Zhang. 2022. Giving a Voice to Minority: Practical Exploration of Ethnographic Animation. *International Journal of Computer Graphics & Animation* 12 (3): 1–8. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5121/ijcga.2022.12301.

**Večnačinska srečanja: oživljanje spominov na otroštvo v spreminjajočih se krajinah**

Članek obravnava animacijo kot večnačinsko etnografsko reprezentacijo, ki je nastala s povezovanjem etnografske raziskave in umetniške prakse. Predstavlja šest animiranih del, ki so bila na podlagi spominov posneta med etnografsko raziskavo o vključevanju otrok v kmečko gospodarstvo v jugovzhodni Sloveniji. Članek najprej umesti animacijo v etnografiji k t. i. obratu h grafičnim pripovedim. Nato podrobneje predstavi ozadje raziskave ter proces nastajanja animacij v sodelovanju z ilustratorko in režiserko Zarjo Menart ter studiom Finta Film, specializiranim za animirane stop-motion filme. V nadaljevanju članka so animacije predstavljene skupaj s pisnimi zapisi spominov ter fotografijami in videoposnetki s sprehodov s sogovorniki, s čimer prikazujejo, kako lahko animacija nazorneje predstavlja pretekle izkušnje sogovornikov. Naraščajoče število študij poudarja, da lahko grafična pripoved in animacija pomagata oživiti pretekle dogodke, spomine, težke zgodbe, čustva in druge neoprijemljive vidike vsakdanjega življenja sogovornikov. Pristopi, ki uporabljajo grafično pripoved in animacijo, oživijo raziskavo na bolj čustveni in osebni ravni ter lažje zajamejo čutne razsežnosti družbenega življenja (Haapio-Kirk, 2022; Theodossopoulos, 2022; Bates idr., 2023; Hamdy, Moll, 2024). Animacija kot vizualizacija pripovedi sogovornikov o preteklih dogodkih prikliče živost ter obudi afektivne, veččutne, prostorske in estetske razsežnosti raziskave (Theodossopoulos, 2022; Bates idr., 2023). Na podlagi teze, da lahko animacija raziskavo približa občinstvu na bolj oseben in neposreden način, predstavljene animacije gledalcem omogočajo lažje predstave o tem, kako je bilo sogovornikom kot otrokom bivati v predstavljenih

kmečkih krajinah, ter hkrati ozaveščajo o gospodarskih in okoljskih spremembah, ki so se odvile v času ene generacije. Članek se zaključi z razmislekom o vlogi animacije v večnačinski etnografiji in njenem prispevku k posredovanju raziskovalnih spoznanj raznolikim občinstvom. S tem prispeva k sodobnim razpravam o večnačinskih pristopih, saj pokaže, kako animacija ne le reprezentira, temveč tudi interpretira, uteleša in posreduje veččutne in afektivne izkušnje udeležencev v raziskavi. Uporaba animacije, ki povezuje akademski svet in umetnost, lahko naredi etnografske izsledke privlačnejše in dostopne širši javnosti, hkrati pa omogoča, da raziskavo približamo tudi sogovornikom in skupnostim, ki jih ti predstavljajo.

Traditiones 55 (2): 83–107 | COBISS: 1.01 | CC BY 4.0 | DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2026550205

# Photovoice as a Complementary Approach with a Tuareg Family in Agadez, Niger

***Sarah Lunaček Brumen***

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
sarah.lunacek@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7618-9010

This article focuses on collaborative and participatory photography, particularly photovoice, in which the main advantage is the active involvement of research collaborators. This involvement brings researchers closer to the collaborators' life worlds and allows potentially more effective communication with various publics and decision makers. In the second part, the author presents the photovoice approach as a complementary method, using the example of research into everyday life and attitudes toward the countryside among the Tuareg in Agadez, Niger.

▪ **Keywords**: participatory photography, photovoice, collaborative approaches, Tuareg, mobile pastoralism

Prispevek obravnava sodelovalno in udeleženo fotografijo, predvsem fotopripovedi, ki omogočajo dejavno sodelovanje udeležencev raziskave, približanje življenjskim svetovom sodelujočih in možnost boljšega komuniciranja z javnostmi in odločevalci. V drugem delu avtorica predstavi pristop fotopripovedi kot komplementarne metode na primeru raziskave vsakdanjega življenja in odnosa do podeželja Tuaregov v Agadezu.

▪ **Ključne besede**: sodelovalna fotografija, fotopripoved, sodelovalni pristopi, Tuaregi, mobilno pastirstvo

## Introduction

Multimodal anthropology, as defined by Collins and Durrington (2024), is inherently collaborative and used to serve the specific community an anthropologist is working with. Collins and Durrington invite researchers to transform visual anthropology with available digital means for this purpose. Among other approaches, they promote photovoice (ibid.: 61–63), a method advocated by anthropology and other social sciences. Other authors such as Grasseni et al. trace new multimodal and digital trends on the basis of continuation of approaches in visual anthropology (2022).

In contemporary anthropology, photography was first seen as a promising technology for recording realistic material for documentation (Mauss, cited in Clifford, 1988: 63, 67), interpretation, and further analysis of research (Bateson, Mead, 1942; Mead, 1975). Collier and Collier (1986) already understood interviewing with photography made by researchers not only as a means to obtain more information, but also as establishing less hierarchical relationships with research subjects, giving them a position of experts (Collier, Collier, 1986: 130, 131).

Sarah Pink further distinguishes between positivist, objective approaches and subjective, reflexive approaches to the use of photography in anthropology (Pink, 2001; see also Turk Niskač, 2011). In anthropological research, the meaning of photos is produced within an intersubjective[1] relationship between the researcher and the research participant, who "use the content of images as vessels in which to invest meanings and through which to produce and present their knowledge, self-identities, experiences and emotions" (Pink, 2001: 68). Meaning is not static, but changes in different conversational and presentational contexts (Luttrell, 2010).

Despite increasing awareness of multimodality and the importance of visual and sensory approaches in research (Howes, 1991; Pink, 2009; Muršič et al., 2022), these research outputs rarely find an equal route to academic publication. As Pink proposed, multiple genres in writing should be extended to the various visual modes used in final publications, aiming for non-hierarchical multi-vocality despite possible ambiguities (Pink, 2001: 117–118). Only recently have journals[2] (such as *Visual Anthropology Review*, *Visual Ethnography*, *Glasnik SED*, and *Svetovi*) and online platforms (such as the project PASTRES) opened space for multimodal presentations, including photo-stories.

In reconsidering established visual anthropology approaches within the context of multimodality, I focus on collaborative and participatory uses of photography, particularly photovoice, to address their possibilities, advantages, challenges, and potential in anthropology. In the second part, I present and critically evaluate photovoice with a Tuareg family in the urban environment of northern Niger, exploring their changing everyday life and their relationship with the countryside. I reflect on the role of photovoice in our relationships and the additional research insights it made possible in my long-term research.[3] The two parts are presented separately and are mainly brought together in the discussion and conclusion because I wanted to provide an overview of the possibilities and challenges of participatory and collaborative photography approaches, and also to keep my research case narrative in a compact form by comparing and analyzing it separately. In this article, selected photographs from photo-stories only slightly exceed illustrative value and only partially represent the richness of photo-stories themselves.

---

[1] I understand intersubjectivity in phenomenological terms as lived relationships through which people communicate and negotiate meaning, identity, experience, and emotions (Jackson, 1996: 23, 26, 27; Pink, 2001: 68).

[2] Booklets (e.g., Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, 2016) and books may offer more space for photography (not only photo-stories) beyond mere illustrations, serving as complementary knowledge communication to textual genres, but this is still uncommon (see, e.g., Kohl, 2009; or memories of long-term fieldwork engagement through photography and drawing in Holtedahl, 2023).

[3] The main research for my dissertation was in 2003 and 2004 (fifteen months), with several return visits between 2011 and 2024 on various topics. With participants, we engaged in photo-stories in December 2011 and January 2012.

## Terminology: Participatory or collaborative

The terminology in participatory and collaborative visual methods remains unclear. As Nadja Valentinčič Furlan summarizes for film and video, the term *participatory video* refers to projects in which the technical device, such as a film or video camera, is operated by the research subject (2025: 64). For research described as collaborative, the research collaborators must be actively involved in deciding on the topic, structure, and use of the film (Valentinčič Furlan, 2025). According to Ruby, in such cases, competences and power relations should be equal, which in practice is rarely achieved (Ruby, 1991; see also Valentinčič Furlan, 2025: 65; MacDougall, 2022). As can be seen, part of the questions concern who has the camera in his or her hands and therefore concretely participates in research, and another part of the concerns are related to the question of who decides on the research topic, its exploration and presentation, and the use of research outcomes, and therefore collaborates in research. Ideally, research subjects should become collaborators and be able to do both, collaborating with visual technical means, but in practice these elements are used to varying degrees.

In the domain of photography used in research, there are issues similar to those found in the use of film. The terms *participatory photography* and *photovoice* are most often used when the camera is in the hands of research subjects (Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2012; Turk Niskač, 2012, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2015; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023; Plage, 2023; Morteson, Questiaux, 2025). Because photos acquire different meanings, engaging in conversation with photos is an integral part of participatory photography and photovoice.

Other approaches to interviewing with photography are possible, in which photos are not generated by participants and are intended to encourage conversation about specific topics. The term *photo-elicitation* (e.g., McLaughlan, 2025; see also Turk Niskač, 2022: 89) is used in this case. Linda Murray and Meredith Nash use the term *photo-elicitation* as a broader term when a photo is inserted in research, even if it is created by participants (2016: 924). Although the practical aspect of photo-elicitation can be meaningful for participants, the terminological aspect of photo-elicitation seems in contradiction with participants creating their own input through photography. Furthermore, the idea of using photography in contemporary anthropological research is not to extract information, but rather to provide another means of communication and involvement with participants in research.

Another terminological issue that needs to be considered is which term to use: *research subjects*, *participants*, *collaborators*, or *protagonists*. When using video, those that participate or collaborate in research by being filmed, and with whom researchers usually discuss the filmed material, can be referred to as protagonists because they are the main figures in the film. According to the definition of "participatory" in the context of filming given above, participants are those that hold the camera but do not necessarily collaborate in research design, although they do influence the research process, whereas

research collaborators play a crucial role in the research design itself. In photography, the same principle applies: participants hold the camera, and collaborators take part in several phases of the research. Ideally, they would also collaborate in formulating the research question, which is rarely the case due to the current organization of research funding in projects. Those terminological solutions are still not satisfactory because research can be participatory or collaborative even if it does not use any visual media.

The term *research collaborator* is used more widely. As anthropological research has developed from a positivist to a reflexive approach, shifting from observing to collaborating, the term for those we research with, rather than on, has changed from *informants* to *research participants*, and finally to *research collaborators*. Especially in multimodal anthropology and in efforts toward more thorough collaboration in research (Collins, Durrington, 2024), the term *research collaborator* has been increasingly used as a generative label for participants in ethnographic research. Although this reasonably indicates our intentions, it can sometimes be methodologically misleading. In any case, a dynamic relationship in the research process requires reflection on who proposes the research agenda and approaches, whether these are adapted to community needs and developed with research collaborators, what the roles of collaborators and researchers are, who interprets the results, and whether the research is meaningful in any way for the research participants.

## Photovoice

Photovoice is based on photos taken by research participants themselves, and these photos form the basis for conversations. They are also intended to be central to the narrative, even when an additional step to create photo-stories is not taken. Photovoice is used not only in anthropology (Bayre et al., 2016; Roque de Piño, 2016; Turk Niskač, 2022; Collins, Durrington, 2024; Morteson, Questiaux, 2025) but also across various social sciences, as well as in NGO and community projects (Wang, Burris, 1997; Luttrell, 2010; Bell, 2015; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023; Schwartz et al., 2025). Most authors refer to Caroline Wang and Marry Ann Burris (1997) when defining their approach as photovoice. Wang and Burris (1997), researchers in public health, described photovoice in three phases: enabling the community to record and reflect on its concerns, promoting critical group discussion, and reaching policymakers. Their approach is therefore an engaged and empowering process, aimed at defining problems by the community and solving them, which is also in line with certain contemporary understandings of multimodality. Often, however, the last step is omitted in academic research, replaced by analysis, making the entire process less action-oriented but rather reflexive. In the latter case, the approach could be called participatory photography because participants are participating in the researcher's research. Sophie Mortensen and François Questiaux

(2025) proposed expanding the notion of photovoice to research as a methodology for knowledge creation about everyday experiences of participants. In their case, migrant workers in Thailand and Ghana / Burkina Faso created aesthetic and emotional knowledge and political messages about their marginalized situation in the global system. I suggest permitting photovoice use in research beyond marginalized groups as well.

In photovoice, participants learn the basics of using a camera, or they use their mobile phone cameras; this depends on their prior experience and the resources available in the research context. In collaborative research, the research question may be formulated together with research collaborators (Bayre et al., 2016, 2018; Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2021). More often, in participatory research, researchers provide participants with some basic questions or guidelines for photographing, usually very open, such as: What is important to you? How would you describe your everyday life? When working with children, questions might include: What would you like to show your family or friends? (Luttrell, 2010; Turk Niskač, 2022). Questions addressed to young people or adults can also be more specific, relating to the particular situation of participants, such as migration or health (Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2021; Plage, 2023), or to perspectives on local change (Roque de Piño, 2016). Questions can be formulated with direct active impact in mind, particularly in relation to environmental issues, such as pollution (Bell, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2015), and may be reformulated based on conversations that reveal what matters most to participants. Depending on the research focus, the expression can be more metaphorical (Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2021) and artistic (Smit et al., 2025).[4] Artists themselves, within the scope of community art, use collaborative methods (Sajovic, 2016).

Photovoice and participatory photography allow research participants to capture what interests them. They themselves can select what to share with the researcher and discuss it further. The act of creating and sharing photos influences the direction of the research. Photos provide details and associations, allowing participants to choose, remember, associate, and explain, while allowing the researcher to learn about and inquire into specific activities, relationships, and places. This creates another space for dialogue and unexpected insights. As Joana Roque de Piño (2016) has shown, the photovoice method used by villagers near an environmentally protected area was able to reveal alternative perspectives. By actively participating and broadening research questions to include various types of change (in the village, outside the village, and in the water), not just climate change, it became possible to encourage villagers to explore beyond what had previously been assumed by various projects' interventions. In this case, it also meant highlighting other aspects of change important to the villagers, as well as showcasing local practices of environmental services that had gone unnoticed by earlier NGO interventions. The villagers not only became involved in exploring

[4] In art-based methods, Smit et al. primarily analyze drawings, and photography is also included.

their own perspectives but also selected the photos they wished to share and presented them publicly to local authorities and protected area management. It was crucial that the new medium (photography) transformed research subjects into participants and, further, into collaborators that provided their perspectives on environmental and social change. This is essential for equality and overcoming domination: not conducting research on externally prescribed topics, but opening ways and media with the particular community to include their perspectives, experiences, and concerns.

## Whose voice and other issues

Wendy Luttrell and Richard Chalfen (2010) questioned the construction of voice in photovoice in research with vulnerable groups. They drew attention to the fact that the idea of "giving voice" reflects the power dynamics of who gives voice to whom and is therefore inherently paternalistic. This issue can be addressed by omitting the ambition of "giving" voice and instead focusing on the motivation to understand and engage in conversation in different situations. Clearly, "voice" is always constructed in social dynamics. Barbara Turk Niskač (2012, 2021) further reflects on how to hear children's voices in photovoice and how to notice when researchers can unintentionally try to guess or presume the meanings of photos. In addition, children and other research participants often pass a camera to others to photograph themselves or because others want to participate in photographing as well (Turk Niskač, 2021). By paying attention to these aspects, as well as to an individual child's refusal to speak, and by carefully re-listening to recorded conversations, it was possible to follow children's intentions regarding the photos more closely (ibid.).

With the construction of voices, I return to the initial questioning of the intersubjective creation of meaning. In her research with children of migrant backgrounds in fifth and sixth grade in a Canadian school, Wendy Luttrell (2010) created various communication opportunities. The children were asked to take photos representing their everyday lives. When each child individually explained the meaning of the photos to Luttrell and her female assistants, the emphasis or entire narrative differed from their explanations during the session of selecting photos for exhibition with peers. Their practice of sharing views of their social relations and communicating everyday experiences was transmitted through different intersubjective relations; therefore, the meaning changed. The authors mentioned above suggest that the research process needs to be revealed and reflected upon to document the construction of voices in different situations and relationships. Taking into account the process of taking photos, the intersubjective relationship, and the intention in selecting and interpreting photos for display, photos allow children and adults to express different aspects of what matters to them.

When a researcher asks a participant to take photos, the participant might have in mind that the photos are intended for the researcher or other audiences to view (Luttrell, Chalfen, 2010; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023; Plage, 2023). Taking photos is shaped by the intention of what one wishes to share and "for whom" they are created. When Phil Mizen and Oyu Ofusu Kosi (2010) worked with children living on the streets in Accra, they acknowledged that the children brought photos of their daily lives to show the researchers how they lived. The photos were taken to present to the researcher, but the process was not one-sided; the participating children also took photos to express themselves and to show how they lived and who they were. Clearly, when research collaborators present their everyday life "through their own eyes," this does not occur in a vacuum. They bring photos to the researcher and, as in any social research, this activity is shaped by their relationship with the researcher.

Joana Roque de Piño (2016) addresses the potential issue of power relations by actively transforming research subjects into research collaborators and photographers in their work in research projects. Research collaborators discuss photos and present selected images with accompanying narratives to the community and public, including local leaders. Only after this process do academic articles follow. In addition, they acquired a new photography skill, which was particularly significant before the widespread availability of everyday smartphone photography. Taking photos during research also provided an opportunity to capture additional images of their friends and family (Luttrell, 2010; Roque de Piño, 2016, 2022).

Sometimes attempts to take photos fail. Some people do not feel the capacity to photograph or choose to disengage. Josh Packard describes how he showed the basics of photography to homeless participants in research in Nashville, in the southern United States, and how reluctant some homeless people were to use the camera, as well as how disappointed they were when they could not capture what they wanted (Packard, 2008). Perhaps photovoice was not the optimal approach, or it could be improved by providing additional training and building stronger trust with participants. Participatory methods require trust and involvement of the researcher with participants, particularly when they are in a vulnerable position. It is also important that participants find these activities meaningful and engaging. For example, in the case of refugee women in southern Italy, the anthropologist Sabine Tiefenthaler and photographer Gemma Lynch collaborated to offer a photography workshop, enabling women who wished to participate to build competency and express themselves, directly or metaphorically, about their feelings and circumstances (Tiefenthaler, Lynch, 2021). Enskillment in media is necessary to the extent that one can use a camera to achieve the desired outcome (Roque de Piño, 2016). On the other hand, researchers can also clarify that they are not seeking professional photography, but rather photography that is meaningful to the participant (Bandaluko, Arko, 2023).

When photographing or discussing photos, a researcher needs to consider preferred ways of being photographed (Banks, 2001; Behrend, 2003), which can conveniently be referred to as photographic culture (Pink, 2001). Photographic culture is further adapted and developed through social media, influencing what types of photography are considered shareable in different cultural contexts (Miller, Sinanan, 2017). On the other hand, it is also possible to find ways to build relationships and collaborate when the anthropologist is the photographer. Camilo Leon-Quijano (2022) collaborated with rappers and young female rugby players in Sarcelles near Paris to find the best ways and photographic styles they wanted to be represented in. Therefore, photos make possible many ways in which researchers can provide meaningful involvement of participants/collaborators in research.

## Photovoice with the family in Agadez

After discussing various aspects of participatory and collaborative photography, in the second part of this article I present my experience of using photovoice with a Tuareg family in northern Niger, in the regional capital Agadez, as a complementary approach to long-term research. When I returned to Niger for the first time in December 2011, seven years after conducting research for my dissertation, my family and I were warmly welcomed by Fatima's family, with whom I was connected, and by their extended networks. I was checking the findings of my dissertation with family members, particularly the young people. In 2011, it was still the analogue era, with no WhatsApp or photos to send, and so my previous follow-ups were limited to phone calls and, more importantly, a visit from Souleymane Mohamed in 2006, who held a photo exhibition in Ljubljana, Slovenia (Lunaček, 2018). Returning to Niger, I intended to focus my research on changes and attitudes towards development, compared to the desired changes in the camps of mobile pastoralists from Souleymane's family. Even then, it was not advisable to stay long in nomadic camps due to insecurity, and we were only able to spend a few days in a camp in Azawak and in pastoralist settlements in Aïr. I therefore had to refocus the research question to include the urban environment of Agadez.

Many Imajeghan (Tuareg) from mobile pastoralist communities, or from communities increasingly focused on gardening and pastoralism, have moved to Agadez for job opportunities and their children's schooling. They maintain close ties with relatives in the countryside, usually keeping their herds with them. Their houses serve as family homes in the city, allowing nephews from the countryside to attend school in Agadez, and accommodating other family members visiting the city (Lunaček, 2020; Gonzales, 2025). In the adapted research agenda, I explored the perspectives of Tuareg in Agadez on changes in mobile pastoralism, how they experience urban everyday life, the aspirations of youth, and their relationships with the countryside and pastoralist life.

I had two small digital cameras, which were easy to use. In Agadez, we stayed with my friend Fatima and her family in a house that was very open, connected, and lively. I offered the cameras to the parents, Fatima and Baye, as well as to some of their high school children and nephews: two boys, Souley (eighteen years old) and his cousin Iliasu (nineteen), and two girls, Salama (sixteen) and her cousin Tabelala (seventeen), who decided to take part in the photography project. I asked if they would be willing to take photos of what was important to them in their everyday lives and then discuss the photos with me. Each of them had a camera for two days, with no limit on the number of photos they could take. Afterward, I uploaded each participant's pictures to my laptop. Sitting together so I could handle the technical aspects, the participants made an initial selection of what to use for the photo-story. We then used PowerPoint, and the research participant told me what to include on each page. Usually, they placed one photo per page. When photos were related and they wanted to include several, I suggested the option of putting three photos together (as in Figure 1). We paused at each selected photo so they could explain why they took and chose certain images, and what was important to them, and the conversation developed further. I wrote down what they told me. Unfortunately, I did not audio record the conversation, which made the co-constructed aspect of the narratives less clear. PowerPoint allowed us to create a visible product: a photo-story. After checking whether any parts needed to be erased before sharing the photo-stories with other family members, I left two computers and an additional USB key with all the stories in the family house. I gave one camera to another cousin that wanted to continue photographing. When I returned next time, I also brought printed copies of the photos.

Photo-stories were not the only approach to understanding; we shared daily life with the people in the house, chatting and cooking, visiting relatives in the countryside, and welcoming relatives arriving for holidays from the capital and those coming from the countryside. I primarily conducted interviews with development agents and entrepreneurs outside the family, but also within the family, speaking with the father and a group of young men – friends and nephews – who had established a cultural organization for the preservation of tradition. After this small joint project, I returned to the family several times, most recently in December 2024, which allowed me to follow the life trajectories of individuals and observe how their aspirations were changing. Here I focus on research insights related to the photo-stories' context, content, and methodology by briefly presenting each person's approach and the main themes in their photography and photo-stories, and I highlight some comparisons and common traits in their approaches. It was a small group of participants, but their diversity quickly became apparent. This was evident in their approach to the camera, the number of photos taken, and their choice of topics.

Fatima, the mother, attended a naming ceremony (*isnauen*) for the grandchild of her good friend and returned the following day with a total of 145 photos from the event.

She was happy to let others use her camera to take photos. She had no difficulty reducing the number of photos to forty slides, keeping some images she did not like technically but wanted to include because they featured dear people and served as memories. Fatima knew what she wanted to photograph. During the naming ceremony, it was important for her to capture the sacrifice of a ram in the morning. She also wanted to show the mother of the newborn with the baby, her room, relatives, and the cooking process. She took several photos of women, including the baby's grandmother, her very good friend. She also photographed another friend, Zejnab, preparing polenta (*eshink n abora*) because it is difficult to make it for so many people, and Zejnab was very skilled at it.

For Fatima, as I understood it, social life from the countryside continued in the city, with slightly modified transition rituals such as naming days and marriages, which allowed for visits in all directions, including her own visits to the countryside. Fatima is a very open person with no formal schooling, and she loved meeting new people. They lived in Agadez, but, as she revealed in our evening conversations, she too would prefer to be in the countryside, in a village with her goats and camels nearby. She did have some goats in the courtyard but did not include them in her photo-story. In other photos, she included all the people living in her house: her children, nephews, my son, and me. To me, her photos confirmed and visualized what I was already learning in other ways: the importance of transition rituals in knitting social relations, and the significance of her home not just as a nest for children, but as a knot in numerous relationships with relatives, friends, and guests. Food and commensality played a role in nourishing these networks.

In contrast, Baye, the father, took only twenty-one photos, all taken by himself except one, with the specific aim of showing adaptation to sedentarization

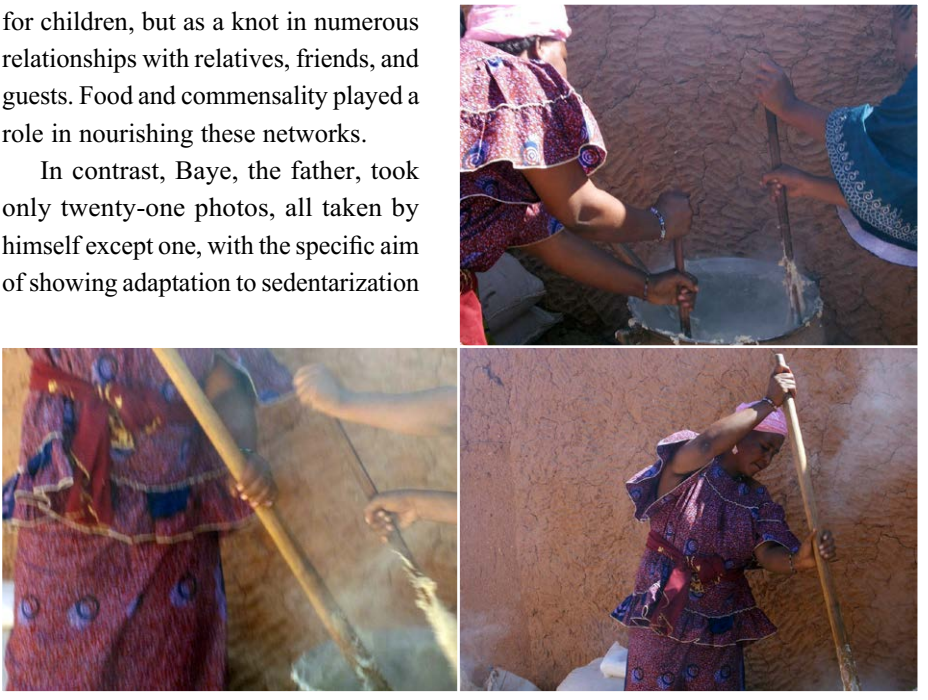

Figure 1: Zeynab preparing polenta. Photos: Fatima Baye, 16 January 2012.

in a nearby gardening settlement. We had discussed this topic in an interview a few days earlier, and so he continued to explore it. Baye explained how people switched from pastoralism to gardening after the drought in 1984 because they lost their animals. Each of his photos was intended to show a particular aspect of irrigated gardening (and irrigation system, growing onions and corn), and a specific type of changing housing and dress. For example, his cousins in the city had "traditional upgraded clothes" with a veil (*taglmust*). He took a photo of an elderly man, his uncle, who came to the city to treat his eyes, to keep it as a family memory. In this case the camera was an opportunity to photograph a dear older relative. Otherwise, technical aspects of gardening and sedentarization took priority over people. Baye is a teacher by profession, teaching in different villages where he was assigned, before moving to Agadez when his children reached the age to attend high school. Otherwise, he said he would prefer living in the countryside, which he often visited on his motorbike. His family from the valleys and mountains of Aïr became experts in gardening, which for them became integrated into Tuareg culture in this mountain massif.

The girls – the cousins Tabelala and Salama, Fatima's daughter – were approximately the same age – seventeen and sixteen years old – and both attended high school. Tabelala had just arrived from Libya, where she grew up with her siblings and mother, who had decided to return to Niger. Tabelala lived with her mother's sister and her



Figure 2: Sedentarization. Photo: Mohamed Baye, 15 January 2012.



Figure 3: Sweeping the school courtyard. Photo: Tabelala Ilel, 18 January 2012.

cousins in another house nearby. Despite having a stomach-ache, she decided to speak with me after taking photos because she felt this was a responsibility toward me and I realized it too late. She took photos "for me", but they reflected her own interests. Her photos were divided among family members such as her brother, her daily household tasks shared with her cousin, and school activities. At school, she chose to show the common activity of sweeping and caring for the school courtyard. At the time, she was attending a Franco-Arabic school and wanted to become a nurse. She said she missed some of the benefits of Libya, such as cheaper food. In one of a series of photos, we see her making tea, which she loves to prepare.

Salama, Fatima's daughter, attended a different school, the same one as her male cousin Abderhmane, who also lived in Fatima's house. She started practicing photography by taking pictures of him. She took two photos of her favorite teacher, a young woman who taught family education. This subject was her favorite because they also learned about family planning and housekeeping. She said she would be too shy to teach a subject like that herself. Her first wish was to finish high school as soon as possible and get married. She told me she had already chosen her future husband. I learned that usually a girl tells her mother her choice, and only then discussions between families begin. In addition to taking photos at school, Salama took very aesthetic and affectionate photos of her closest family members. I thought she might be a little afraid of her



Figure 4: Little sister. Photo: Salama Baye, 12 January 2012.

mother because she obeyed her every call, but through these conversations about the images I learned that she not only respects her but loves her deeply. When her mother is not there, the house feels rather empty, she said. Her mother was the ultimate role model for her. From her focus on family members and the way she photographed them, I was able to feel her care for her younger siblings and understand her values better.

Illias, Baye's sister's son, was deeply engaged in preparing for his final exam. He chose natural sciences as his major because he wanted to study geology or economics. His days revolved entirely around school and lessons. Through photos, he allowed me to gain insight into his class, his male and female classmates of various ethnicities, the solidarity of a Fulani girl that took him to school on her motorbike, and a Hausa friend that shared his larger house for group study sessions. At the time, Iliasu's dream was to finish university and find a job near his home village, where his mother and sister lived. However, he said he would be willing to go far away to earn money to support them if the opportunity arose. Because he was too busy studying, he could not visit the village, and so he borrowed a photo of the village from his cousin Souley (Figure 7). He explained that he felt most at ease in the village, among family members and free to move as he wished, because there was no police curfew like in the city. The village was also associated with holidays, when he worked in the garden to earn money for his school supplies.




Figure 5: Ilias at school. Photo: a schoolmate of Ilias Rhisa, 4 December 2011.

Souley, the son of Fatima and Baye, had just finished high school and did not yet have the ambition to continue his studies. He wanted to develop a garden with onions to earn money, and his dream was to own a shop. Several photos showed onion cooperatives and markets. That year was particularly unfavorable for onion prices, and onions were rotting everywhere. In other years, onions could bring a fortune. Souley included a photo together with his friend in his shop, young friends smiling against a background of essential commodities such as macaroni, sugar, oil, and Maggi seasoning. Souley took time to visit his grandmother's village to see his cousins and other relatives – for example, his older aunt, who was shy about being photographed, but whom he wanted to include precisely because of her importance because older people are valued in the family for their knowledge and as a link to previous generations. In the village, Souley photographed a traditional dwelling (a mobile tent, or *ehan*; Figure 7) and a water pump. He was also critical of a coal mine and power plant, which caused dust to fall on the gardens and pastures. He showed how his cousins had to study at night using torches because their house did not have electricity, despite the proximity of the power plant. A camel running from the road represented the violent impact of the road. For him, the countryside was very important; like Ilias, he also spent holidays gardening.

Because Souley spent much time in the countryside with his grandmother, he also knew the family tree by heart, and I wrote down all the family lineages for myself




Figure 6: Sign for the cooperative. Photo: Souley Baye, 2 January 2012.



Figure 7: A traditional home, or *ehan*. Photo: Souley Baye, 13 January 2012, with commentary by Ilias.

to learn. He drew a map of the entire village with all the houses and the names of the inhabitants. At that point, there were many of us in a room, and the young men began to dream about the future of the village. In an ideal world, they imagined living in the village, in large houses with running water and electricity. If the road was good, they could work in the city and maintain the gardens.

## Relation to the countryside and methodological insights

Because I did not specifically ask the participants to focus on the difference between the city and the countryside, these themes appeared in our conversations only sporadically. Several elements associated with the countryside were present in the city, such as milk and tea. Ilias began his story with *iliwa*, a typical morning meal for the Tuareg in both the countryside and the city. Tabelala photographed her brother with a small calabash containing milk from the two goats her aunt keeps in her courtyard. Elements related to milk carry connotations of the countryside, where herds are kept. Milk is valued as the best food, yet it is difficult to obtain in the city because animals are distant and powdered milk is expensive. Tea was another important element in the photos, regarded as crucial to Tuareg identity and everyday life. It appeared in Tabelala's photos, where she is making it, and in images of Souley drinking tea while visiting his cousin.

For all the men participating, the countryside was an important topic to discuss. For the father, our previous interview influenced his focus on sedentarization. For Souley and Ilias, it was their love for the countryside and their relatives there that they both expressed when reflecting on well-being and the future. Souley took his time to visit the countryside, photographing relatives, the well, the dwellings, and the impact of the power plant. He said that, given more time, he would also photograph the gardens. Ilias borrowed a photo of traditional tents from Souley to express his attachment to the countryside.

Fatima and Salama could not visit the countryside with a camera during those two days, but, given the opportunity, they would have been interested in taking photos there. The network of relatives they photographed was clearly extending into the city. As already mentioned, for Fatima, whether in the city or countryside, at home or in other homes, her role was always to create a meshwork of relationships. The girls also discussed their aspirations: marriage for Salama and medical school for Tabelala. Fatima and her daughter Salama primarily focused on social interactions, events, roles, and people important to them. The father conducted his own research and had a point to demonstrate. The boys showed the places most important to them and related to their aspirations (university and business), as well as relationships significant to them; for Illasu, those were at school and in the village, and, for Souley, it was the relatives. Everyone included photos of people they wanted to remember. Passing a camera to others not only meant that some photos were not taken by the participant, but also that

individuals were willing to share the camera as part of their relationships, or that they asked someone else to take a photo of them (cf. Turk Niskač, 2012, 2022; Murray, Nash, 2017). The people appearing in photos, as well as those absent but mentioned in our conversations, revealed which relationships matter to participants and in what way.

Photovoice and photo-stories benefited my research on changes in the city, youth aspirations, and connections to the countryside by providing deeper, more nuanced insights. Although I was already attentive to signs of the countryside in the city (such as milk), these were also reflected by Ilias, Suley, and Tabelala. I gained a better understanding of the importance of gardens for both the father and his son. The mother's photography confirmed her essential role in the network of family relationships. Neither parent spoke explicitly about passing on their knowledge to their children, but the photo-stories revealed that Salama and Souley were interested in learning their parents' skills – Salama by taking her mother as a role model, and Souley by showing interest in onion production and expanding into business. Tabelala considered pursuing further schooling for employment but later chose to marry first. For a girl, it is difficult to insist on her plan to gain a profession, even when her husband supports her in principle. Once married and with children, continuing schooling becomes challenging. Photo-stories also function as a slice of time and shared memory, making it possible to follow and better understand later decisions in the lives of young participants.

Both parents that grew up in the countryside mentioned they would prefer to live there, but they chose the city for their children's schooling. For younger generations, the countryside is also associated with holidays, escaping the city, and spending time with parents and grandparents. At the same time, young people aspire to develop the countryside by bringing more infrastructure such as running water and electricity, and stronger housing to make life more comfortable for their parents, grandparents, and themselves. They continue the traditional principle of going out into the world and returning with new knowledge (Claudot-Hawad, 2002).

The relationship with the countryside is therefore multifaceted, ambiguous, and dynamic, far from being a one-way process. These insights were part of a long-term relationship, following extended families through various means, not only collaborative photography, and are included in other analyses (see Lunaček, 2020, 2023). It is important to ask about what is absent and to seek insights beyond photovoice to understand a broader context and acknowledge the limitations of a two-day photo project with an individual. From the photos alone, it might appear that Fatima and Salama did not care much about the countryside or goats, which was not the case. My understanding of the role of women in networks spanning both rural and urban environments was shaped by various occasions. Ideally, photovoice should be complemented by other research methods, as also proposed by Turk Niskač (2011, 2022). More broadly, anthropologists using participatory approaches tend to combine methods with participant observation and other techniques (e.g., Turk Niskač, 2012; Harper, Alonso, 2018; Roque de Piño, 2020).

Upgrading photovoice to photo-stories also proved to be a way to increase creativity in participation. As a result, personal photo-stories were more satisfactory than just photos and more comprehensive for me to review afterwards. What remained under-reflected was our shared construction of narratives along the slides. I did try to put myself at the service of participants, but not to the same extent as in Souleymane's exhibition (Lunaček, 2018), and I did ask questions. Recording would help to better understand our shared meaning-making, but it would not fully reveal the entire intersubjective process of photovoice (cf. Luttrell, 2010).

Photos allowed me to get closer to experiences of the younger generation. Although we lived in the same house, photos allowed us to focus on what they wished to share from their everyday lives and concerns with me as a researcher in an active and creative way. Because I am of the same generation as their parents, photovoice was effective in building trusting relationships across the generations. I gained better insight into their everyday life, wishes, and aspirations, including family attachment and connections to the countryside.

In this case, the plan was not to seek solutions in the community or make public presentations. Photovoice provided a way to participate in research on topics that interested them. However, it also allowed us to build closer relationships and strengthen our trust and understanding. Participants took photos to share with me, but they also had their own motivations: curiosity about trying something new and using photography to express their concerns and interests (cf. Roque de Piño, 2016, 2020). They also seized the opportunity to photograph cherished people and places for memory, as Ilias most clearly expressed on some slides: "Print this photo on paper!" I brought all the photos featuring persons on my next visit. With open questions and their own agendas and aims, my research became their project as well, moving beyond participation towards collaboration.

Our research orientation was explorative, experiential, and reflexive, not aimed at seeking solutions in the community or communicating political problems directly to decision makers (as in case of Harper, Alonso, 2016; Roque de Piño, 2016; Arku, Bandaluko, 2023). Despite this, many of the issues addressed were indirectly political, such as Souley's critique of the coal-fired power plant and its dust affecting the gardens without providing electricity locally. Ilias mentioned unease in the city due to the police curfew, and Tabelala commented on better bread prices in Libya. The potential of the applied value of photovoice remains for me to explore in the future. Even if I cannot go to Niger at the moment, it may serve as a suggestion to local civil society regarding exploration and communication of environmental issues.

## Communicative value and issues in publishing

Photography and photovoice have strong communicative value for community projects (Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, 2016; Harper, Alonso, 2018) and facing decision makers with the voices of a concerned community (Roque de Piño, 2016; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023). Photos have the ability to create affective connections, foster identification, and transmit or evoke meanings. For further communication, photovoice requires both photography, with its immediate content and affective impact on the viewer, and voice or text explaining the meanings participants shared about photos. In addition, it needs context, which is usually provided by anthropologists. Photos can be further arranged in photo-stories, presenting photos with accompanying text. Photo-stories are a result in themselves and have the potential to be the basis for exhibition or publication.

Publishing participatory photography presents additional challenges in participatory approaches because it often does not conform to formal photographic culture and may depict intimate scenes of everyday life and living conditions. The most important aspect of ethical codes and guidelines is to thoroughly consider the principle of doing no harm (American Anthropological Association, 2012; Cox et al., 2014: 7–11). Informed consent is necessary, but sometimes it is difficult to obtain it because researchers cannot always reach all the participants that have been photographed. Compared to text, anonymization in photography can significantly diminish the affective value of the image. Most intimate photos often have greater identification potential but might make the protagonists in photos more vulnerable. For example, I felt that some photos were potentially too intimate for public access; despite informed consent, I preferred to keep them for more controllable settings, such as research presentations in small groups. What to share is more transparent when research participants or collaborators select photos for exhibition and public presentation during the research process. (Roque de Piño, 2016, 2020; Murray, Nash, 2017; Bandaluko, Arku, 2023; Smit et al., 2025).

## Conclusion

Photovoice proved to offer many benefits, the most significant being the active participation and creative self-expression of research participants leading to more collaborative manners of research and its presentation. It is inherently political because it changes or at least challenges the power dynamics within research relationships. Even when taking photos for a research(er), participants also have their own motivations and bring their own perspectives they want to share. The meaning created in the process is inter-subjective, based on trust and motivation, and needs to be reflected. It is technically relatively easy and becoming more widely accessible with smartphones. It is crucial

that this method and its outcomes make sense to participants that need to understand research context so that it doesn't become just a method to efficiently and quickly extract data. Therefore photovoice is at its best when it is conceived as collaborative research from the outset.

Despite checking whether the question about the relation to the countryside as research was meaningful to the participants, my research lacked systematic creation of a collaborative and engaged approach and was rather explorative. Photovoice allowed me to better understand the relationships among participants and persons important to them, and to strengthen my connection with the younger generation, allowing me to gain greater insight into their present and future life decisions. In this way, I better understood their perspective on and relation with the countryside. It confirmed the continuity of a meshwork of relations spreading across urban and countryside spaces, as well as their economic connection. It allowed me additional close insights into everyday life spaces and encounters, aspirations, and values. Research needs to be complemented with other methods, such as participant observation and interviews with other actors, to understand a wider context and aspects not included in photo-stories.

Photo-stories can be a creative extension of photovoice, offering a collaborative outcome that can be revisited later, despite participants preferring to keep tangible printed photos for their memory. In addition to its reflexive power and convenience for collaborative and engaged discussion for desired changes, the (affective) potential of photovoice for wider communication must be carefully considered with participant-collaborators. In publications and exhibitions, a wider context is also needed, in which the anthropologist can serve again in the role of a mediator. In both individual and community engagement, along a continuum of reflexive, engaged, and applied approaches, photovoice fits into the continuum of visual anthropology approaches and gains momentum in the scope of multimodal approaches, aiming to transform participation with a camera in hand into collaboration throughout the entire research process.

## Acknowledgements

I am infinitely grateful to everyone involved, especially Fatima Baye and her family for their hospitality. I acknowledge financial support from the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (research core funding Ethnological Research of Cultural Knowledge, Practices and Forms of Socialities, no. P6-0187).

## Research data statement

This article is based on ethnographic material, which I do not define as a collection of research data. All further information about the material used is available from the author upon reasonable request.

## Data protection statement

For all photos in which the identities of individuals are recognizable, the individuals have given their consent for publication. The authors of the photos participating in the research are not anonymous; the authorship is indicated on the photos and the authors agreed with publication.

## References

American Anthropological Association. 2012. Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association. URL: https://americananthro.org/wp-content/uploads/aaa-code-of-ethics-2012.pdf (accessed 20.2.2026).

Bandaluko, Emond and Godwin Arku. 2023. The Power of a Camera: Fieldwork Experiences from Using Participatory Photovoice. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22: 1–13. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231154437.

Banks, Marcus. 2001. *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020284.

Bateson, Gregory and Margaret Mead. 1942. *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*. New York: Academy of Sciences.

Bayre, Francesca, Krista Harper, and Ana Isabel Afonso. 2016. Participatory Approaches to Visual Ethnography from the Digital to the Handmade: An Introduction. *Visual Ethnography* 5 (1): 5–14. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12835/ve2016.1-0056.

Behrend, Heike. 2003. Imagined Journeys. The Likona Ferry Photographers of Mombasa, Kenya. In *Photography's Other Histories*, eds. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, 221–239. Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384717-012.

Bell, Shanon Elisabeth. 2015. Bridging Activism and the Academy: Exposing Environmental Injustices Through the Feminist Ethnographic Perspective. *Human Ecology Review* 21 (1): 27–58. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22459/her.21.01.2015.02.

Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies. 2016. *Success Through our Eyes. A Photovoice project.* Manitoba: Brandon University Press. URL: https://people.brandonu.ca/rempelk/files/2015/05/BU-Photovoice-Book-1.pdf (accessed 20.9.2026).

Claudot-Hawad, Hélène. 2002. Noces du vent: épouser le vide ou l'art nomade de voyager. In *Voyager d'un point de vue nomade*, ed. Hélène Claudot-Hawad. Paris: Paris - Méditerranée, IREMAM.

Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture. 20th Century Ethnography, Literature and Art.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9x0h.

Collier, John Jr. and Malcolm Collier. 1986 [1967]. *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method.* DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1499536.

Collins, Samuel Gerald and Matthew Durington. 2024. *Multimodal Methods in Anthropology*. New York, London: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5771/0257-9774-2025-2-626.

Cox, Susan, Sarah Drew, Marilys Guillemin, Catherine Howell, Deborah Warr, and Jenny Waycott, eds. 2014. *Guidelines for Ethical Visual Research Methods*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.

Gonzales, Giulia. 2025. Être jeune Kel Tamacheq face au marché du travail da Bamako: Autonomie, interdépendance et mobilité. *Cahiers d'études africaines* 257. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/13h7f.

Grasseni Cristina, Bart Barendregt, Erik de Maaker, Federico De Musso, Andrew Littlejohn, Marianne Maeckelbergh, Metje Postma, and Mark R. Westmoreland. 2022. *Audiovisual and Digital Ethnography: A Practical and Theoretical Guide.* London, New York: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003132417.

Harper, Krista and Ana Isabel Afonso. 2018. Cultivating Civic Ecology: A Photovoice Study with Urban Gardeners in Lisbon, Portugal. In *Global Sustainability and Communities of Practice,* eds. Carl A. Maida and Sam Beck, 109–125. New York, Oxford: Berghahn. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw04cgj.9.

Holtedahl, Lisbet. 2023. *Maïné Soroa*. Trømso: Madam Lisbeth.

Howes, David. 1991. Sensorial Anthropology. In *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, ed. David Howes, 167–192. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.

Leon-Quijano, Camilo, 2022, Why do "good" pictures matter in anthropology? *Cultural Anthropology* 37 (3): 572–598. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14506/ca37.3.11.

Lunaček, Sarah. 2018. V iskanju skupne antropologije: Fotografska pripoved Souleymana Mohameda*. Glasnik Slovenskega etnološkega društva* 58 (3–4): 91–195.

Lunaček, Sarah. 2020. Sedentarisation, Continuous Mobility and Gender among Tuaregs in the North of Niger. In *Africa on the Move: Shifting Identities, Histories, Boundaries*, eds. Hana Horáková, Stephanie Rudwick, Martin Schmiedl. 25–47. Zürich: LIT Verlag.

Lunaček, Sarah. 2023. Schooled Tuaregs' Engagement with Mobile Pastoralism in the Agadez Region (Niger): Avoidable Sedentism and Alternative Forms of Cooperation. *Nomadic Peoples* 27 (2): 242–254. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3197/np.2023.270205.

Luttrell, Wendy. 2010. "Camera is a Big Responsibility": A Lens for Analysing Children's Visual Voices. *Visual Studies* 25 (3): 224–239. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586x.2010.523274.

Luttrell, Wendy and Richard Chalfen. 2010. Guest Editor's Introduction: Lifting up Voices pf Participatory Visual Research. *Visual Studies* 25 (3): 197–200. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586x.2010.523270.

MacDougall, David. 2022. *The Art of the Observer:A Personal View of Documentary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Mead, Margaret. 1995 [1975]. Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words. In *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, ed. Paul Hockings, 3–10. Hague, Paris: Mouton Publishers. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110290691.3.

Miller, Daniel and Jolynna Sinanan. 2017. *Visualising Facebook: A Comparative Perspective*. London: UCL Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1mtz51h.

Mizen, Phil and Yaw Ofosu–Kusi. 2010. Unofficial Truths and Everyday Insights: Understanding Voice in Visual Research with the Children of Accra's Urban Poor. *Visual Studies* 25 (3): 255–267. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586x.2010.523278.

Morteson, Sofie and François Questiaux. 2025. Extending the Ethnographic Toolbox: Photovoice and Everyday Experiences of Marginalised Groups. *Gender, Place & Culture* 32 (3): 287–312. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2023.2298788.

Murray, Linda and Meredith Nash. 2017. The Challenges of Participant Photography: A Critical Reflection on Methodology in Two Cultural Contexts. *Qualitative Health Research* 27 (6): 923–937. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316668819.

Muršič, Rajko, Blaž Bajič, and Sandi Abram. 2022. Obzorja čutnih raziskav: antropologija, umetnost in čutne trnasformacije In: *Občutki mest: Antropologija, umetnost in čutne transformacije*, eds. Rajko Muršič, Blaž Bajič, Sandi Abram, 13–47. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4312/9789617128871.

Packard, Josh. 2008. "I am Gonna Show You What is Really Like Out There.": The Power and Limitation of Participatory Visual Methods. *Visual Studies* 23 (1): 63–78. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860801908544.

PASTRES, Photovoice. URL: https://seeingpastoralism.org/PHOTOVOICE-PROJECT (accessed 15.2.2026).

Pink, Sarah. 2001. *Doing Visual Ethnography.* London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/136754940200500408O1.

Pink, Sarah. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249383.

Plage, Stefanie. 2023. What Can Voice Do? Combining Narrative Methods and Participant-Produced Photography to Explore Contemporary Cancer Survivorship. *Visual Studies* 38 (1): 56–68. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2021.2008814.

Roque de Piño, Joana. 2016. Portraits of Change by Farmers in Southern Guinea Bissau. *Visual Ethnography* 5 (1): 161–186. DOI: https://doi.org/10.12835/ve2016.1-0062.

Roque de Piño, Joana. 2020. The Year People Helped Zebras to Stand Up: Climatic Variability and Extreme Weather Observed and Portrayed by Kenyan Maasai Pastoralists. In *Changing Climate, Changing Worlds*, eds. Meredith Welch-Devine, Anne Sourdril, and Brian J. Burke, 154–182. Cham: Springer. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37312-2_8.

Ruby, Jay. 1991. Speaking for, Speaking about, Speaking with or Speaking alongside and Documentary Dilemma. *Visual Anthropology Review* 7 (2): 50–68.

Sajovic, Eva. 2016. *The Roles We Play: Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty.* London: ATD Fourth World. URL: https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/02/20141017-The-Roles-We-Play.pdf (accessed 10.2.2026).

Schwartz, Norah Anita, Christine Alysse van Glascoe, Victor Torres, Lorena Ramos, and Claudia Soria- Delgado. 2015. "Where they (Live, Work and) Spray": Pesticide Exposure, Childhood Asthma, and Environmental Justice among Mexican-American farmworkers. *Health and Place* 32: 83–92. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2014.12.016.

Smit, Jude, Erminia Colucci, and Lisa Marzano. 2025. Unspoken, Unseen, Unheard: Using Arts-Based and Visual Research Methods to Gain Insights into Lived Experiences of Suicide in Young Adults. *Social Sciences* 14: 62. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14020062.

Tiefenthaler, Sabine and Gemma Lynch. 2021. Immigrant Sisterhood: Visual Narratives of Asylum-Seeking Women in Italian Reception Centres. *Visual Ethnography* 10 (2): 185–200 DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12835/ve2019.1-0169.

Turk Niskač, Barbara. 2012. Predšolski otroci kot soudeleženci v raziskavi: Pristop vizualne antropologije. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 249: 33–45.

Turk Niskač, Barbara. 2021. *O igri in delu*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3986/9789610505181.

Turk Niskač, Barbara. 2022. Raziskave z otroki in mladostniki. Etični in metodološki izzivi. *Glasnik Slovenskega etnološkega društva* 62 (1): 83–94.

Valentinčič Furlan, Nadja. 2025. *Znanje in identitete v filmih o nesnovni kulturni dediščini*. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani.

Wang, Caroline and Mary Ann Burris. 1997. Photovoice: Concept, Methodology and Use of Participatory Needs Assessment. *Health Education and Behaviour* 24 (3): 369–387.

**Fotopripoved kot dopolnilni pristop z družino Tuaregov v Agadezu v Nigru**

V prispevku sodelovalne pristope pri rabi fotografije umeščam med sodobne večnačinske pristope. Vloga fotografije v antropologiji se je preusmerila od pozitivistične usmerjenosti k subjektivnemu in refleksivnemu razumevanju fotografije v raziskavi. Pri pogovorih ob fotografijah pomen nastaja v intersubjektivnem razmerju (Pink, 2001) in ni statičen (Luttrell, 2010). V besedilu se osredotočam na sodelovalno fotografijo oz. fotografijo z udeležbo in razpravljam o razlikah med udeleženostjo in sodelovanjem. Pri fotopripovedi (photovoice) fotografije ustvarijo sodelujoči_e v raziskavi. Ena od njenih glavnih prednosti je spodbujanje sogovornikov_ic k aktivnemu sodelovanju v raziskavi s pomočjo fotografije, da ti sami_e izpostavijo, kaj je zanje pomembno. S tem udeleženi_e soustvarjajo pomene in usmerjajo raziskavo. Raziskovalcu_ki fotopripoved istočasno omogoči, da se približa izkušnji in perspektivi sogovornikov_ic. Afektivna moč fotografije in besedilo, nastalo v pogovoru ob fotografiji, ima potencial tudi za nadaljnjo komunikacijo, bodisi v obliki lokalne predstavitve ali razstave bodisi kot del akademskega besedila. S podajanjem konteksta raziskave lahko raziskovalec_ka prevzame vlogo mediatorja_ke. Fotografija z udeležbo oz. sodelovalna fotografija tako presega zgolj pridobivanje informacij na podlagi fotografij, saj omogoča nove vpoglede v raziskovalna vprašanja in večjo bližino. Poleg tega je inherentno politična, saj s samim pristopom kot tudi z agendo vidnosti in slišnosti v prizadevanjih daje poudarek podajanju perspektive sodelujočih. Sodelovalno usmerjena fotopripoved ima lahko za cilj

skupnostno razpravo ali pritisk na odločevalce. Prednosti, izzivi in potenciali fotopripovedi so v članku predstavljeni tudi na primeru ustvarjanja foto zgodb z družino Tuaregov v Agadezu, in sicer v povezavi z raziskovalnimi vprašanji o vsakdanjem življenju v mestu in odnosom do podeželja. Poleg navedenih prednosti foto pripovedi mi je ustvarjanje foto zgodb omogočilo odpiranje novih vidikov in poglabljanje raziskovalnih vprašanj, vključno z razmerji med mestom in podeželjem in vlogo žensk. Predvsem je spodbudilo večjo bližino z udeleženci_kami, posebno z mladostniki_cami, in vpogled v njihove življenjske svetove, vrednote in aspiracije. Sodelovalne oblike fotografije v antropologiji razumem predvsem kot komplementaren pristop za boljše ciljno in refleksivno sodelovanje z udeleženimi v raziskavi.

Traditiones 55 (2): 109–132 | COBISS: 1.01 | CC BY 4.0 | DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2026550206

# Counter-Mapping and Co-Theorizing Ruinous Postscapes

***Sanja Potkonjak***

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia
spotkonjak@ffzg.unizg.hr
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1528-0765

***Iva Grubiša***

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia
iva.grubisa@ffzg.unizg.hr
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0350-3167

***Petra Kelemen***

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia
pkelemen@ffzg.unizg.hr
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3372-8175

***Nevena Škrbić Alempijević***

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia
nskrbic@ffzg.unizg.hr
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8653-7954

***Kristina Vugdelija***

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia
kvugdeli@ffzg.unizg.hr
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2008-6705

This article presents counter-mapping and co-theorizing as a form of multimodal methodology and pedagogy for engaging with and reimagining postindustrial ruinscapes in Zagreb. Drawing on three workshops conducted with different student groups, the authors demonstrate how counter-mapping makes it possible to co-theorize possible futures of deindustrialized sites. The method challenges dominant urban development narratives by foregrounding collaborative imagination, speculative engagement, and critical urban practice.

▪ **Keywords**: counter-mapping, co-theorizing, multimodal methodology, multimodal pedagogy, ruinous postscapes

Članek obravnava protikartiranje in njegovo skupno premišljevanje kot večnačinski metodološki in pedagoški pristop k raziskovanju in ponovnemu zamišljanju poindustrijskih krajin ruševin v Zagrebu. Avtorice na primerih treh delavnic z različnimi skupinami študentov pokažejo, kako lahko protikartiranje služi kot orodje za skupno premišljevanje o možnih prihodnostih deindustrializiranih območij. Izbrani pristop izpodbija prevladujoče predstave o urbanem razvoju, saj poudarja pomen kolektivnega zamišljanja, spekulativnega raziskovanja in kritične urbane prakse.

▪ **Ključne besede**: protikartiranje, skupno premišljevanje, večnačinska metodologija, večnačinska pedagogika, krajine ruševin

## Introduction: Engaging with postscapes

> Postscapes are formed by combining the prefix *post-* with nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Postscapes are more than a prefix. The *post-* in postscapes is not a destination; it is a direction. *Post-* changes meanings and the ways we understand our worlds. *Post-* is an attempt to navigate the unnavigable. It brings us back to where we came from and what we emerge from, reminds us of where we are now, and refers to what comes after and beyond … It points toward the future, toward the horizon of anticipation, expectation, and possibility … It enables imagining and narrations, practices and actions, ventures and new beginnings. […] Postscapes are opportunities for constructive discontinuity and for the imagining of continuities, spaces for rehearsal and re-coding, reflection, trial and error, rising and moving, for envisioning alternative worlds. […] Postscapes are spaces of potential for what is to come, for what follows, for postscapes of transgressions … We conceive of the postscapes of Zagreb both conceptually and concretely, practically, poetically, and theoretically. We activate postscapes as sites of research, as practices of creative imagining, critical thinking, and counter-mapping, as spaces of personal and epistemological responsibility. (Potkonjak, 2024)

This excerpt is drawn from a text we used to introduce our workshop at Postscapes Matter, the 2024 SIEF summer school held in Zagreb. The summer school invited students and early-career researchers from various academic institutions worldwide to reflect on the contemporary postsocialist, post-Yugoslav, and postindustrial contexts of Croatia and the city of Zagreb. As local organizers, we sought to grasp all these semantic layers through the lens of postscapes. To explore *how* postscapes may be researched and taught, we designed a methodological workshop.

This workshop dealt with several sites in Zagreb, selected because they make the city's and the country's break from the previous political, economic, and social systems – their post-conditions – visible in space. The participants were asked to engage with these critical urban loci – familiar to some and encountered for the first time by others – from a counter-perspective. They were encouraged to consider what new values might emerge from thinking beyond what is visually present at the sites, by attempting to capture visions of the future, the desirable, and even the utopian.

The concept of postscape emerged from our research within the project The Transformation of the Postindustrial City: Space, Community, and Work (abbreviated PostCity). This project approaches *post-* as "a platform to ask which social orders, worldviews, and forms of (re)development are probable or might become possible

within the context in which the break from past orientations is signalled by this prefix" (Škrbić Alempijević, Kelemen, 2025: 314–315). *Post-* directs the researchers' attention not only to what comes after, but also to how people and places may move beyond their past trajectories.

The term *postscape* is open enough to provide space for multiple understandings of co-mapping and invites co-theorization. At the outset, we described postscapes as complex and contested sociocultural and socionatural spaces, negotiated within the landscape by various human actors and more-than-human actants, inviting speculative engagement with *post-*. We understand postscapes as sites where material decay and everyday lifeworlds intersect with planning regimes, preservation narratives, and land development. They variously manifest as socio-spatial, socio-environmental, and socio-temporal formations, encompassing diverse practices, affects, and meaning-making processes in the late capitalist contexts (ibid.). We approach postscapes through materiality, inscribed meanings, and lived experiences, while also treating them as a useful conceptual tool.

Our research focuses on a particular form of postscapes – that is, on deindustrialized sites in Zagreb, observing different pathways of their transformation into and from ruinous urbanscapes. The overwhelming presence of *post-* at these sites permeated both the everyday life we encountered and our theoretical thinking. In these cases, the term *postscape* signals the accumulation of post-manifestations there, raising the question of living in a city *after* modernization and industrialization, *after* the former visions of progress were abandoned. The question that then arose was *how*, conceptually and methodologically, *post-* should be tackled to avoid falling into a linear narration of these sites' histories or into a univocal rewriting of the causal chains that led to the collapse of industries and their present condition.

This article addresses the methodological challenges and opportunities in researching and teaching the intricacies of ruinous postscapes by proposing counter-mapping and co-theorizing as pathways to knowing differently, opening space for the "unscripted", the unseen, and the speculative (Amri, Ihar, 2025: 634).

The following sections outline our conceptualization of counter-mapping and co-theorizing, and they present our experiences of engaging with postindustrial transformations through adapted counter-mapping exercises (Peluso, 1995) and co-theorizing gatherings. They describe three counter-mapping exercises conducted with different groups of students in 2024 and 2025. These workshops were grounded in shared premises, beginning with our presentations on the PostCity project, our field sites, and the main concepts and approaches to postscapes. The group dynamics within these counter-mapping and co-theorizing exercises were influenced by the participants' insider/outsider positionalities and their varying familiarity with the local context, which is also elaborated on below. Even though the workshops differed in terms of duration, the students' disciplinary backgrounds, and their positionalities in relation to

the city, they revealed comparable outcomes and potentials for co-theorizing, which are discussed in the concluding sections of the article.

## Multimodal research and counter-mapping

The PostCity project employs a multimodal framework to address the coexistence of overwhelming complexity and elusiveness of researching, encountering, and grasping postscapes as challenges. Central to our work are immersive, site-specific ethnographies of selected postindustrial sites in various parts of Zagreb. The focus is on the ways in which various social agents attempt to engage with, transform, and activate sites affected by deindustrialization, drawing on shared visions, visual representations, and social ties to imagine and create new life within these spaces. The project conceptualizes our ethnographic methodology as inherently multimodal in recognizing the importance of various ways of collaborative meaning-making beyond written text (Alvarez Astacio et al., 2021). The methodology includes participation in citizen initiatives and transition groups, locally organized walks, municipal council meetings, roundtables, museum tours, public cleaning actions, tactical urbanism interventions, and diverse neighborhood programs, as well as interviews with a range of agents. At the same time, the analysis of policy documents sheds light on the mechanisms of urban planning – the authorized framework within which the lifeworlds of ruinous postscapes take shape and emerge (cf. Kelemen, Škrbić Alempijević, 2025; Škrbić Alempijević, Kelemen, 2025).

Multimodality is used as a catalyst that will inform and empower new forms of experimentation in and on collaborations (Dattatreyan, Shankar, 2016). Multimodality shapes both our integration of diverse methodological strategies and our conceptualization of field sites, as well as the design of specific research methods aimed at challenging dominant knowledge claims about the postscapes we inhabit alongside research participants, fellow citizens, colleagues, and students in the study of transformation. Following Alvarez Astacio et al. (2021: 420), we "embraced *multimodality as an opportunity* to collaborate and invent with our participants, to create alternate pathways for the circulation of anthropological knowledge, and, more broadly, to rethink, recalibrate, and reimagine ethnography as the epistemological grounds." For us, it offered "a more inclusive worldview, where diverse constituents can find *new mutual ground*" (Westmoreland, 2022: 174–175, emphasis added). Recognizing multimodality as a prospect to unsettle and reconfigure, we turned to multimodal methodology. It offered a way to co-theoretization – to building pathways "of connecting, relating, and creating with others" in "producing meaningful interventions" (Alvarez Astacio et al., 2021: 426).

To show how multimodality, seen as a catalyst, informs our work, this article focuses on counter-mapping as a methodological intervention that complements other methodological project strategies. This method resists the dominant mechanisms of

representing and "writing" reality, which often reduce the complexity of spaces and social relations to abstractions shaped by power, and instead seeks to capture multiplicity and people's diverse ways of being in the world (Wainwright, Bryan, 2009: 154–155). In our reiteration of a multimodal approach, the inspiration for counter-mapping came from cultural geography and the visualization *of otherwise*. As Hodgson and Schroeder (2002: 80) note, counter-mapping aims "to counter dominant representations of property regimes and land use practices" and "to meet progressive political goals." Historically, this has included Indigenous land rights (Wainwright, Bryan, 2009) and confronting hegemonic cartographic regimes (Peluso, 1995). Peluso (1995) describes the rise of Indigenous "counter-mappers", motivated by a culture of recognition and resistance to socioeconomic, cultural, political, and environmental oppression tied to imperial and settler cartography. More recently, counter-mapping has become a critical epistemological tool in universities, "instigat[ing] critical organizing and knowledge production" (Counter Cartographies Collective et al., 2012: 441). This is seen, for instance, in the Counter Cartographies Collective autonomous cartographies that "render new images and practices of economies and social relations; destabilize centered and exclusionary representations of the social and the economic; [and] construct new imaginaries of collective struggle and alternative worlds" (https://www.countercartographies.org/). Similarly, the Urban Imaginaries Lab at Carleton University, launched in 2022, engages students and urban residents in collectively imagining multiple urban futures (https://www.urbanimaginaries.com/).

Although counter-mapping originated in resistance to colonial and imperial projects, it retains a liberatory capacity to enact counter-narratives more broadly. We mobilized this power to "speak back" to the ignorance and despondency that diminish the imaginative potential of postscapes, treating counter-mapping as a means of undoing their relegation to mere leftovers and fostering communal reimagining. In the case at hand, directing the students' attention to postscapes meant drawing on the knowledge and imaginaries they brought to the classroom. We invited them to co-imagine and co-theorize Zagreb's postscapes as a form of critical urban practice oriented toward surfacing the unspoken, unthought, unseen, or unheard. Their work was to be informed by their lived experiences and memories, long-term attachments or fleeting impressions, and moments of engagement or indifference. We welcomed counter, critical, and creative insights grounded in the participants' immediate understandings and feelings. We framed the exercise as an opportunity to identify actors and actants that might help reimagine ruinous postscapes, encouraging students to see themselves as agents of transformation. Seen as a cultural intervention rather than a description of our worlds, the multimodal research approach became an invitation for practicing anthropology as collaboration in co-theorizing the prospects of meaningful ruinous postscapes.

## Counter-mapping and co-theorization as multimodal pedagogy

Our approach to counter-mapping is informed by multimodal pedagogy as a way of engaging with – and potentially unmaking – postscapes. The multimodal pedagogy of postscapes is anchored in our situatedness as university teachers and urban dwellers, researchers, and citizens in the city where we carried out our research. Resonating with Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's (2015) call to attend to life in the ruins and Kathleen Stewart's (2007) evocation of the affective power of place, we approach teaching with a conscious commitment to collaboration and co-theorization. In our case, multimodal pedagogy, seen as a "collaborative venue of its own" (cf. Boyer, Marcus, 2020: 4), was a one-time attempt evolving into a sustained teaching experimentation. It prompted us to reflect on who we are conducting ethnography on and with, particularly when the boundaries of postscapes are blurred, or perhaps, no longer meaningful. Moreover, it foregrounded the question of purpose. We asked ourselves: what kinds of knowledge, relationships, and interventions do our ethnographies of postscapes aim to enact when fieldwork migrates into the classroom?

As Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019: 220) explained their call for integration of multimodality within teaching, "a focus on multimodality and invention invites us to reconsider the pedagogy of anthropology – both in the sense of what gets formally taught within the disciplinary canon and in relation to the manifold ways of teaching and learning together that emerge during fieldwork, which are not always made visible and which exceed the textual and conceptual domain. Indeed, we use multimodality and invention to refer to the multiple ways of doing anthropology that create different ways of knowing and learning together."

In the same vein, in our own project we consider the multimodal pedagogy of postscapes as a vital part of anthropology that aims to do more, rather than just engage and experiment. It calls to "unsettle and disrupt" (Dattatreyan, Marrero-Guillamón, 2021: 271) what is conceived as given. The multimodal pedagogy of postscapes allows for liberation from the bounds of learned expectations and experiences governed by sociopolitical setups in which we live. Multimodal pedagogies strive to surprise. In this sense, counter-mapping translates to co-theorization and multimodal research translates to multimodal pedagogy. A multimodal research approach combined with multimodal pedagogy becomes crucial in mentoring students in seeing, theorizing, and doing things differently.

Following Joanne Rappaport (2007, 2008), we understand collaborative ethnography not simply as a representational project grounded in well-intentioned anthropological insight, but as an emancipatory methodology conducted with(in) a community and aimed at creating a space for co-theorization. In anthropology, this means grasping for meaning together. Rappaport's work centers on collaborations with Indigenous communities and Native scholars, whereas in our project co-theorization facilitates the

emergence of counter-ontologies within the classroom. Our collaborative engagements with postscapes positioned "community" beyond conventionally recognized groups, such as the oppressed First Nations or residential neighborhoods. In our case, "communities" coalesced around a shared investment in working with and co-theorizing postscapes. They consisted of diverse groups of students and urban dwellers participating in elective courses, workshops, and summer school programs organized by the PostCity project team. Even though our pedagogical aim was to raise the participants' awareness of the demands and potentials of counter-mapping as a research method, we also treated the material co-produced by these emerging communities during the workshops as an alternative source of insights into postscapes. We reached toward emerging ethnographers, early career artists in the visual arts doctoral program, and humanities doctoral students to become "collaborative partners" (Boyer, Marcus, 2020: 8) in a co-thinking classroom.

In these three contexts, we turned to counter-mapping and co-theorization to challenge the hyper-narrativized and textualized tendencies of ethnographic endeavor and to boost collaborations where they might not be initially sought. We have recognized counter-mapping as a tool that serves both research and teaching purposes. We designed counter-mapping exercises to explore how students participating in them might understand fragments of postscapes, endowing them with renewed meanings and agency. The participants in these exercises were asked to reimagine sites regardless of the dominant mapping systems, top-down determined purposes, and economically driven urban planning. The activity was guided by what possible futures could be imagined for the sites depicted and how they could be incorporated into visual material, countering it, developing it, and speculating upon it. Selected photos of the sites in which we have conducted ethnographic research as part of the PostCity project – mostly former factories, business and fair zones, and infrastructural project sites – served as the primary source of inspiration for shared endeavor. The photos used as a visual basis for these exercises mainly signaled the effects of ruination and abandonment, demolition, new construction, and infrastructural interventions. They were purposefully under-contextualized, offering only glimpses of the sites' previous functions, contemporary uses, and prospective developments. Participants engaged with them in a variety of ways. They were encouraged to collaboratively intervene using techniques such as co-thinking, co-sketching, co-drawing, co-scribbling, co-collaging, co-discussing, and co-imagining, translating their visions of the sites directly onto the photos. Applied in the spirit of collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) and experimental fieldwork practices (Marcus, 2013), counter-mapping exercises allowed knowledge to emerge through shared doing, understanding, and sensing.

We treated counter-mapping as both creative and empowering, less a militant overtaking of the imaginary than an effort to sustain autonomous imagination while awakening the political stand. It was designed to help participants recognize ruinous postscapes as

spaces awaiting communal co-imagination, opening them toward *the otherwise* as an "ethico-onto-political commitment" to change (Meek, Morales Fontanilla, 2022: 275). It sought to awaken "multimodal readings" and "blur the boundaries" (Aguilera Del Castillo, 2025: 384–385) between the fixed and fictitious, given and possible, planned and pursued, haunted and freed.

So far, we have carried out workshops on counter-mapping with three groups of students: the participants in the SIEF summer school in September 2024, visual arts doctoral students at the University of Zagreb in February 2025, and master's students at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology in May 2025. The following section presents how the counter-mapping strategies were adapted for each group, the activities conducted, and the insights that emerged from these exercises.

## Encountering the city differently: The SIEF summer school

The primary aim of the summer school Postscapes Matter, co-organized by SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore) and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, was to explore the vitality of the concept of postscapes from different perspectives – from the perspective of postsocialist studies, popular culture and queer studies to that of environmental social movements. Around thirty students attending the summer school came from various universities worldwide and had academic backgrounds in ethnology, anthropology, folklore studies, and related fields.

Our workshop PostCity: Workshop on (Counter)Mapping for the Possible After was a three-hour session. In the introduction to the workshop, we framed counter-mapping amid the ruins and ruptures of the past and encouraged students to engage with the concept of postscapes based on selected examples in multimodal ways. We selected five postscape sites for the exercise from the PostCity project's research locations. The first was the former Zagrebačka banka (Zagreb Bank) building and the Paromlin steam mill, at the time framed as a strategic project of Zagreb's city government. The second was Sljeme, the ruins of a meat industry complex in the Sesvete district on the city's eastern edge, envisioned as an experiment in architectural design within the new urban agenda. The third was the Nada Dimić site, a ruined textile factory slated for redevelopment into inner-city housing by a private investor. The fourth was Buzin, an emerging sprawl adjacent to the Zagreb railway yard, rapidly transforming into a housing, commercial, and corporate zone. The fifth site was Zagrebački velesajam (the Zagreb Fairground), once a showcase of socialist industrial enterprise and now an eroded site of postindustrial change. We approached these sites as contested postscapes awaiting "radical imagination" – worlds wasted or vanishing, but still open to remaking against the dominant ideologies of Growth and Progress (cf. Gan et al., 2017: 12).

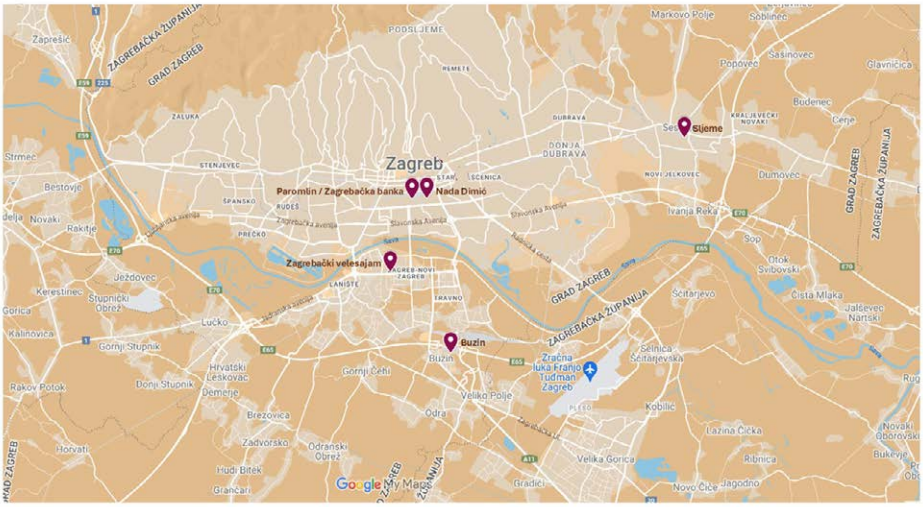


Figure 1: Map of the PostCity research sites selected for the counter-mapping workshop. Produced by the PostCity research team using Google Maps.

Working in five groups, the students responded to enlarged photos taken during the PostCity project's fieldwork. Each group was prompted to present its counter-mapping outcomes through sketches, drawings, and reflections on the imagery. The groups' counter-maps referred to the following questions: Which functions might these spaces serve? Who are the agents of change? What is the possible "after"?

Although most participants were unfamiliar with Zagreb and might have encountered the chosen sites only as passersby, the exercise still generated thought-provoking insights into the city's socio-spatial, temporal, and moral dynamics. The Zagrebačka banka and Paromlin group focused on the proximity to the railway station as a defining factor, imagining an emergency community center for immigrants, passersby, and street users. Rather than emphasizing the nearby locations of institutional power (e.g., the city hall and the courthouse), they rethought the area as a space of safety and support for transient and otherwise policed populations. The Nada Dimić Factory group took a similar stance. Adjacent to a newly built gated condominium complex, complete with an artisan bakery and a coffeeshop frequented by affluent residents, they reimagined the site as a counter-space of solidarity and anti-elitism. Their proposal centered on social integration, social housing, and workshops for small-scale trades such as repair services. The Sljeme group interpreted their site as redundant, disintegrated, marginal, and separated from the neighboring area by a railway yard, sketching crossings to overcome this spatial isolation. Playing on its namesake (mountain peak Sljeme above Zagreb), they re-envisioned the site as a peak of new community life: a multigenerational community hub with shared workspaces for sewing, IT repairs, bike workshops, and other small-scale services. The Buzin group addressed the corporate transformation of the peripheral neighborhood with the slogan "No business!" They argued for the



Figure 2: The Buzin neighborhood, selected for counter-mapping. Photos: Kristina Vugdelija.

missing essentials: safe railway crossings, vegetable gardens, affordable housing, post offices, sports facilities, and doctors' offices instead of corporate headquarters. Their intervention highlighted the costs of commercial encroachment and the neglect of everyday life in the nearby villages. Lastly, the Zagreb Fairground group confronted the deteriorating tradescape by reimagining its future through layered, horizontal zoning meant to repopulate and reanimate the area.

Across groups, students counter-mapped postscapes as openings. Their proposals emphasized modest interventions and small-scale urbanism that reconnect communities and reintroduce shared, public-oriented practices into urban narratives. In doing so, they countered investment-driven approaches that impose commercial and residential megastructures. At the same time, their reflections raised concerns about the social effects of new development: Who is excluded from urban makeovers? What happens when high-income residents are cast as the "ideal" urban dwellers?

The idea of "relief" spaces or safe communal places that absorb the needs of commuters, migrants, and residents was particularly strong. The postscapes they explored emerged not as voids, but as sites full of potential.

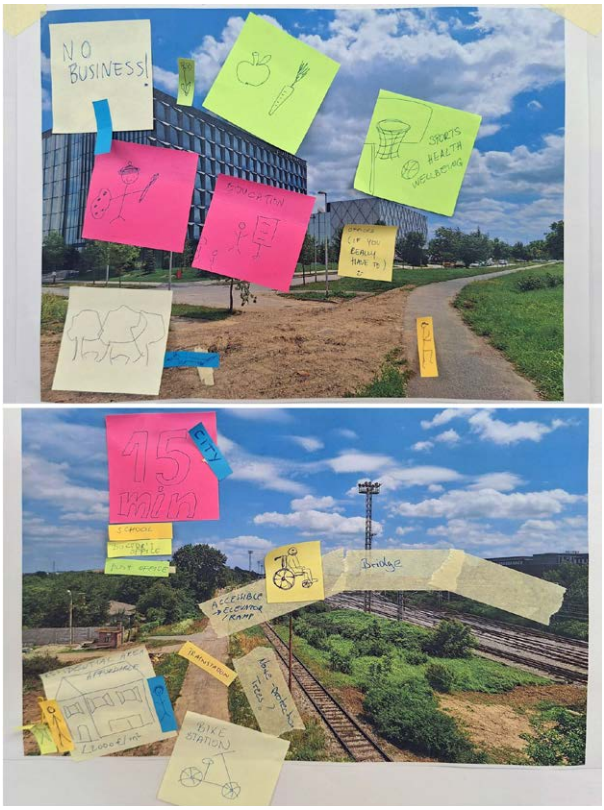


Figure 3: Counter-mapping a possible *after* for the Buzin neighborhood. The counter-map made by the following group of students: Kia Liimatainen, Sascha Sistenich, Stephanie Stelko, Helena Tolić, and Digne Ūdre-Lielbārde.

## Visualizing postscapes otherwise: Counter-mapping by visual arts doctoral candidates

In the second case, the community invited to counter-map selected ruined postscapes in Zagreb also included doctoral candidates, but with a markedly different orientation toward theorizing the city. Unlike the SIEF workshop participants, who largely shared our disciplinary affiliation and theoretical and methodological framework, the participants in the February 2025 workshop were attending the visual arts program. Visual modes of engaging with the world are central to this doctoral program and to the artistic vocation of those enrolled in it. The guiding principles of counter-mapping resonate with the program's rationale that "artistic research involves expanding and questioning the boundaries of human cognition, relying on imagination rather than on fact-based description" (Blažičko et al., n.d.: 3). Situated in a transdisciplinary realm through the involvement of ethnologists and cultural anthropologists as workshop organizers, this perspective supported our efforts to further deconstruct linear approaches to postindustrial spaces and times.



Figure 4: The Zagreb Fairground, selected for counter-mapping. Photos: Petra Kelemen.

Counter-mapping was conducted within the Methodology of Scientific Research course, taught by Nevena Škrbić Alempijević, which introduces doctoral candidates to core qualitative research strategies while outlining their potential applications in artistic research. Although the course highlights the relational, contextual, and processual character of research, it also seeks to provide attendants with practical guidelines for formulating their doctoral projects. The counter-mapping task differed from other course components in that it did not prompt them to think using established concepts and methodological tools. Instead, it encouraged them to step away from the postscapes as they are and to reimagine what they could become or even how they might exist entirely within the realm of imagination – not as a plan, but as a dream of an alternative. As one participant put it, the exercise aimed to uncover something "completely unrealistic and completely difficult to carry out, at the edge of the limits of possibility and the real."

Four doctoral researchers participated, each working individually on reimagining one site. As a starting point for counter-mapping, they received a selection of photos produced during the PostCity project's fieldwork. The photos focused on the decaying traces of industrial production and its related activities, notably the sites of the former



Figure 5: "The Tropical Spa" at the Zagreb Fairground by the doctoral candidate and artist Vida Meić.

Nada Dimić textile factory, the Paromlin steam mill, the Sljeme meat industry, and the Zagreb Fairground. The participants were invited to select images that they found inspiring and called to perform counter-mapping. The guiding question was what they might envision in the city amid the ruins of its industrial past, and which imaginings might emerge.

In their imaginaries, the participants counter-mapped postindustrial spaces as a dome-covered swimming-pool complex (a tropical spa) simultaneously serving as a sanctuary for exotic species and experimental communities; as an open public space for articulating opinions, exposed to the sun and social critique, a locus of voice; as a green hollow where deindustrialized remnants are left in ruins and engulfed by vegetation, forming a threshold to a park; and as a space of freedom, unfolding from its own remnants and allowing the existing elements, even in decay, to evolve into something new.

Each doctoral researcher's worldview served as a prism for reimagining postscapes. Some reinterpreted the spaces along the thematic lines that they had already explored in their artistic practice and drew on personal experiences of the city as residents, reflecting on what they felt Zagreb lacked. Their understanding of the position of these

sites within the urban fabric – regular drives past the sites described as "piles of nothing and something", knowledge of routes linking the train station to the city institutions, and familiarity with local attitudes toward particular sites – also influenced the way they reinvented them. Alongside this local grounding, global references also appeared: in their counter-mappings, the participants evoked examples from cities such as Berlin and New York. References to the industrial past were also integrated into the ways the sites were rethought. For instance, the participants recalled traveling past factories and the sharp, unpleasant odors that first came to mind in relation to them. For some, images of ruined factories triggered scenes of former industrial labor, revealing the presence of many workers engaged in highly structured, assembly-line patterns. At the same time, they were explicit about not planning postindustrial futures. Their counter-maps visualized utopias, which were imagined "like a game", as "a space without any purpose, neither industrial nor productive like it once was, nor strictly organized by anyone", allowing postscapes to be "simply overtaken by greenery, with truly nothing being built". Despite their diversity, these reimaginings had one thing in common: they resisted solution-driven, linear planning and instead opened the sites to multiple possibilities.

By encouraging the doctoral researchers to visualize alternative worlds and deviate from conventional paths, the counter-mapping task offered a form of methodological instruction outside the standard canon. It invited critical reflection on the processes and assumptions underlying academic knowledge production itself.

## Forward-oriented remembering of the city: The workshop Anthropology of Social Memory

The third exercise, conducted with around twenty students enrolled in the master's course Anthropology of Social Memory, was designed as a more extensive and in-depth activity, reflecting their semester-long engagement with postindustrial memory. Throughout the semester, the students dealt with the industrial pasts and postindustrial transformations in Zagreb through the theoretical and analytical lens of memory studies (e.g., High, Lewis, 2007). Each student pursued an individual, small-scale research project focusing on a specific case study. Their work analyzed and problematized how memories of industrial pasts, industrial labor, and industrial spaces are present or absent in today's urban memoryscapes, and how they are integrated into or excluded from memory politics, public policy, urban planning, and the city's redevelopment projects.

The counter-mapping workshop at the end of the course aimed to shed a different light on Zagreb's postindustrial ruinscapes and broader postindustrial transformations, drawing on the students' research insights and engagement with the postindustrial city. The exercise was structured as a three-part workshop across three sessions.

The first part consisted of a lecture introducing the theoretical and conceptual framework of counter-mapping practices and outlining the guidelines for the fieldwork exercise. The second part was a half-day fieldwork session, during which students walked through three postindustrial sites selected from among the PostCity project's field sites because they were within easy walking distance – the former Paromlin steam mill, the Gredelj rolling stock company, and the Nada Dimić textile factory – and visually mapped the sites by taking photos. They were instructed to document and map whatever they perceived as attention-drawing, relevant, or meaningful – anything that "spoke to them" and that they wished to "speak with or through" in their visions of the future. They worked in groups of six to seven (one group per site). Each group selected four or five photos to serve as the basis for their counter-maps through collaborative deliberation outside the classroom and without our direct involvement.

The students were instructed to walk the ruinscapes with an adjusted gaze, reading the spatialization of power relations, attuning themselves to traces of social injustice, exclusion, and erasure from the public, but also recognizing the potential of ruinscapes to be transformed into postscapes that would address these injustices and make them visible, become more open and inclusive, serve the common good, and be integrated into the citizens' everyday lives.

Unlike in the previous two cases, counter-mapping within this course had a specific thematic focus: memory. Drawing on Tim Edensor's understanding of ruinscapes (Edensor, 2005), this exercise aimed to challenge the dominant understanding of ruins as merely empty or decaying. Instead, the students were encouraged to recognize that ruins brim with potential as alternative sites of memory rich in sensory traces, whether or not they are included in hegemonic memory regimes. The counter-mapping process sought to actualize these memories as part of the future of such spaces, giving them both a place and a voice. In this way, the students were encouraged to see themselves not only as critical and analytical anthropologists but also as politically engaged citizens and potential agents of change.

The third part of the workshop, back in the classroom, involved the collaborative creation of counter-maps, their presentation, and an open discussion. During the session, the main directions of interventions in the postscapes that emerged from the participants' counter-mapping practices were noted and discussed. The aim was to jointly reflect on how we imagine a better future for postindustrial ruinscapes and why.

In this case, the counter-maps also revealed that the students' engagement with ruinscapes and the postindustrial city as a whole was shaped by their positionality as city dwellers. In imagining the city's possible futures, they were simultaneously imagining their own. Their visions did not extend toward distant utopian horizons but rather toward immediate, tangible, and concrete futures that directly reflected their current needs, preoccupations, challenges, and everyday experiences of living in a postindustrial city.



Figure 6: Paromlin and its surroundings, selected for counter-mapping. Photos: Leonarda Andrić, Lina Deković, Anita Dreven, Dora Pšeničnjak, Lucija Severinac, and Tea Žeželić.




Figure 7: Imagining an alternative future for Paromlin. A counter-map created by the following group of students: Leonarda Andrić, Lina Deković, Anita Dreven, Dora Pšeničnjak, Lucija Severinac, and Tea Žeželić.

The imaginative spatial interventions envisioned postscapes that were simultaneously conservative, creative, and corrective. They were conservative in that they did not necessarily challenge the dominant notions of what is possible, appropriate, or compatible with the prevailing socioeconomic order. For example, some projects attempted to reconcile capitalist logics with social justice and inclusion by envisioning spaces in which multinational retail chains coexisted with markets selling products from family-owned local farms or repurposing industrial heritage as tourist attractions capable of generating income for the city. Correctivity was the dominant feature of counter-maps primarily concerned with transforming ruinscapes into new memoryscapes in a way that silenced or erased memories could be acknowledged and reintegrated. Even so, many corrective visions remained conservative in form, relying on institutionalized ways of remembrance.

There were also glimpses of reimagining postscapes through the lens of catastrophic imaginations of future; for instance, in a project that introduced a nuclear shelter into the site, reflecting the embeddedness of the local in the global political turmoil.

Ultimately, these imaginative futures revealed a layered perception of the postindustrial city. On one hand, students viewed it as a city of *lack* – that is, lacking affordable housing, adequate transport infrastructure, ecological food systems, public spaces for cultural and political activities, and recognition of diverse histories and memories. On the other hand, this perception of lack was counterbalanced by an imagination of the city as a space of *potential*: potential for accessibility, safe movement, ecological and social responsibility, sustainable resource distribution, inclusion, fairness, meaningful encounters, knowledge exchange, leisure, and shared open spaces.

## Positioning

While designing the counter-mapping workshops, we adjusted the workshop structure and duration according to the participants' backgrounds, available time frames, and feasible levels of engagement. As shown, in each introductory part we provided a conceptual framework by explaining postscapes and counter-mapping. For the first two workshops, we also supplied photos, which served as windows into imagining possible afters. For all three exercises we also offered – and were further requested to provide – basic historical and contemporary information about the sites. Beyond that, during the workshops we primarily acted as observers of the counter-mapping process and later as discussants of the results. We tried not to interfere with or guide the participants' imaginative directions but instead to remain attentive listeners.

However, one occasion prompted us to reflect more deeply on our own positionality and the methodological challenges inherent in counter-mapping. During the SIEF summer school workshop, one of us (Iva) assumed a dual role: she participated in the

school's activities as a doctoral researcher while simultaneously serving as a project collaborator familiar with the spaces being counter-mapped from a research and analytical perspective.

Her group worked on the Zagrebačka banka building and the Paromlin steam mill. Alongside another master's student from Zagreb, the group included two doctoral researchers from Hong Kong and Canada. At the very beginning of the group work, when Iva revealed her involvement in the project from which the workshop originated, the other group members, especially those from other continents, expected her to provide not only the context of the selected spaces but also "insider" information about the plans for those sites. Although she tried not to influence the group's counter-mapping process excessively, other participants took her input as a "factual state of affairs", even though it was merely one of many possible interpretations of the space. The group faced a dual problem.

On one hand, Iva found it difficult to distance herself from what she "knew" about the sites, their pasts, and their planned futures, especially because Paromlin was already undergoing reconstruction for the new city library, making its future appear predetermined and limiting the sense of open possibilities. Her familiarity with the sites' histories and official development plans made it difficult to enter the imaginative "state of mind" that counter-mapping requires (i.e., one unburdened by predetermined futures).

On the other hand, the two foreign participants experienced discomfort and at times frustration, but not simply because they lacked contextual knowledge. Rather, their frustration stemmed from the awareness that such knowledge was present within the group, embodied in Iva's research experience, yet remained paradoxically inaccessible. They expected Iva to "solve the problem" of counter-mapping because she "knew" the context and plans, which placed them in a position of dependence rather than enabling collaborative imagination. Whatever counter-mapping approach they pursued, they felt they were acting without adequate understanding of the city and its inhabitants' needs – an impression reinforced by the cultural anthropological instinct that, in order to conclude and propose something, one must deeply understand complex relationships of different agents in these spaces as well as all the different layers of their pasts.

Thus, knowledge was simultaneously present and absent: "here" in the room but "not really" available for the collective reimagining that counter-mapping demands. This epistemological paradox partially blocked the group's counter-mapping capacity. Feelings of confusion and uncertainty accompanied the group's work.

Despite being intrigued by alternative "possible afters", the group could not get rid of the impression that each of its "solutions" was unfounded and omitted key insights necessary for more serious planning of the space's future. The group felt that the boundary between possible alternative futures and mere utopian fantasy was extremely thin and blurred. It was uncertain whether to inscribe a future utopia into their assigned spaces, or rather propose a more conservative, "practical" solution that

would simply differ from what had been, what is now, and what is officially planned for the future of these places. These feelings of confusion and uncertainty shaped the group's counter-mapping process in a decisive way. Unable to ground their proposals in the kind of deep contextual knowledge they felt was necessary, and uncertain whether they were producing meaningful alternatives or merely detached fantasies, the group members shifted their strategy.

Rather than attempting to map a future grounded in intimate local understanding they did not have, they descended to a different level of engagement: one anchored in universal, embodied experiences of urban transit spaces that were intrinsically common to all of them. This shift from locally specific to translocal imagination revealed new insights into the possibilities and limitations of collaborative counter-mapping across different positionalities. The resulting output reflected this methodological transformation: it was less rooted in Zagreb's specific urban struggles, but perhaps more attuned to globally recognized needs for spatial relief within the late capitalist urban rhythms. This shift manifested concretely in the group's focus on the Zagreb central station, where it considered what would allow users to feel safe, balanced, and calm within the frenzied rhythms of a city railway station.

From this emerged the idea of transforming the former Zagrebačka Banka space into a green oasis next to the station, offering passengers and passersby a contrast to the everyday urban rush. The group envisioned a place for pausing, grounding, and resting beside the mobility hub. In this way, the group's counter-mapping of a small local space by the Zagreb central station became a reflection of globally recognized needs for slowing down amid the whirl of late capitalism. At that moment, a rare and fleeting collaboration took shape, as the weight of deep-lived local insights briefly gave way to a quiet, sensorial co-theorization of spatial relief by a collaborative outsider.

## Conclusion

The counter-mapping and co-theorizing exercises reflected our efforts to capture the complexity of ruinous landscapes in Zagreb. In the three workshops we organized, our multimodal pedagogy took the form of a short, several-hour session, an intensive course, and a semester-long ethnographic experiment that culminated in a half-day field trip followed by discussion and co-theorizing. What began as a discrete teaching exercise grew into a methodological tool for reimagining postscapes, aligning with critical urban research in its insistence that counter-thinking and critique should be treated as urban pedagogy tools of inclusion rather than dismissal. We approached these counter-mapping exercises as "open and nimble, grounded and propositional; [those] that combin[e] thinking and doing, writing and engaging, caring and challenging" (Cupers, Herz, 2022: 7). Across these collaborations, our goal was to stimulate

new ways of co-theorization, capable of countering the accelerating, late-liberal developmental narratives of urban design in Zagreb and of extending the postscapes' co-imaginary beyond the classroom. They were conceived as exercises in anticipation, reinscription, and recoding of postindustrial urbanscapes. They allowed different participants – co-creators of urban imaginaries – to draw, write, imagine, reflect, and rehearse potential futures that reconfigure the present.

In our experience, counter-mapping conducted in collaboration with an anthropology class proved equally fruitful whether carried out with master's or doctoral candidates in an ethnology summer school. More challenging and open-ended was an exercise conducted with visual arts doctoral candidates, a serendipitous encounter intended "to augment collaborative practices and potentials within conventional anthropological research and ethnography by engaging insights and practices drawn from other arts and disciplines" (Boyer, Marcus, 2020: 14).

All three exercises grasped the unspoken and possible meanings of postscapes as more than the relics of an industrial past, showing that co-theorizing, like any good anthropology, aspires to have a political effect (ibid.: 17). The collaboration made space for what is otherwise conceived as impossible. In that sense, it echoed and underscored the significance of the "otherwise", as articulated within feminist scholarship, which seeks "solidarity with transforming worlds precisely through not knowing in advance what this may mean, not demonstrating mastery, not (only) condemning but, instead, extending liberatory worlds" (Meek, Morales Fontanilla, 2022: 275). By engaging with postindustrial sites through layered temporal perspectives that ranged from near-future scenarios to expansive, long-term utopian imaginaries, the participants developed counter-maps that challenged the dominant narratives of urban development. They articulated alternative visions grounded in care, transgression, diversity, and inclusion, ultimately reframing ruined urbanscapes as spaces of possibility rather than decline.

The counter-maps brought intimate, individual experiences of space into dialogue with shared knowledge and collective meaning-making. The method encouraged creativity, imagination, and dialogue, facilitating speculative co-theorization. This pedagogical approach to co-thinking also revealed how positionality and asymmetries of knowledge shape the horizons of collaborative imagination. Suspended between the certainties of insider expertise and the uncertainties of outsider perspectives, counter-mapping illuminated the delicate boundary between situated understanding and hesitant speculative inquiry. In turning toward global experiences of urban life, the group found that even across differences of positionality, alternative futures can emerge in the fleeting space between transparency and opacity of ruinous postscapes.

In sum, multimodal research and pedagogy demonstrated their ability to contest endorsed narratives of space and time, as well as everyday assumptions and imaginaries that shape ruinous postscapes. As a result, ethnography was performed as an inspiring and collaborative generative practice of co-theorizing in the classroom. Through

collaborative partnerships and visual inquiry, participants could not only document hindrances of ruinous postscapes but also unleash unthought-of possibilities. Multimodal engagements thus allowed postscapes to be viewed as non-linear formations, unfolding as pasts, presents, and futures co-theorized. Perhaps the most enduring lesson from this multimodal pedagogy is that it transformed from a one-time experiment into an ongoing practice "in which we aim to turn our assumptions – the things we think we know – into questions" (Cupers, Herz, 2022: 7).

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project The Transformation of the Postindustrial City: Space, Community, and Work (HRZZ-IP-2022-10-2473), abbreviated PostCity, https://postcity.ffzg.unizg.hr.

## 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.

## References

Aguilera Del Castillo, Pablo. 2025. Cartographic Archives: Excavating the Subterranean with a Camera. *American Anthropologist* 127 (2): 381–387. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.28071.

Alvarez Astacio, Patricia, Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan, and Arjun Shankar. 2021. Multimodal Ambivalence: A Manifesto for Producing in S@!#t Times. *American Anthropologist* 123 (2): 420–427. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13565.

Amri, Myriam and Zsuzsanna Ihar. 2025. Introduction: On Vanishing Fieldsites. *American Anthropologist* 127 (3): 633–635. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.28100.

Blažičko, Ida, Darko Masnec and Josip Zanki. N. d. Vodič kroz doktorski studij Likovne umjetnosti. Zagreb: Akademija likovnih umjetnosti Sveučilišta u Zagrebu. URL: https://www.alu.unizg.hr/alu/cms/upload/dokumenti/pds/materijali/Vodic_kroz_doktorski_studij_Likovne_umjetnosti.pdf (accessed 27.9.2025).

Boyer, Dominic and George E. Marcus. 2020. Introduction: Collaborative Anthropology Today: A Collection of Exceptions. In *Collaborative Anthropology Today: A Collection of Exceptions*, eds. Dominic Boyer and George E. Marcus, 1–21. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.

Counter-Cartographies Collective (3Cs). URL: https://www.countercartographies.org (accessed 10.8.2025).

Counter Cartographies Collective, Craig Dalton, and Liz Mason-Deese. 2012. Counter (Mapping) Actions: Mapping as Militant Research. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 11 (3): 439–466. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v11i3.941.

Cupers, Kenny and Manuel Herz. 2022. Elements of Urban Pedagogy: Introduction. In *What Is Critical Urbanism? Urban Research as Pedagogy*, eds. Kenny Cupers, Laura Nkula-Wenz, Sophie Oldfield, Emilio Distretti, Manuel Herz, and Myriam Perret, 6–19. Zurich: Park Books.

Dattatreyan, Ethiraj Gabriel and Arjun I. Shankar. 2016. Multimodal Ethnography and the Possibilities for Engaged Anthropology. *Anthropology News* 57: e76–e80. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/AN.198.

Dattatreyan, Ethiraj Gabriel and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón. 2019. Introduction: Multimodal Anthropology and the Politics of Invention. *American Anthropologist* 121 (1): 220–228. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13183.

Dattatreyan, Ethiraj Gabriel and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón. 2021. Pedagogies of the Senses: Multimodal Strategies for Unsettling Visual Anthropology. *Visual Anthropology Review* 37 (2): 267–289. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12248.

Edensor, Tim. 2005. *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics and Materiality*. Oxford, New York: Berg.

Gan, Elaine, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, and Nils Bubandt. 2017. Introduction: Haunted Landscapes of the Anthropocene. In *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, eds. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, 1–14. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

High, Steven and David Lewis. 2007. Corporate Wasteland. *The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.

Hodgson, Dorothy L. and Richard A. Schroeder. 2002. Dilemmas of Counter-Mapping Community Resources in Tanzania. *Development and Change* 33 (1): 79–100. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00241.

Kelemen, Petra and Nevena Škrbić Alempijević. 2025. Culture and Planning in Zagreb and Rijeka: Anthropological Reading of Cultural Policy Documents. *Sociologija i prostor* 63 (2): 175–197. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5673/sip.63.2.1.

Lassiter, Luke Eric 2005. Collaborative Ethnography and Public Anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 46 (1): 83–106. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/425658.

Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Marcus, George. 2013. Experimental Forms for the Expression of Norms in the Ethnography of the Contemporary. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (2): 197–217. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14318/hau3.2.011.

Meek, Laura A. and Julia Alejandra Morales Fontanilla. 2022. Otherwise. *Feminist Anthropology* 3: 274–283. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12094.

Peluso, Nancy Lee. 1995. Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia. *Antipod* 27 (4): 383–406. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.1995.tb00286.x.

Potkonjak, Sanja. 2024. Postkrajolici svega. *PostCity project*, 4 October. URL: https://postcity.ffzg.unizg.hr/2024/10/04/postkrajolici-svega (accessed 8.8.2025).

Rappaport, Joanne. 2007. Más allá de la escritura: la epistemología de la etnografía en colaboración. *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* 43: 197–229. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22380/2539472X.1108.

Rappaport, Joanne. 2008. Beyond Participant Observation: Collaborative Ethnography as Theoretical Innovation. *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1: 1–31. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/cla.0.0014.

Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Škrbić Alempijević, Nevena and Petra Kelemen. 2025. From Industrial Pasts to Culture-Oriented Futures: Urban Planning in Postindustrial Rijeka and Zagreb. *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 37: 313–339. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17234/SEC.37.16.

Urban Imaginaries. URL: https://www.urbanimaginaries.com (accessed 10.8.2025).

Wainwright, Joel and Joe Bryan. 2009. Cartography, Territory, Property: Postcolonial Reflections on Indigenous Counter-mapping in Nicaragua and Belize. *Cultural Geographies* 16 (2): 153–178. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474008101515.

Westmoreland, Mark. 2022. Multimodality: Reshaping Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 51: 173–194. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-121319-071409.

**Protikartiranje in skupno premišljevanje krajin ruševin**

Članek predstavlja protikartiranje (ang. *counter-mapping*) kot obliko večnačinske pedagogike, namenjene izzivanju prevladujočih narativov urbanega razvoja in spodbujanju skupnega premišljevanja možnih prihodnosti poindustrijskih krajin v Zagrebu. Avtorice na podlagi treh delavnic z različnimi skupinami študentov pokažejo, kako protikartiranje odpira prostor za skupno domišljijsko ustvarjanje, kritično urbano prakso in avtonomno ponovno zamišljanje deindustrializiranih območij. Raziskava temelji na etnografski angažiranosti projekta PostCity v urbanih krajinah ruševin (ang. *ruinous landscapes*).

Avtorice konceptualizirajo postkrajine (ang. *postscapes*) kot kompleksne sociokulturne ter socionaravne prostore, v katerih se materialno propadanje, vsakdanje izkušnje in življenjski svetovi prepletajo z urbanističnim načrtovanjem, dediščinskimi narativi in razvojem zemljišč. Ti prostori izražajo družbeno-prostorske ureditve, družbeno-okoljske interakcije in družbeno-časovne konfiguracije. Avtorice uporabljajo večnačinski pristop, v katerem protikartiranje deluje hkrati kot raziskovalno in pedagoško orodje v duhu sodelovalne etnografije in eksperimentalnih terenskih praks. Po Joanne Rappaport (2007, 2008) sodelovalno etnografijo razumejo kot emancipatorno metodologijo, katere cilj je ustvarjanje prostora za skupno premišljevanje kot proces skupnega iskanja pomenov. Skupno premišljevanje omogoča nastanek protiontologij (ang. *counter-ontologies*) med učnim procesom.

Na prvi delavnici, ki je potekala v okviru poletne šole SIEF leta 2024, so študenti etnologije, antropologije in folkloristike sodelovali v triurni vaji, osredinjeni na pet poindustrijskih lokacij. Študenti so si v skupinah ponovno zamišljali te prostore ter poudarjali posege in pristope majhnega merila: skupnostne centre za ljudi v prehodnih življenjskih okoliščinah, socialna stanovanja in popravljalnice, medgeneracijska skupnostna središča, lokalne storitve namesto korporativnih sedežev ter večplastno revitalizacijo območij. Njihovi predlogi so nasprotovali investicijsko usmerjenim pristopom in izpostavljali prostore podpore ter javno usmerjene prakse. Druga delavnica je vključevala doktorske študente vizualnih umetnosti. Štirje doktorski raziskovalci so samostojno protikartirali izbrane lokacije in ustvarili pretežno utopične vizije: tropsko zdravilišče kot zatočišče za eksotične vrste in eksperimentalne skupnosti, odprt prostor za izražanje mnenj in družbeno kritiko, zeleno kotanjo, v kateri industrijske ruševine postopoma prerašča vegetacija, ter prostor svobode, ki se razvija iz lastnih ostankov in se lahko preoblikuje v nekaj novega. Te reinterpretacije so se upirale načrtovanju, usmerjenemu v rešitve, ter odpirale prostor številnim alternativnim možnostim. Študenti so izrecno poudarili, da ne načrtujejo prihodnosti, temveč vizualizirajo utopije. Tretja vaja je vključevala magistrske študente predmeta Antropologija družbenega spomina, ki so se s tematiko ukvarjali skozi celoten semester. Proces se je zaključil s tridelnim sklopom dejavnosti: teoretskim predavanjem, poldnevnim terenskim delom na treh lokacijah in sodelovalno delavnico protikartiranja. Osrednje mesto je vseskozi zavzemalo vprašanje spomina – preizpraševanje razumevanja ruševin kot praznih prostorov in spodbujanje njihovega prepoznavanja kot alternativnih krajev spomina. T. i. protizemljevidi so razkrili notranjo pozicionalnost študentov kot prebivalcev mesta, saj so njihove vizije odražale neposredne potrebe in vsakdanje izkušnje. Domišljijske intervencije so bile konservativne (niso izzivale prevladujočega družbeno-ekonomskega reda), kreativne (igrive reinvencije prostora) in korektivne (preoblikovanje krajin ruševin v krajine spomina oz. *memoryscapes*, ki opozarjajo na zamolčane in marginalizirane spomine).

Avtorice se posvečajo tudi metodološkim izzivom, ki so se pojavili med protikartiranjem, zlasti napetostim med notranjim, lokalnim poznavanjem prostora in sodelovalnimi perspektivami zunanjih opazovalcev. Te napetosti razkrivajo, kako lahko poglobljeno kontekstualno razumevanje hkrati omogoča in omejuje spekulativno domišljijo. V zaključku izpostavljajo, da se je protikartiranje iz enkratnega eksperimenta razvilo v trajnejšo prakso, ki kot oblika večnačinske pedagogike omogoča pretresanje uradnih narativov ter odpira prostor za ponovno zamišljanje krajin ruševin in njihovih možnih prihodnosti.

Traditiones 55 (2): 133–153 | COBISS: 1.01 | CC BY 4.0 | DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2026550207

# On the Essay's Place in Scientific Writing: Toward a Disobedient Epistemology

*Nataša Rogelja Caf*
ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute, Slovenia
natasa.rogelja@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8087-7491

The article examines the use of essays within *hodinars*, interdisciplinary field events developed as part of the research programme Heritage on the Margins and the project Route Biographies. It sheds light on the essay as a genre and its place within the social sciences and the humanities; furthermore, it offers a reflection on the role of the essay in science, whose nature can be described as non-linear, rejecting deductiveness, meandering and slow, as well as disobedient.

▪ **Keywords**: essay, *hodinars* as walking-writing seminars, writing as method, multimodal scientific writing, disobedient epistemology

Članek tematizira uporabo esejev na hodinarjih, interdisciplinarnih terenskih dogodkih, razvitih v okviru programa Dediščina na obrobju in projekta Biografije istrskih poti. V besedilu najprej osvetlim esej kot žanr in njegovo mesto v družboslovju in humanistiki, v nadaljevanju pa na podlagi primerov iz lastne prakse podam premislek o vlogi eseja v znanosti. Naravo eseja opišem kot nelinearno, ki zavrača deduktivnost, je meandrirajoča in počasna, a tudi neposlušna.

▪ **Ključne besede**: esej, hodinarji, pisanje kot metoda, večnačinsko znanstveno pisanje, neposlušna epistemologija

## Two questions

When, at the beginning of 2025, the first textual and video essays arrived for the essay collection *FootNotes*, developed within the project Route Biographies (ZRC SAZU) and the research programme Heritage on the Margins (ZRC SAZU), I found myself – acting as the editor of the collection – compelled to pose two questions that also underpin the present text: *What is an essay?* and *What is the role of the essay within scientific research?*

As for the role of the essay in science, I already carried in my pocket a handful of partially articulated answers, developed together with colleagues within the framework of *hodinars*,[1] walking-writing seminars. These I will unfold later in the text. The first

[1] *Hodinars*, as we developed them at ZRC SAZU over the past six years within the programme group Heritage on the Margins (ARIS, P5-0408 (A)), and as I later further elaborated them within the project Route Biographies (ARIS, J6-4611), can be defined as follows. Hodinars are curated events in which a group of participants walks together over several days while collectively thinking through a particular theme (in relation to places where they walk). The participants themselves, as well as the discussions and experiences that unfold among them and within the walk regarding certain sites, are central to shaping responses (and generating new questions). Hodinars take place in a hybrid space between analysis and fieldwork, where the seminar format intertwines with ethnographic practice, without a clear boundary separating the two. They are coupled with experimental writing, in which walking and writing become a methodological and epistemological intervention.

question, however – seemingly the simpler one – proved far more troublesome. In the context of editorial work, it was a question of a very practical nature, demanding concrete and immediate decisions. The incoming texts had to be evaluated according to the qualities of the essay; authors had to be advised to do this or that. Yet in truth, at least at the beginning, I was improvising, offering future authors guidance more by intuition than certainty, much as I myself was still grappling with the form while shaping my own essays.

If an author used too many references or footnotes, I asked them to reduce citations to what was strictly necessary. If thoughts took the form of clear, assertive statements, I encouraged authors to loosen their reasoning. If a timid doubt crept between the lines, I advised writers and video-makers alike to strengthen that trace of doubt in their work. If the texts felt too heavy, I suggested simplifications; if they were too long, I advised shortening – while at the same time entangling myself in (over)long or (over)complex writings of my own. At times, I seemed too lenient in my comments, at others too strict; I judged others with ease, only to commit similar "mistakes" myself, guided by affect, momentary impulses, the material at hand, the topic, and an acquired style of writing.

In the process of learning, editing, researching, and reading, I then encountered the work of David Foster Wallace (2006), the American "excessive" essayist, a multi-award-winning author who in his essays used hundreds of footnotes and routinely exceeded what might be considered the "normal" length of an essay. I also encountered the work of Jamaica Kincaid (1988), the Antiguan-American essayist, and her dense, complex articulations, far removed from any light, leisurely essayistic meandering. Why not? After all, in texts that reflect on essays themselves (Adorno, 1984; Porter, 2012; Badley, 2019; Dillon, 2024), the essay is described as one of the freest genres, an adaptable form that must be reinvented each time anew, depending on circumstances and subject matter; a form with an inherent intention to escape the confines of any genre. In fact, a genre that is not quite a genre at all, but rather a principle operating across genres. A trickster of sorts, refusing the rules of the game while continuing to play it.

All these diverse essayistic writings – which, following Roland Barthes (1977), move within a hybrid space between science, art, and intimacy – take on a wide variety of ever-emerging forms precisely because of these three "angles" of perception. Yet they nevertheless seem to adhere to loosely conceived constants of essaying, which are easier to understand not as form but as a process of thinking with an infinite number of possible outcomes. A non-repeatable conversation with the world. "A method of inquiry through which we invent and assemble the world" (Badley, 2019: 9).

Furthermore, if one is to take on the editorship of an essay collection, it seems that, while reading and observing (textual and video essays), one must look sideways, gaze beyond words and images, into the space between the lines – where the world is not yet fixed, into a swarming time-space where the true qualities of the essay reside.

If we attempt to condense these qualities into a never entirely precise list, drawing on the above writers on essays, it might read as follows: the essay perpetually doubts and avoids the traps of certainty; it is fragmentary and spontaneous; focused on the everyday; it reveals the contradictory nature of knowledge; it is heretical, rejects deduction, imitates the process of thinking; it is a (self-)critical practice, a practice of testing ideas,[2] an art of slow contemplation; painfully personal yet capable of decentring; its content is not fictional, but its style is creative and continually reinvented; it is playful and serious at once, hesitant, solitary and social, instructive, seductive, and mystifying; adaptable and direct; it leads to insight, not to catharsis. The essay is the language of conversation, transformed into written form.

The present text adopts many characteristics of the essay, even as it deliberately evades some of them (not least through its use of footnotes and scholarly citation). In this sense, the text is itself a paradox. It acknowledges ongoing concerns surrounding so-called "creative" writing: the risk of aestheticization in place of analysis; the tension between accessibility and academic legitimacy, particularly in relation to peer review and disciplinary standards; and the alignment of anthropological "creative" writing with a cultural economy in which originality, style, and personal voice operate as forms of marketable capital, a space where everything risks becoming "a joke". To confront and answer these concerns, the present essay starts from the idea that the problem of aestheticization lies not in literary expression as such but in the possibility that rhetorical force may substitute for epistemological clarity. Also, the text attempts to write playfully and seriously at the same time, embracing and understanding playfulness as an indicator of a specific kind of seriousness (Shepherd et al., 2018), questioning along the way the presumed separation between theory and practice by revealing the process of thinking through writing. Ultimately, through its own example of form–content entanglement, the text foregrounds the following question: is multimodal writing in anthropology merely a richer, more layered narration of research experience, without analytical consequence, or do such ethnographic experiments[3] themselves possess analytical and theoretical potential?

In the first section, I will attempt to view the essay within a broader temporal and disciplinary context, primarily within anthropology. In broad strokes, I will sketch different types of essays, with a particular emphasis on critical and research essays. In the second section, I will unfold the use of essays within hodinars – interdisciplinary field events developed as part of the research programme Heritage on the Margins (ZRC SAZU)

[2] The word *essay* originates from the French verb *essayer*, which means "to try", even in a very literal sense (e.g., *essayer un chapeau* – "to try on a hat"). The essay as a text aligns well with this meaning, since in a way it can also signify the testing or trial of ideas.

[3] The term *experiment* is not used here in a narrow scientific sense; rather, it indicates an openness to the unexpected, the random, the unlikely, the seemingly irrelevant, and also to the "joke", in a manner similar to how the field of experimentation is understood in Eleana Yalouri's article 'Entanglements: Experiments in Multimodal Ethnography' (2022).

and the research project Route Biographies (ZRC SAZU) – and illuminate the process and purpose of multimodal scholarly writing that reaches beyond academic discourse while remaining in constant dialogue with it. It is here that we will also touch upon the concept of disobedient epistemology (Mignolo, 2011), one of the central ideas of decolonial thought, which, among other things, underpins hodinars and "disobedient" modes of writing developed within these walking-writing seminars.

In the concluding chapter, I will reflect on the qualities and purposes of using essays within present-day scientific research. And methodology? The methodology of the article is, in fact, writing itself, preceded by walking, reading, (day)dreaming, listening, mingling, gazing, talking, and hanging – and, perhaps above all, by the playfully serious joy of turning experience into meaning, and meaning into words.

## The essay as apeirogon

I first encountered the unusual-sounding word *apeirogon* on the cover of a novel by the Irish writer Colum McCann (2020), which uses the metaphor of an infinite-sided polygon to describe relations between Israel and Palestine. An *apeirogon* is, in fact, a theoretical mathematical figure, a kind of infinite polygonal shape, that can also serve as a point of departure for thinking about the essay, a kind of never-completed, disobedient knowledge. In the context of this text, we will primarily discuss the essay within anthropology and, more broadly, the humanities and social sciences, while first outlining the historically recognized coordinates of the essay.

Many historical surveys of the essay (e.g., Porter, 2012) begin with the famous French essayist Michel de Montaigne, the Renaissance humanist who, like many of his contemporaries, was inspired by ancient writers and is widely regarded as the originator of essayistic writing. His work, titled *Essais*, was first published in 1580 in Bordeaux, and Montaigne continued to revise and expand it over time. As Porter (2012: xii–xvi) notes, the use of the first person singular in his often ironic, provocative, and always hesitant, wandering, and floating texts was radical for its time. Montaigne once wrote, "if my mind stood on solid ground, I would not write essays, but make decisions" (Montaigne in Porter, 2012: xiii).

Beyond the celebrated literary qualities of his writings, perhaps the most important fact for our discussion is that his first-person style opened the door to voices outside traditional authority. It circumvented the prevailing literary norms, allowing words to spread widely. As William Hazlitt, the early nineteenth-century English essayist, observed, Montaigne was the first modern author to write publicly about what he thinks as a human being (Hazlitt in Porter, 2013: xvi). And although Montaigne came from a noble family, his writing can certainly be seen as a critique of the dominant practices of behaviour and writing of his time. As Porter notes, Montaigne may have

felt discomfort in facing uncertainty, yet he believed that understanding the changing nature of human thought has not only philosophical value, but also political power to challenge prevailing authoritarian practices (ibid.: xiv).

Jeff Porter, in the introduction to *Understanding Essays* (2012), wonders how the essay appeared so late, given how naturally suited it seems to human reflection on the world. Why is there no Bronze Age essay? Why did Nestor not comment on the Trojan War in an essayistic manner? Porter concludes that had they done so, Aristotle surely would have devoted a chapter to the essay in the *Poetics*. Classical writers and heroes, however, do not doubt; Homeric heroes have no time for hesitation or reflection, and even the most "suspicious" among them, such as Odysseus, does not question his actions (Porter, 2012: xii). Perhaps Porter overlooked the practicalities: in those times, a thought recorded on paper or inscribed in stone had to be damn sure to justify the effort. It appears that essays originated in oral culture and later evolved into written form. Perhaps the earliest essayists were forgotten storytellers, side characters in the main narratives, whose words lingered in the in-between space between spoken and written forms.

And essaying within anthropology? The texts written by anthropologists, likely because of the very nature of anthropological work, seem to have always been flirting with literature; they stand closely next to journals, memoirs, and travelogues, even at a time when travelogues are considered a pulp genre and even when a literalised text (may) close the door to academic and research positions to anthropologists. Anthropological work is closely related to life, the everyday kind that includes banal and chaotic clusters of unforeseeable events and circumstances, the settled and the changing, the emotional and the unspoken, albeit present. The urge for such writing thus does not emanate merely from the material itself, that is, from the observed, but also from the specifics of the anthropological fieldwork. Anthropologists appear in a double role – as a tool of research, receiving information; and as a tool of putting research into words, conveying information. When expressing intense sensorial and emotional field experiences, anthropologists also express situations and events following the atmospheric specifics of the field and our own affects (Rogelja Caf, Ledinek Lozej, 2026 [in print]).

Adrie Kusserow (2017), who studied violence in Sudan, transformed her field notes into what she called "poems of discomfort", to capture the emotional nuances of tragic events that are nearly unimaginable, and which classical academic texts either leave unsaid or which the analytical language cannot adequately render. Her poems function in the scientific text almost like photographs, letting the material choose its own form of expression. She explains her approach: "Maybe the beyondness needs a different tone of voice, a more vulnerable and more empathic one" (Kusserow, 2017: 87). Though her field example is extreme, similar reflections can be extended more broadly to the articulation of anthropological field experiences. Through observational

methods, we harvest the imponderables of life[4] (Malinowski, 1922: 17), which may be better captured by more flexible forms of narration.

In addition to Malinowski, who in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) often employs a personal, confessional tone and reflective observation, Margaret Mead does similarly in *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). We can continue with Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), with its descriptions of sunlight at dawn and dusk, and reflections on Brazilian rain. Such personal, essayistic records of ethnographic experience are far from mere wandering through the researcher's subjective emotional landscapes; rather, they can be understood as "a faltering search that never seeks to reach its goal in a linear way, but constantly meanders, repeatedly and brutally cutting into the edges of the goal itself." (Mendiževec, 2016).

Within the literary turn, with writers such as James Clifford, George Marcus, and others, the essay in anthropology emerged as a critical practice: a text that reflects the method, the author, their position, and their writing, as exemplified in *Writing Culture* (1986). In recent decades, essaying in anthropology has become common practice: authors observe and comment on their own research steps (e.g., Sarah Pink in *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 2009, where video documentation is central),[5] illuminate power relations in literary-critical form, follow Orwellian practices, or produce works combining theoretical, literary, and narrative-descriptive passages, as in Anne Lowenhaupt Tsing's *The Mushrooms at the End of the World* (2015), which asserts: "The time has come for new ways of telling true stories" (ibid.: vii). Many other works as well have employed literary techniques in recent decades, often embedded within articles or books as vignette-style inner texts, or using essays as the primary mode of writing.[6] Anthropological blogs can also be seen as essays, such as the collection *Writing Anthropology: Essays on Craft and Commitment* (2020), drawing on the famous blog *Savage Minds* (later renamed *Anthrodendum*).[7]

---

[4] As Malinowski wrote: "there is a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality. Let us call them the *imponderabilia of actual life*. Here belong such things as the routine of a man's working day, the details of his care of the body, of the manner of taking food and preparing it; the tone of conversational and social life around the village fires, the existence of strong friendships or hostilities, and of passing sympathies and dislikes between people; the subtle yet unmistakable manner in which personal vanities and ambitions are reflected in the behaviour of the individual and in the emotional reactions of those who surround him" (1922: 17).

[5] Simultaneously but also in earlier phases, visual anthropology also developed in Slovenia. One of its key trajectories runs through institutions such as the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and ZRC SAZU, where ethnographic film often emerged as an extension of fieldwork, including its reflexive and methodological dimensions (see Križnar, 1996).

[6] For example: Behar, 1996; Taussig, 2000, 2011; Crapanzano, 2003; Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2015; Pandian, 2015; McLean, 2017; Rogelja, 2018; Petrović Šteger, 2021; Potkonjak, Škokić, 2022; Muršič et al., 2022; Svetel, 2024.

[7] *Anthrodendum*; https://anthrodendum.org/.

One might ask whether essays can be categorized according to theme, writing style, or format (video versus text) to identify those most suited to anthropological research. Such categorization of the elusive apeirogon seems doomed, yet perhaps a provisional sketch helps guide further reflection. The tripartite schema I propose here serves as a starting point.

When I first sketched three bubbles, the first contained literary essays, the second academic essays, and the third research essays. While the academic essay (in the Slovenian academic context better known as a seminar paper) primarily tests knowledge, the research essay serves a different purpose: it is a critical journey through the material of the research question, personal experiences with the question, and reflection on literature or fieldwork, aiming to transform what we know and have experienced into something new. The literary essay, by contrast, is freer, unconcerned with research questions or critical reflection, yet can appropriate such techniques along the way and approach the research essay (as Jamaica Kincaid does). Research essays may also be literary, often employing narrative techniques, as in the work of Adrie Kusserow and others.

Many classifications of essays come from literary studies. For example, Graham Good, in *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (1988: xi–xii), historically divides essays into four types: the travel essay, preceded by movement through space;[8] the moral essay, reflecting and weighing values (e.g., essays of English moralists such as Francis Bacon); the critical essay, an intellectual judgment or dialogue with the read material; and the autobiographical essay, preceded by memory and self-reflection (e.g., Montaigne). Perhaps more relevant to us is Good's typology by mode of thinking: the research essay (born of curiosity, without predetermined conclusion or moralizing intent, bringing more questions than answers); the speculative essay (allowing the writer freedom, a "what if" essay); the contemplative essay (slow introspection, e.g., of an event); and the argumentative essay (developing a line of argument in a personal, less academic tone).

Following certain classic authors, anthropological essays – texts written in a somewhat personal, confessional tone about research topics, the field, or field experiences – might be divided into: ethnographic essays on places and communities (e.g., Malinowski); (self-)reflective essays (such as introductions to anthropological books revealing the author's engagement with field and topic);[9] theoretical essays, often lacking direct empirical material but engaging in dialogue with research, concepts, and ideas, frequently in a critical tone yet still including personal reflection; and experimental

[8] Space enters the essay relatively late, for example in the works of Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), such as *Walking* (1862).

[9] This is also where visual anthropology becomes central, particularly in terms of analyzing methodological approaches and the author's own positionality, while some authors also adopt an essayistic form (e.g., Favero, 2013; van de Port, 2018). On cinema, anthropology, and the essayistic impulse, see also Thomson (2017).

essays or essayistic books, bordering on art, characterized by fragmentation, literary techniques, openness, and variability of form.[10]

Although the above categorisations are often imprecise and overlapping, they may help us reflect on our own essayistic endeavours. In the following lines, I will highlight some of the efforts within selected projects and programs conducted at ZRC SAZU in the last two decades.

## Walking between noting and inscription

Within the framework of the research programme Heritage on the Margins (ZRC SAZU 2019–2027) and the project Route Biographies (ZRC SAZU 2022–2025), we began experimenting with hodinars – curated events in which participants, through shared walking, writing and conversation, reflect on a specific theme. Such walking-writing seminars take place in a hybrid space between analysis and fieldwork, where the seminar format intertwines with ethnographic practice, without a clear boundary separating the two.

In the aforementioned research group related to heritage, the initial use of hodinars was primarily connected to the desire to establish interdisciplinary dialogue, as researchers came from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. Several days of shared walking through a specific area – one tied to our research questions about heritage and heritagisation – offered a space for dialogue. Discussions that would usually take place within seminar rooms were moved outdoors; our seated bodies were set in motion. In doing so, we expanded the temporal frame of conversation (fieldwork usually lasted several days), shared a common experience of walking and encountering the terrain (albeit briefly), and engaged in evening reflections on the research questions we had posed. Throughout, we kept field diaries, and in the evenings, organised discussion workshops in which we deepened our understandings, often through writing exercises of some sort or by using our photo material.

Methodologically, our use of walking-writing seminars followed the guidelines of Nick Shepherd, Professor of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at Aarhus University and Professor of African Studies and Archaeology at the University of Cape Town, as well as other experiments in ethnographic and research walking. Shepherd conducted multi-day walking seminars in South Africa as part of the programme Heritage and Public Culture in Africa, grounding their theoretical premises closely in decolonial studies.[11] As Shepherd and his collaborators wrote in the introduction to *Walking*

[10] Although there exists a considerable body of literary works in the form of novels written by anthropologists (e.g., Ghosh, 1992; Pandian, 2014, Rogelja, 2018; Ferlež, Rezman, 2019, Podjed, 2024, and many others), anthropological novels are not the subject of this article.

[11] The walking seminar, as practised by Shepherd and his collaborators, becomes a decolonial intervention in which participants interrogate hegemonies of knowledge, Western epistemologies, and the relations

*Seminars: Embodied Research in Emergent Anthropocene Landscapes* (Shepherd et al., 2018), these seminars pursued three central aims: to explore the intersections and boundaries between conventional scholarship and forms of artistic research and practice; to employ walking as a methodology for investigating landscape and history; and to rethink time, materiality, and memory.

One of the guiding ideas behind Shepherd's walking seminars was the desire to erase hierarchies between theory and practice, between scientific research and artistic practice, and also between disciplines – a kind of erasure of boundaries that does not negate the integrity of diverse forms of knowledge. To this end, Shepherd's seminars were designed to encourage hybrid collaborations, bringing together architects, philosophers, choreographers, anthropologists, and others to think collectively about a pre-defined research question. At the centre of interest lies the relationship between "seriousness" and "playfulness", and their fusion through research walking. As Shepherd and his collaborators write: "I do not understand playfulness in opposition to seriousness, but as something in a far more complex relationship with it, as an indicator of a specific kind of seriousness" (Shepherd et al., 2018: 13). Seminars conceived in this way appeared to be a valuable tool for establishing respectful interdisciplinary dialogue, as well as for reflecting on the authoritativeness of scholarly texts and dialogue more broadly.

Beyond practising interdisciplinary dialogue, some of us also sought to connect walking more firmly with writing. Just as walking opened an (in-between) time for reflection, I became interested in the intermediate step of recording – whether in the form of textual, photographic, or video essaying.[12] Although hodinars draw on numerous prior initiatives, it was in the project Route Biographies that I forged a more explicit connection between walking and writing and on reflecting upon diverse forms of academic expression, mostly textual but including, in part, also "writing with the camera", which materialised in two video essays.[13] However, the multimodal textual writing was at the core of our interest.

The fundamental reflection underpinning this "new" step within the hodinars sheds a new light on the process of writing itself. Writing is usually imagined as the final phase in the sequence of reading–research–writing. Yet writing itself enables thinking. It is, among other things, an in-between space in which analysis is born. Between to jot

between researcher and interlocutors, between professor and student, between student and student, and across disciplinary boundaries. Shepherd's seminars also reveal the influence of archaeology, particularly in their attentiveness to materiality while walking. Participants move primarily through sites burdened with colonial histories, in order to experience space as a material and affective archive of coloniality. Walking here is not merely a method, but a critical gesture that probes relations of power and epistemological hierarchies (cf. Shepherd et al., 2018; Shepherd, 2024).

[12] For examples of essays produced within the project Route Biographies, see the online collection of essays *FootNotes*, which operates as a scholarly online journal under the ZRC Publishing (https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si/).

[13] Although video essays are not the subject of the present article, readers may find two video essays published at *FootNotes* closely aligned with the reflections developed in the textual essays discussed here. These are the essays 'Archiving Silences' and 'Dragonja FootNotes' (https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si/archiving-silences/ and https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si/dragonja-footnotes/).

down (in a field notebook) and to formalize into text (a scholarly article), there lies the often-overlooked act of writing itself – as movement, as process, as a mode of thought.

After several days of walking and workshops, we began writing essays, which we shared after a few weeks, read reciprocally, and discussed in a collective meeting, this time usually in a seminar room. These essays were not intended for publication, but rather for building dialogue among us, and for cultivating our own reflections; a kind of thinking-through-writing. Through reading texts that were hesitant, open, unstructured, and experimental, our conversations moved several steps further in our collective reflection. At the same time, while reading these unfinished texts, I began to ask which aspects of (human) life remain excluded when we adhere to more conventional forms of scholarly expression, and how authoritative writing styles often reproduce colonial and other hierarchical relations of power.

We also reflected on the emergence of analysis within the writing process itself, which stands between the practices of recording (field notes) and inscription (final results). In our experiments[14] with writing, we most strongly embraced the essay – whose nature I would describe as non-linear, resistant to deductive logic, meandering and slow, as well as disobedient. It emerged as a potential bearer of a disobedient epistemology,[15] one that may dare to reveal or even annul the "zero point" from which the world is supposedly observed neutrally, as discussed by Walter Mignolo.[16] The essay's mobility seemed to ventilate rooms of certainty and allow doubt to enter thinking.

## Multimodal writing: When writing finds a form adequate to what it describes

Geographer Timothy Cresswell (2019: 1–3) has pointed out that writing is commonly understood as the final step in the sequence of reading–researching–writing, and yet it is precisely writing that often makes thinking possible in the first place. I cannot fully agree with Cresswell here, since anthropological and ethnological research practices have, from the very beginnings of the discipline, relied on field notes and diaries. Still,

[14] See footnote 3.

[15] On the necessity of a disobedient epistemology – one that would fundamentally interrogate the assumption of the "zero point" posited by Western European science, from which the world is supposedly observed in a neutral manner – Walter Mignolo writes in his article 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom' (2009). He posits as follows: "Once upon a time, scholars assumed that the knowing subject in the disciplines is transparent, disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured. From a detached and neutral point of observation (that Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez describes as the hubris of the zero point), the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them. Today that assumption is no longer tenable, although there are still many believers. At stake is indeed the question of racism and epistemology" (2009: 1).

[16] This concern has however a longer genealogy. Feminist and decolonial scholars as well as the literary turn in 1980s have challenged the idea of an unlocated knower, emphasising instead the situated, embodied and partial character of knowledge.

within anthropology, writing has been more consciously recognised and employed as a technique rather than as a method. Writing as method, however, assumes a different role: it is a method that (can) enable thinking and knowing. As Anna Gibbs writes (2007: 1), writing as method does not refer only to researching, but also to making sense of research in the process of research itself. It is therefore a form of writing that is neither merely a field note nor simply the final product of research.

If we slightly rework Cresswell's formulation, we might say that between noting and inscription lies an often-overlooked act of writing: one that enables movement, looser forms of consolidation and dissolution of thought in relation to the material at hand, a particular kind of journey that is part of the research and that also builds the research. At this point, we arrive, like in walking, to a certain kind of meditative writing that tries not to follow the pre-drafted shapes and procedures, but builds in the relation with the research event – it is the event itself, self-referencing and potential, constantly checking its own position and the surrounding epistemologies and ontologies. As one of the participants in the walking seminar along the River Rižana writes in her essay: "Above all, it is a method that encourages associative thinking. The initial question is merely a spark, capable of igniting a multitude of important questions and reflections."[17]

Let me illustrate this with the example of the walking seminar along the River Rižana, which I organised within the project Ethnographies of Land and Water Routes: A Comparative Approach to (Im)mobility,[18] where we also asked questions about the ethnography of a river in the context of posthuman theorising. Among other things, we inquired how one might approach a river ethnographically.

Combining walking with writing proved to be of special importance for the more-than-human ethnographic situation, one predominately characterized, in my view, by uncertainty. Apart from thinking through writing, which is a precious in-between step in various research situations, writing essays also allowed us to be freer with word choice, which seems an important issue when researching a river and other more-than-human subjects. Metaphors and loose language effectively invite uncertainty to be discussed and might open windows for new ideas. In a way, writing a research essay gave us the freedom to touch the invisible present verbally, to express uncertain predictions and guesses, to reflect on stereotypes (humans as saviours) and prejudices (what the river should look like), and to write about the hints given to us by the river; it also allowed us to describe the overall atmosphere, so as to put into words the modus operandi of the Rižana River, namely the *oozing*. The Rižana, at least during the summer months, does not flow – it oozes, even underground, where the limestone bed, shaped by the river itself, allows water

[17] Ana Jelnikar, https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si/the-river-woman-and-mortadella/.

[18] The project was carried out at ZRC SAZU between 2014 and 2017 under the leadership of Nataša Gregorič Bon. Within this project, I organised the first walking-writing seminar, trying for the first time to bring writing to the foreground. Later, I developed a more complex methodological plan, encompassing writing as a method within the Route Biographies (ZRC SAZU) project.

to move slowly and to pool. In the summer heat, our steps, too, began to linger, and the bodily desire for water, intensified by heat and drought, began to shape ethical reflections within us (Rogelja Caf, 2022). With the notion of oozing, we (perhaps) moved from (subjective) affective attunement to (dialogic) affective resonance, to use Gibbs' (2007) words, reaching the point where writing finds the form adequate to what it describes.

One of the purposes of working with unfinished essays, in which participants reflected on how to approach the river ethnographically, was to introduce greater complexity and sensitivity into ethnographic writing, in order to forge a deeper connection with the research question. Another reason why authors employ alternative modes of writing within scholarship, whether as exercises in dialogue or as published essays, anthropoetry, and similar forms, is to break with conventional notions of representation and subjectivity. As Pandian and McLean write:

> some of us take experimental writing as a way of lending greater nuance and sensitivity to the project of ethnographic understanding, and thus of entering more profoundly into the lives and worlds of others. Other contributors to this book seek, in writing, new means of breaking with conventional notions of representation and subjectivity, putting the anthropological category of the 'human' itself into question. We float this volume with the faith that inventive, appealing, and intellectually adventurous writing can serve both of these ends, while also reaching out to wider and more diverse audiences. We hope to show that such experimentation is essential to anthropology's role in the contemporary world, and that it is one of our most powerful means of engaging it. (2017: 8)

Building on the tradition of the literary turn of the 1980s, the contributors to the volume edited by Anand Pandian and Stuart L. McLean push reflections on writing further, beyond the reflexivity of the writer and their role, by situating experimental ethnographic writing within questions of responsibility. They reflect on complex field situations to which conventional modes of inscription do injustice: they erase silences, trim emotionally charged moments, and bypass subtle shades of distress and joy that exist beyond spoken words. "There is a sense that the social sciences and humanities build a certain authority by maintaining distance from direct witnessing, from direct involvement in people's lives" (Paper Boat Collective, 2017: 13).

Rather than opting for critical distance, the authors of the volume choose vulnerable writing – writing in which authors, readers, and the text itself are all at risk (Paper Boat Collective, 2017: 15). Underlying this choice is a desire to decolonise and move beyond authoritative writing, toward engaged and situated forms of expression and more complex modes of articulation. Yet in their reflections on unspoken and unsettled field voices, the authors of *Paper Boat* are by no means pioneers. Others have long considered

the complexity of non-linguistic knowledge and the challenges of representing such knowledge, among them the anthropologist Maurice Bloch in his article 'Language, Anthropology, and Cognitive Science' (1991), and later Mark-Anthony Falzon, editor of *Multi-Sited Ethnography* (2009).

Bloch (1991: 183) speaks of the complex forms of knowledge gained through participant observation and of the importance of non-linguistic ethnographic understanding. Falzon (2009: 9–10) reflects on the predicaments anthropologists face when writing about the fieldwork. When we explore a topic through observation as a method, we inevitably also harvest "weeds" – that rich, non-linguistic knowledge – and it is precisely here that experimentation with essayistic and other looser forms of writing may help. Field diaries, essays, lists of things, events and sensations, the assembling and reassembling of such lists, collective writing and readings of research essays, or simply personal reflection through writing are all attempts to bring writing into the research process. Following our own experiences, a loose process of writing, an unfinished text that multiplies points of entry and exit, may build a bridge between non-linguistic ethnographic understanding and the (final) written outcome of research, while its meandering flow may (at times) establish unexpected connections.

Within the broader debate on multimodality in anthropology, our contribution gradually became focused on a specific question: that of multimodal writing, a comparatively under-reflected issue within multimodal discussions. Multimodal anthropology, emerging from the observation that social life is inherently multisensory and mediated through diverse forms, has largely approached multimodality through the use of sound, photography, film, performance, installations, mapping practices, and digital platforms.[19] But, as Eleana Yalouri (2022), building on Janet Wolff (2012), has cautioned, attempts to move beyond the dominance of text should not be understood as emancipation from it, as such gestures always carry the risk of losing critical dimensions. Rather than abandoning writing, the challenge lies in reworking its role while sustaining its analytical, critical, but also disobedient capacities. Within our reflections on multimodal writing[20] and on

[19] Against the background of such approaches, which partly displaced writing from the centre of attention, lies, among other influences, the post-linguistic turn: a shift away from the idea that language constitutes the primary or exclusive medium through which the world is understood.

[20] Speaking of multimodal writing, numerous examples of experimental and non-conventional writing have appeared throughout the history of anthropology, starting from the early 20th century, mostly by women researchers (Mead, 1928; Hurston, 1935, 1937; Deloria, 1988). Some of these writers occupied the margins of what was considered "legitimate" anthropology in their time, yet quietly reshaped it from within. Through their multimodal writing, they challenged male-dominated ideals of objectivity, rigid academic genres, and ethnographic authority. For example, Hurston, in her monograph *Mules and Men*, writes from an embodied, participatory perspective, integrating herself into the community she studies and using oral traditions, storytelling, and humour as legitimate forms of knowledge, thereby documenting a communal and Black female epistemology. Deloria, in *Waterlily*, employs fiction as an ethnographic method, centring women's lives, kinship, motherhood, and emotional labour. Both authors demonstrate how narrative, subjectivity, and experience can constitute valid anthropological knowledge, prefiguring the feminist and decolonial approaches that would emerge later (see also Rogelja Caf, Ledinek Lozej, 2026 [in print]).

the role of writing within the research process itself, writing thus does not simply return as a privileged medium, but re-emerges both as an epistemological question and as an ongoing research practice – something to be reconsidered, reconfigured, and experimentally engaged alongside other modes of knowledge-making. Together with numerous other scholars (e.g., Pandian, McLean, 2017; Ballestero, 2019; McGranahan, 2020; Pandian, 2025) and building on the legacy of various theoretical perspectives (e.g., the literary turn, feminist critique, decolonialism, the Anthropocene, posthuman theorizing), we experimented with various genres, from anthropoetry, story maps, collaborative forms of writing to different kinds of essays. However, I noticed that this opening up of possibilities does not mean that such forms are equally suited to all ethnographic research situations. As Taussig (2011) notes in explaining his decision to include hurried drawings in his text, anthropologists need to adopt modes and aesthetics of writing that remain faithful to their fieldwork experience. It is precisely this attentiveness that seems important, if not crucial, in order not to lose our way as researchers.

## The role of the essay in scientific research

In this concluding chapter, I would like to shed light on the answer to the second question posed at the outset: What is the role of the essay in scientific research? The answers that follow are based primarily on my experience of writing essays within the previously mentioned research groups, where the act of writing was always preceded by several days of collective walking. This long-lasting group activity, whereby walking is intertwined with writing, has undoubtedly also shaped the responses presented here, which should therefore be understood in the specific context of the hodinars: collective, walking-and-writing interdisciplinary research events, where art and science meet. Within these groups, the essay served, in methodological terms, primarily as a "tool of the in-between step", a space in which our field notes were transformed into a somewhat more kneaded and reflected textual form, intended for use in group discussions among the participants of the walks. Although some of these essays were later published, it was precisely the process of essaying (writing – mutual reading – discussion – rewriting…) that revealed many of the potential roles and uses of the essay in science (whether as a working text or as an outcome). In what follows, I summarise the most salient among them.

### *Reflecting on one's own values and biases*

In essays that were not intended for immediate publication but rather for mutual reading within a closed circle of researchers, we dared to say more – to describe personal feelings, including stereotypes, prejudices, and fears. Through this (self-)knowledge, strengthened in dialogue with collaborators (with whom we had previously shared a

multi-day experience), we were later able, in our published texts, to more firmly articulate the researcher's entanglement in the research process itself. In several cases, even the published articles retained, to a certain extent, a personal, more engaged, and less formalised mode of writing (e.g., Rogelja Caf, 2022; Gombač et al., 2025).

***Inviting doubt into reflection***

It seems that the slowing down of writing in the meanders of the essay (which, in my own experience, I can compare to a meditative, very slow form of thinking-through-writing) affects thought in a way that endeavours to be more hesitant. A similar effect is produced by writing outside strictly structured forms and modes of scientific writing, as such writing more readily invites doubt into reflection. In our walking essays, which in their style often moved toward more literary modes of articulating field experience, participants found it easier to speak about matters that had not yet been fully thought through but perhaps contained promising starting points. At the same time, we were able to speak more confidently and openly about our reservations regarding potential dead ends in the research, about our own (in)competencies or missteps, fears, poorly framed questions, and so on. Doubt[21] can also function as a safeguard against misleading certainty embedded in colonial relations of power, as discussed by the above-mentioned authors from decolonial studies. In this sense, the essay can be seen almost as a tool of disobedient epistemology. Tentative and hesitant writing (which the essay, in my experience, enables but by no means guarantees) may possess several qualities. For instance, it can establish interaction between author and reader, and may even be understood as an epistemic strategy, one that allows for interpretative openness and scientific caution, reduces dogmatism, and sustains dialogue. And if we are to be consistent in our practice, we must also cast doubt on tentative writing itself. Important warnings have been raised regarding restrained, hesitant expression, suggesting the need for balance: overly tentative texts may obscure an idea to the point of vagueness, while excessive assertiveness may appear clear and convincing but closes off space for alternative interpretations (cf. Milostivaya et al., 2020). Let me add a further reservation of my own. Essays are usually not overly structured nor firm in their claims,

[21] Although a critical analysis of doubt in scientific articles is not the focus of this text, the article by Yao et al. (2023) can serve as an illustrative example. Based on an analysis of predominantly natural science articles published between 1997 and 2021, the authors identify an increase in assertiveness in scientific writing and a decline in doubt. They write: "Our findings show that the use of such hedges has significantly decreased in the past 25 years in the research articles of the Journal *Science*. In addition, we propose that the drop of such hedges in *Science* research articles may be an implicit writing strategy for research promotion, and therefore may correlate with the rising linguistic positivity in academic writing" (ibid.: 4541). Although doubt appears to be "at home" in the humanities and social sciences, it may be precisely because of this taken-for-granted, implicit assumption that the issue of doubt in the humanities and social sciences receives little attention. In the context of the above discussion, reflections on overly "doubt-laden" texts that blur clarity of expression are also of particular interest.

yet structured modes of writing also help us think, with the caveat that, in the research process, structures must repeatedly be dismantled and reassembled.

***Expanding dialogue***

In our case, the essay also served as a tool for establishing dialogue among researchers. This seems particularly important for qualitatively oriented research, where researchers, who often themselves function as research instruments, may (and often do) feel isolated. The discussion space that emerged after the mutual reading of essays thus illuminated blind spots or new possibilities within long-term research projects (on which some of the walking practices were based). Notably, it was often the "ignorant" writers, meaning those who did not know much about the topic but commented on the process from the perspective of their own discipline and research concerns, who most frequently pointed out oversights, missteps, taken-for-granted assumptions, and the like. Here, the essay offered an expansion and deepening of discussion among participants, which proved particularly fruitful in situations of interdisciplinary and intersectoral (science–art) collaboration.

***Illuminating analysis***

Although analysis is a constitutive process of ethnographic work, it receives relatively little attention. Rare discussions (among them the volume *Experimenting with Ethnography: A Companion to Analysis*, edited by Andrea Ballestero and Brit Ross Winthereik in 2021) pose the key question: "How does the alchemy of analysis actually happen?" (Ballestero, Winthereik, 2021: 1). Rather than developing a general discussion of analysis, they illuminate analysis as an event. One way to help us address the question of how, in ethnographic research, we arrive at insights that are not self-evident is precisely the use of writing (in our case, the essay). The essay mimics thinking; it is a process of testing ideas, and in its best form, it is self-critical and unafraid to reveal the contradictory nature of knowledge. In its meandering, it turns now in one direction, now in another, and without a sense of guilt dismantles positions it had set up only moments before. The essay appears to be the language of inner dialogue – perhaps even the time-space of analysis itself.

***Time***

One of the defining features of interpretative methods is their iterative nature: long-term repetition and circulation, movement between interpretation and material, which develop together. It seems that, over recent decades, interpretative disciplines have been deprived of precisely this step (in other words, the time of the long conversation) for various reasons that lie beyond the scope of this article. The essay, as a slow and meandering form used for research purposes, may help extend the time between noting something down in a field notebook and writing it up in a scientific article. Itinerant essay-writing

deliberately remains in the in-between space of no-man's-land. And it is precisely there, in this no-man's-land where analysis is born, that we can, as the French philosopher Michel Serres writes, "approach the turbulence of life that precedes the emergence of a discursively intelligible and recognizable world" (1997: 65).

## In conclusion

In a text that is itself a kind of essay about the essaying, I first presented the essay as a genre; its history and its place within the social sciences and the humanities, especially anthropology. In a second step, drawing on examples from my own practice, I focused on experiences of multimodal writing within interdisciplinary research groups operating at ZRC SAZU. Based on these experiences, the final part of the article outlined the role of the essay and essaying within scientific research, and highlighted several aspects. Among the first is the possibility of reflecting on one's own values and prejudices, which the essay – painfully personal yet capable of decentring – offers to researchers. I then addressed the invitation of doubt into writing, which can (and sometimes does) open space for multiple interpretations of reality. As a third dimension of the essay's role in science, I pointed to the expansion of dialogue that the essay can provide, both in its function as a research in-between step, and as a published text that may more readily reach broader publics. In this sense, the third of the angles mentioned in Roland Barthes' text in relation to the essay (science, art, and intimacy) is likely crucial. When a writer (publicly) speaks from their own human situatedness, the reader's response may shift. Equally important is the illumination of analysis, a process which, according to the editors of the book *Experimenting with Ethnography: A Companion to Analysis* (2021), can occur in multiple ways, including through the process of thinking-in-writing. Seen from this perspective, the essay seems important as it stretches the time of iteration, allowing prolonged repetition and circulation, a continual movement between interpretation and material, developing together – a process that enriches understanding in interpretative disciplines such as anthropology. However, the essay form, which we predominantly used in our hodinars (walking-writing seminars), represents only one possibility within multimodal writing and may not suit every situation, since anthropologists should adopt modes and aesthetics of writing that remain faithful to the experience of fieldwork.

Essays as final outcomes, condensed and crystallised, can function as particular kinds of ethnographic documents of reflection, standing in for ethnographic vignettes (cf. Rogelja Caf, Ledinek Lozej, 2023). They may appear in professional articles written by scholars for the media in order to reach wider publics, or they may take the place of a differently articulated scientific text. In the latter case, at least two hypothetical paths of reflection open up. One could argue that scientific essays grounded in research and key literature, and incorporating an account of methodology, differ from

classically structured texts merely in style. Another path of reflection might reject such heretical thoughts, sharply distinguishing essays from scientific texts that require a strict, agreed-upon scholarly apparatus, vocabulary, structure, and perhaps even style.

What if there are other possibilities, which suggest that essays and other multimodal forms of representation are not merely differently worded scientific texts – even though they may contain all the magical ingredients of the scientific text – nor are they separate from science? As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing explains, living and researching in capitalist ruins requires new ways of telling true stories. "To listen to and tell a rush of stories is a method. And why not make the strong claim and call it a science, an addition to knowledge?" (2015: 37). Following this line of thought, essays and other modes of articulation within science may be understood as messengers of a new epistemology, one that follows the changes we live through and seek to research.

## Research data statement

The author states that no new research data was created or analysed in this article.

## References

Adorno, Theodor W. 1984. The Essay as Form. *New German Critique* 32: 151–171.

Anthro{dendum}. n.d. Anthro{dendum}. URL: https://anthrodendum.org/ (accessed 21.8.2026).

Badley, Graham F. 2019. Essays, Essayists, and Essayism: A Slow Critique. *Qualitative Inquiry* 26 (7): 806–816.

Ballestero, Andrea and Brit Ross Winthereik, eds. 2021. *Experimenting with Ethnography: A Companion to Analysis*. Durham, NC, London: Duke University Press.

Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image–Music–Text*. London: Fontana Press.

Behar, Ruth. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bloch, Maurice. 1991. Language, Anthropology and Cognitive Science. *Man* 26 (2): 183–198.

Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Crapanzano, Vincent. 2003. *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cresswell, Tim. 2019. *Maxwell Street: Writing and Thinking Place*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Deloria, Ella Cara. 1988. *Waterlily*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Dillon, Brian. 2024. *Essayism Trilogy*. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Falzon, Mark-Anthony, ed. 2009. *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*. Aldershot, UK, Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Favero, Paolo, 2013. Picturing Life-Worlds in the City: Notes for a Slow, Aimless and Playful Visual Ethnography. *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 22 (2): 1–19.

Ferlež, Jerneja and Peter Rezman. 2019. *Maribor paralaksa*. Ljubljana: Beletrina.

Ghosh, Amitav. 1992. *In an Antique Land*. New York: Vintage Books.

Gibbs, Anna. 2007. Writing as Method: Attunement, Resonance, and Rhythm. In *Affective Methodologies*, eds. Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, 222–236. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gombač, Jure, Nataša Rogelja Caf, and Lucija Klun. 2025. *Counter-Archive: FootNotes: A Collection of Essays*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU. URL: https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si/counter-archive-reflections-on-the-nonpossibility-of-migrant-heritage/ (accessed 10.9.2026).

Good, Graham. 1988. *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay*. London: Routledge.

Hazlitt, William. 1994 [1826]. On the Pleasure of Hating. In *The Art of the Personal Essay*, ed. Phillip Lopate, 189–198. New York: Anchor Books.

Hurston, Zora Neale. 1935. *Mules and Men*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company.

Hurston, Zora Neale. 1937. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company.

Jelnikar, Anja. 2025. *The River, Woman, and Mortadella: FootNotes: A Collection of Essays*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU. URL: https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si/the-river-woman-and-mortadella (accessed 25.8.2026).

Kincaid, Jamaica. 1988. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Križnar, Naško. 1996. *Vizualne raziskave v etnologiji*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC.

Kusserow, Adrie. 2017. Anthropoetry. In *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*, eds. Anand Pandian and Stuart McLean, 71–90. Durham, NC, London: Duke University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1955. *Tristes Tropiques*. Paris: Librairie Plon.

Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Malinowski, Bronisław. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

McCann, Colum. 2020. *Apeirogon*. New York: Riverhead Books.

McGranahan, Carole, ed. 2020. *Writing Anthropology: Essays on Craft and Commitment*. Durham, NC, London: Duke University Press.

McLean, Stuart. 2017. *Fictionalizing Anthropology*. Durham, NC, London: Duke University Press.

Mead, Margaret. 1928. *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation*. New York: William Morrow & Company.

Mendiževec, Alenka. 2016. *Žalostni tropi*. Ljubljana: Radio Študent, Teorema.

Mignolo, Walter D. 2009. Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom. *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (7–8): 159–181. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275.

Milostivaya, Anna A., Irina V. Makhova, and Lidia E. Chudnova. 2020. Hedging in a Scientific Article Written in English as a Reasoning Strategy. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences* 100: 2305–2314. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.10.05.285.

Montaigne, Michel de. 2003. *The Complete Essays*. London: Penguin Books.

Montaigne, Michel de. 2023. *Eseji I–III*. Ljubljana: Beletrina.

Muršič, Rajko, Blaž Bajič, and Sandi Abram, eds. 2022. *Občutki mest: antropologija, umetnost in čutne transformacije*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani.

Pandian, Anand. 2015. Reel World: *An Anthropology of Creation. Durham*, NC: Duke University Press.

Pandian, Anand. 2025. *Something Between Us: The Everyday Walls of American Life, and How to Take Them Down*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Pandian, Anand, and M. P. Mariappan. 2014. *Ayya's Accounts: A Ledger of Hope in Modern India*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Pandian, Anand, and Stuart J. McLean, eds. 2017. *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*. Durham, NC, London: Duke University Press.

Pandian, Anand and Stuart J. McLean. 2017. Prologue: Crumpled Paper Boat. In *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*, eds. Anand Pandian and Stuart J. McLean, 1–10. Durham, NC, London. Duke University Press.

Paper Boat Collective. 2017. Introduction. In *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*, eds. Anand Pandian and Stuart J. McLean. Durham, NC, London: Duke University Press.

Petrović-Šteger, Maja. 2021. The Textures of Touch: A Study of a Sensory Journey into Creativity, Fashion, and Entrepreneurship. *Studia Ethnologica Croatica* 33: 121–145. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17234/SEC.33.5.

Pink, Sarah. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications.

Podjed, Dan. 2024. *Krizolacija: fantastična povest o izoliranih ljudeh*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba.

Porter, James. 2012. *Understanding Essays*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Potkonjak, Sanja and Tea Škokić. 2022. *Gdje živi tvornica? Etnografija postindustrijskoga grada*. Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku.

Rogelja, Nataša. 2018. *Trinajsti mesec: portreti morskih nomadov*. Ljubljana: Aktivni mediji.

Rogelja Caf, Nataša. 2022. Walking with the Rižana River: Ethnographic Experiments in the Anthropocene. *Anthropological Notebooks* 28 (3): 11–38.

Rogelja Caf, Nataša and Špela Ledinek Lozej. 2023. *Hodopisi: zbirka etnografskih esejev z metodološkimi premisleki o hoji in pisanju*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU.

Rogelja Caf, Nataša and Špela Ledinek Lozej. 2026 [in print]. *Footnotes: Ethnographic Essays with Methodological Reflections on Walking and Writing*. Berlin: Peter Lang Verlag.

Rogelja Caf, Nataša, Špela Ledinek Lozej, and Živa Caf. 2025. *Archiving Silences: FootNotes: A Collection of Essays*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU. URL: https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si/archiving-silences/.

Rogelja Caf, Nataša, Špela Ledinek Lozej, Jernej Mlekuž, and Uroš Kanjir, eds. n.d. *FootNotes: Collection of Essays*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU. https://footnotes.zrc-sazu.si/.

Serres, Michel. 1997. *The Troubadour of Knowledge*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Shepherd, Nick. 2024. Walking as Embodied Research in Emergent Anthropocene Landscapes. In *Walking as Embodied Research: Drift, Pause, Indirection*, eds. Christian Ernsten, Nick Shepherd, 1–22. London, New York: Routledge.

Shepherd, Nick, Christian Ernsten, and Daniël J. Visser. 2018. *The Walking Seminar: Embodied Research in Emergent Anthropocene Landscapes*. Amsterdam: Reinwardt Academy, Amsterdam University of the Arts.

Svetel, Ana. 2024. *Spremenljive krajine severovzhodne Islandije: vreme, letni časi, svetloba in tema*. Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Univerze v Ljubljani. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4312/9789612974114.

Taussig, Michael T. 2000. The Beach (A Fantasy). *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2): 248–278.

Taussig, Michael T. 2011. *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thomson, Rachel, 2017. Labyrinth of Linkages – Cinema, Anthropology, and the Essayistic Impulse. In *Between Matter and Method: Encounters in Anthropology and Art*, eds. Gretchen Bakke and Marina Peterson, 1–20. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Thoreau, Henry David. 1862. *Walking*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields.

van de Port, Mattijs, 2018. In Love with My Footage: Desirous Undercurrents in the Making of an Essay Film on Candomblé. *Visual Anthropology Review* 34 (2): 136–146.

Wallace, David Foster. 2006. *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Wolff, Janet. 2012. After Cultural Theory: The Power of Images, the Lure of Immediacy. *Journal of Visual Culture* 11 (1): 3–7.

Yalouri, Eleana. 2022. From Cultural Critique to Multimodality: Representational Strategies and New Notions of In-Betweenness. *Entanglements* 5 (1–2): 76–93.

Yao, Min, Ying Wei, and Hui Wang. 2023. Promoting Research by Reducing Uncertainty in Academic Writing: A Large-Scale Diachronic Case Study on Hedging in Science Research Articles Across 25 Years. *Scientometrics* 128: 4541–4558. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-023-04759-6.

**O mestu eseja v znanstvenem pisanju: k neposlušni epistemologiji**

Članek tematizira uporabo esejev na hodinarjih, interdisciplinarnih skupinskih terenskih dogodkih, razvitih v okviru raziskovalnega programa Dediščina na obrobju in raziskovalnega projekta Biografije istrskih poti (oboje ZRC SAZU). V prispevku se osredotočam na tekstualne eseje, nastale v okviru zgoraj omenjenih projektov, pri tem pa osvetljujem proces, namen in učinek večnačinskega znanstvenega pisanja. Čeprav se hodinarji opirajo na številne predhodne pobude, smo znotraj omenjenih skupin uvedli še svojstven poudarek na pisanju kot metodi in refleksiji različnih oblik akademskega izražanja. Spraševali smo se, kateri vidiki (človeškega) življenja ostajajo izključeni, kadar se oklepamo bolj konvencionalnih oblik znanstvenega izražanja. Kritično smo preizpraševali, kako avtoritativni pisni slogi pogosto reproducirajo kolonialna in druga hierarhična razmerja moči. Reflektirali smo rojstvo analize znotraj procesa pisanja, ki stoji med praksama beleženja (terenskih zapiskov) in zapisa (končnih rezultatov). V članku najprej osvetlim esej kot žanr in njegovo mesto v družboslovju in humanistiki, v drugem koraku pa na podlagi primerov iz lastne prakse podam premislek o vlogi eseja v znanosti (predvsem antropologiji), katerega naravo lahko opišem kot nelinearno, takšno, ki zavrača deduktivnost, meandrirajočo in počasno, pa tudi neposlušno.

## MULTIMODAL RESEARCH AND REPRESENTATIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGY
## VEČNAČINSKE RAZISKAVE IN REPREZENTACIJE V ANTROPOLOGIJI


Ana Svetel, Manca Filak, Introduction (*Uvodnik*)

Manca Filak, Ethnographic Film in the Advent of Multimodal Anthropology: (*Etnografski film v času večnačinske antropologije*)

Carolina Némethy, Expositions for a Multimodal Patchwork Ethnography (*Predstavitve za večnačinsko mozaično etnografijo*)

Barbara Turk Niskač, Multimodal Encounters: Animating Childhood Memories in Changing Landscapes (*Večnačinska srečanja: oživljanje spominov na otroštvo v spreminjajočih se krajinah*)

Sarah Lunaček Brumen, Photovoice as a Complementary Approach with a Tuareg Family in Agadez, Niger (*Fotopripoved kot dopolnilni pristop z družino Tuaregov v Agadezu v Nigru*)

Sanja Potkonjak, Iva Grubiša, Petra Kelemen, Nevena Škrbić Alempijević, Kristina Vugdelija, Counter-Mapping and Co-Theorizing Ruinous Postscapes (*Protikartiranje in skupno premišljevanje krajin ruševin*)

Nataša Rogelja Caf, On the Essay's Place in Scientific Writing: Toward a Disobedient Epistemology (*O mestu eseja v znanstvenem pisanju: k neposlušni epistemologiji*)



ISSN 0352-0447

9 770352 044014

ZRC SAZU

SLOVENSKA AKADEMIJA ZNANOSTI IN UMETNOSTI