

Multimodality and Ethnographic Methods

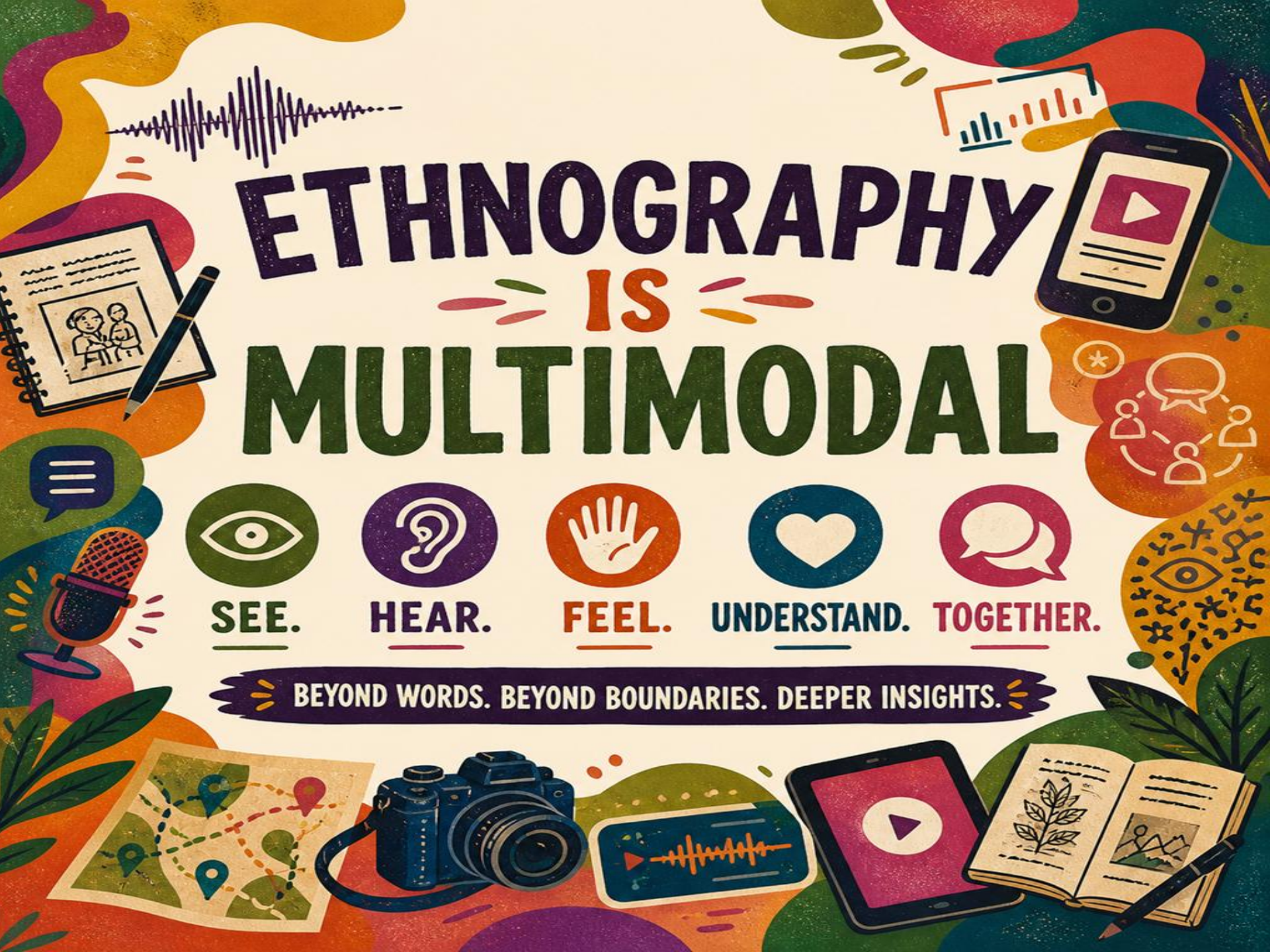
Eleni Sideri(Ass. Prof. UoM)

**Mobility, Borders, Heritage, and Resilience through
Story-telling**

Day 4th: Digital methods and research

Outline of the lecture

- ⦿ *What is multimodality*
- ⦿ *Multimodality and Ethnography*
- ⦿ *Multimodality and ethnographic methods*
- ⦿ *Case Study*



ETHNOGRAPHY IS MULTIMODAL



SEE.



HEAR.



FEEL.



UNDERSTAND.



TOGETHER.

BEYOND WORDS. BEYOND BOUNDARIES. DEEPER INSIGHTS.

The multimodal turn

Part I.

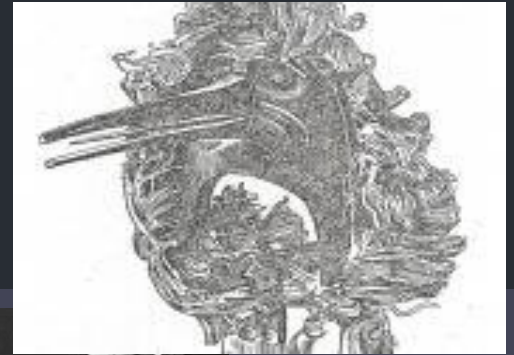
Limits of Textual Ethnography

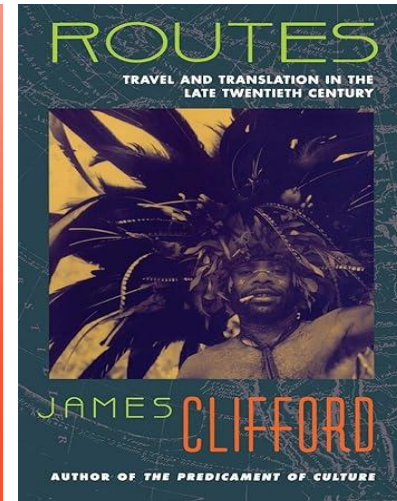
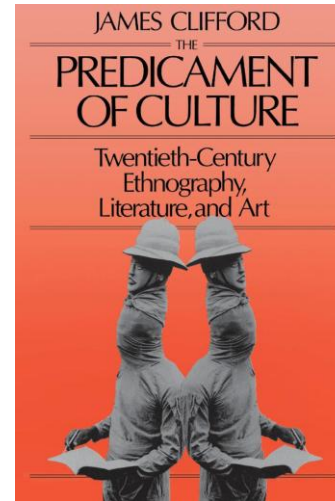
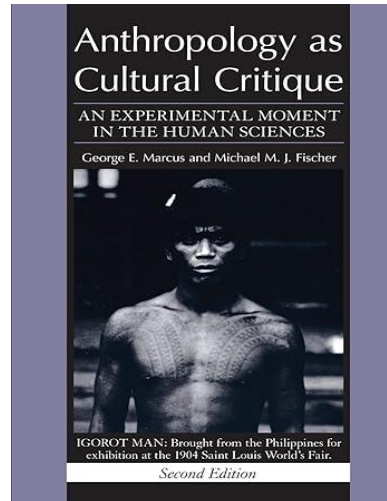
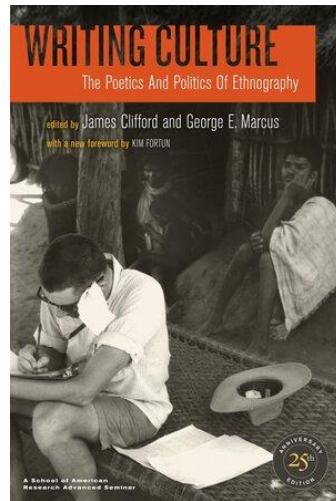
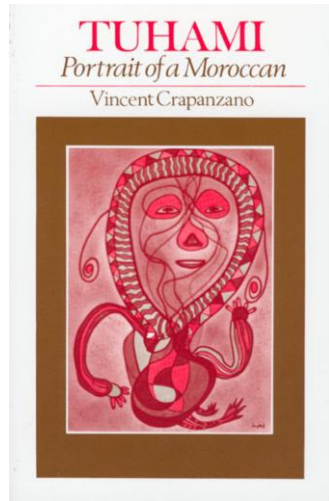
- Can affect be fully written?
- Can silence be textualized?
- Can atmosphere be translated into prose?
- Can bodily experience become fully linguistic?

This connects beautifully with:

- sensory anthropology,
- postmodern ethnography,
- decolonial critiques.

FIELD AND TECHNOLOGIES OF RESEARCH





Crisis of Representation and the field/fieldnotes

Multimodality

- just before the outbreak of the pandemic and much more after, multimodality seems to be returning but within a new condition, which takes it outside the field or academia to diffuse anthropological knowledge to new audiences (public anthropology).
- specific materialities and resources that shape the production and circulation of meaning, for example, digital technologies and communication (smartphones, tablets, online platforms, digital arts, and databases) have become dominant conduits of meaning.

Epistemological conditions

- ④ The shift to the study of emotions (affective turn), the more phenomenological and sensorial methodologies that wanted to challenge the logocentrism boosted the emergence of multimodal ethnography.
- ④ Postcolonial studies and criticism began to be infused with more activist, feminist, indigenous, and regional movements that targeted the very production of knowledge and its methodologies in the academic as well as the public sphere.
- ④ polycrises, state of emergency (pandemic, conflicts, wars, lack of funding), new forms of ethnography (patchwork, rapid etc)
- ④ **As Lather (2001) underlines, multimodality marks a shift not to something new but to something existing with new and perhaps more inclusive epistemological questions but also methodologies that go beyond the emphasis on the text and writing of dec. of 1980, they are experimenting but also reflecting on ethical problems and questions.**

Part II

Modalities as Narrative
Forms

Modalities used

- ◉ **Visual**

- ◉ Photography, film, drawing
- ◉ Ethnographic film traditions

- ◉ **Aural**

- ◉ Soundscapes, interviews, ambient audio
- ◉ Silence as data

- ◉ **Embodied / Gestural**

- ◉ Movement, affect, posture
- ◉ Learning through participation

- ◉ **Spatial**

- ◉ Mapping, architecture, environments

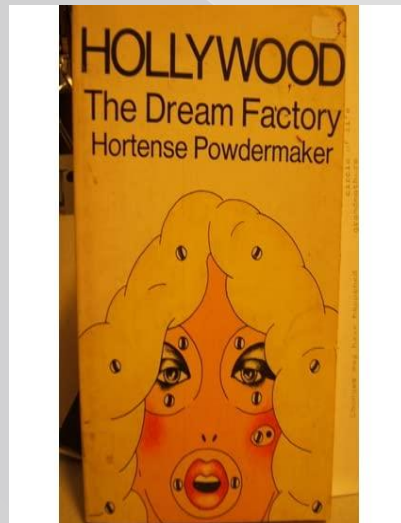
- ◉ **Digital / Hybrid**

- ◉ Social media, memes, interfaces

How do images narrate ethnographically?



- Visual anthropology was born in the Victorian era
 - Photography and later cinema were used to record this 'reality' which at that time coincided with the study of the Other (even if, as in the case of Boas, it did not hide any racism)



<https://www.documentary.org/feature/women-verge-pioneer-documentary-filmmakers-history-ignored>

The agenda of visual anthropology includes

- -the analysis of the properties of visual systems, how they are defined and how they relate to specific political and interpretative processes.
- -a second agenda is the analysis of visual methods of disseminating anthropological knowledge.



Early Anthropology and the Visual

- Empirical positivism in the early 20th century considers cinema as another means of documenting reality
- The introduction of the moving image into anthropology took place almost immediately with the development of cinema, but it was limited



Doing Visual Ethnography

- ◉ Visual images are not simply illustrations of ethnographic knowledge; they are a way of knowing.”
- ◉ Different media do different things

E.g.

photography,
film,
archives,
participatory video

Since the 1970s

- cultural criticism, i.e. a reflective critical look at the categories through which we understand our world and through specific historical experiences of people, considered cinema as a tool of critical recording and narrative that can problematize and provoke rather than simply describe.
- Also, the formation of Cultural Studies as a related field to social anthropology helped anthropologists in developing methodological tools for examining visual culture, but also the reasons involved in the production, distribution and consumption of this culture by specific people and contexts



Jean Rouch 1917-2014

- VW Voyou - Jean Rouch - Niger, 1974
- [In the piece VW Voyou \(Rouch uses a number of New Wave methods and launches ethnofiction ie the ethnographic film with a 'script'. The genre overturns the strict documentary/fiction divideA Summer's Chronicle, 1961](#)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK70dUZjsSE>

Jean Rouch 1969, LITTLE BY LITTLE <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofX90vY10jk> Trinh T. Minh-ha in her 1983 film

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Psk-fg771r8>

Voice and Multimodality

omniscient textual narration
vs
observational camera



“IMAGES ARE ‘EVERYWHERE’. THEY PERMEATE OUR ACADEMIC WORK, EVERYDAY LIVES, CONVERSATIONS AND DREAMS (...). THEY ARE INEXTRICABLY INTERWOVEN WITH OUR PERSONAL IDENTITIES, NARRATIVES, LIFESTYLES, CULTURES AND SOCIETIES, AS WELL AS WITH DEFINITIONS OF HISTORY, SPACE AND TRUTH. ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IS LIKEWISE INTERTWINED WITH VISUAL IMAGES AND METAPHORS. WHEN ETHNOGRAPHERS PRODUCE PHOTOGRAPHS OR VIDEO, THESE VISUAL TEXTS, AS WELL AS THE EXPERIENCE OF PRODUCING AND DISCUSSING THEM, BECOME PART OF THEIR ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE”

(Pink 2001:17)

Not a technology but a decision

- ◉ Multimodality = not aesthetic choice, but **epistemology**
- ◉ **Ethics:** Written ethnography may anonymize people. Images often cannot.
- ◉ **Visual ethics** is not only about permission to film or photograph.
- ◉ It concerns power, visibility, authorship, vulnerability, and the politics of representation itself.

Example

In Balkan cinema and media, Roma communities have often been hyper-visible as images but underrepresented as narrators. Contemporary Romani media challenges this asymmetry by transforming marginalized groups from objects of representation into producers of visual knowledge.

See Hopa Lide
(<https://hopalide.nuska.me/en/#watch-the-film>)

See it in motion >



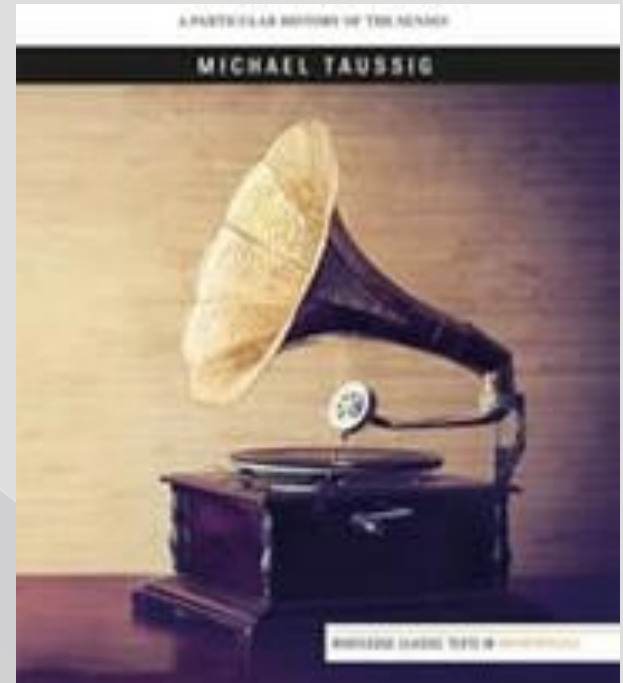
Filming Hopa Lide

Objective: how to acknowledge the role of movement in Romani life and artistry without slipping into its romanticised cinematic cliché. Unlike many portrayals that reify Roma as perpetual wanderers. I aimed to recognise that movement – both physical and musical – is indeed central to the lives of my collaborators, yet without reducing it to an ethnic essence

How?

1. **Use of a DSLR** for intimate camerawork supported with gimbal stabilizer
2. **Focal length.** a decision that directly shaped the viewer's proximity to the film's protagonists
3. **Developing ethnographic** intimacy not as a marketing hook, but as a methodological (and ethical) principle – one that emerges from, and speaks to, the entangled realities of our shared fieldwork experience
4. **Ethos of improvisation:** each of the three films' chapters grew out of a shared creative venture in which the musicians were not just subjects but co-directors of their own representation. Because there was no storyline to follow, there was no pre-written script to constrain the flow of events.
5. **Long takes** similar to ethnographic observation

Sound and Multimodality



Societies are also heard.

Sound becomes:

- ethnographic data,
- narrative medium,
- and epistemological practice.

Sound-scape

An etic category often that explores the sonic environment through which people experience place.

What can sound communicate
that writing or images cannot?

**Think of a memory connected strongly
to sound.**

Sound becomes

- ◉ ethnographic data,
- ◉ narrative medium,
- ◉ epistemological practice

Voice and Authority

Whose voice is heard?

Whose accent is legitimized?

Who remains silent?

e.g.

oral testimony,

interviews,

podcast ethnography,

storytelling traditions

Podcast Ethnography

A transcript may preserve words,
but podcasts preserve:

- hesitation,
- accent,
- silence,
- breathing,
- emotional tone,
- rhythm,
- ambient sound.

Thus podcasts communicate:

affective and embodied dimensions of experience.

Podcast as Narrative Form

Podcasts are not simply interviews uploaded online.

They are carefully constructed narratives through:

- editing,
- sequencing,
- layering sound,
- music,
- ambient recordings,
- narration.

So podcast ethnography connects directly to your earlier lectures on:

- narrative voice,
- authority,
- perspective,
- polyphony.e.g. multiple speakers,overlapping testimonies,contradictory memories,ambient environments to coexist.

Ethic/Collaborative Practice

Podcast ethnography can challenge epistemic hierarchy because participants may:

- narrate themselves,
- record their own environments,
- produce collaborative storytelling.

This reduces:

- extractive representation,
- centralized academic authority.

You can connect this to:

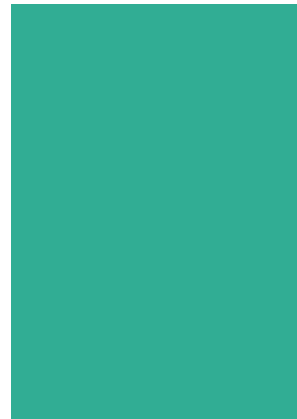
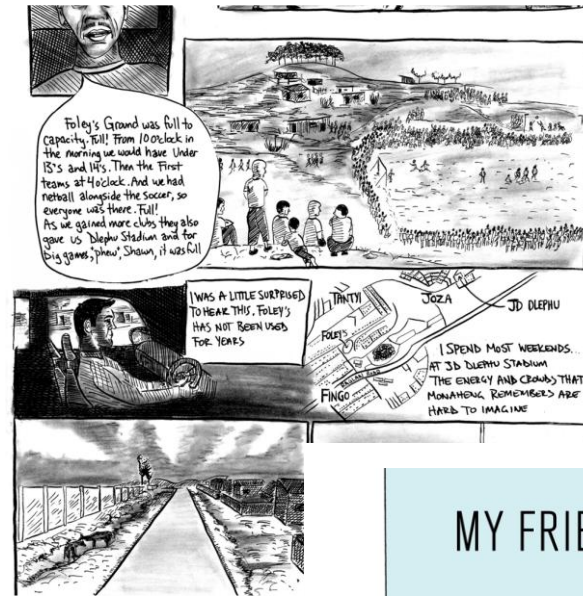
- ecology of knowledges,
- participatory ethnography,
- oral epistemologies.

Podcasts as Ethnographic Method

- ◉ Anthropologists use podcasts in three main ways:
- ◉ **A. Podcasts as Fieldsite**
- ◉ Study podcast communities, audiences, creators
- ◉ Example topics:
 - > *True crime fandoms*
 - > *Political podcasts and ideology*
 - > *Wellness/spiritual podcasts*
- ◉ **B. Podcasts as Method**
- ◉ *Recording interviews as audio narratives*
- ◉ *Capturing tone, pauses, emotion (lost in transcripts)*
- ◉ **C. Podcasts as Output**
- ◉ *Publishing research as podcasts instead of (or alongside) articles*
- ◉ *Makes anthropology more accessible*

ILLUSTRATING ANTHROPOLOGY

[HTTPS://ILLUSTRATINGANTHROPOLOGYCOM.WORDPRESS.COM/](https://illustratinganthropology.com.wordpress.com/)



MY FRIEND'S CHAIR



Reclaiming Dita, Gilbert, Kurtović&Stapić (2021), Graphic Anthropology through coproduction

Credit: Boris Stapić



ISSUES

ALL
ARTICLES

ABOUT

NEWS

BOOK
FORUM



Reclaiming Dita, <https://www.anthropology-news.org/articles/reclaiming-dita/>

- *A single illustrated image depicts an overhead map-like view of a factory campus including the names of roads, a river, and building descriptions. Overlaid on that view are the talking heads of two male workers and a group of four workers dressed in jackets and wool caps patrolling the grounds at night with two dogs and flashlights. The two talking heads have speech bubbles next to them with text reading “We would work sometimes 12, sometimes 8 hours, depending on how we organized ourselves. Women were there during the day, and men guarded at night.” and “We had a flashlight, and about five dogs. They followed us everywhere. And we did not mind because it was dark and the grounds were huge, about 90,000 square meters*

Dita detergent factory in the city of Tuzla

- ◉ Founded in 1977
- ◉ Part of *kombinat* SodaSo, the organizational structure for the chemical and mining industries
- ◉ The complex in decay after the war, the workers reclaimed it in 2015
- ◉ Comics as a popular form of sociality in socialism
- ◉ Comix against epistemic extractivism and a form of collaboration with the local communities of activism

Appendix

How to develop the idea?

- ◉ It can be about something you know well and you want to inform the audience or something you don't know anything about and again you want to learn and inform the audience.
- ◉ Make a research regarding your idea e.g. accessibility to sources, people, places, cost
- ◉ During the research try to simplify your idea. You should be able to explain in a sentence to an unknown person what your idea is about.

In comparison to fiction

- ◉ In documentary , scriptwriting is a process which starts before and continues after the shooting of the film.
- ◉ What the creator tries to do is to start with a rough outline of beginning, middle and the end

Especially for ethnographic film

- ◉ You understanding of the categories of analysis and how they were shaped within the discipline's history are important
- ◉ Moreover, your voice (point of view) and how it interacts with the main theme and the people involved are critical. Decide the position you take in the film and how it is made obvious to you audience. Moreover, you should be clear about you methodology and connection to the theme.
- ◉ Respect, avoidance or eurocentrism, challenge and deconstruction of stereotypes are important characteristic of the ethnographic film

More in detail,

- ◉ You need to turn your idea to an argument, i.e. what you want to say, what your audience will take from your film in the end.
- ◉ In order to shape your script, make a list with name of participants, who you are going to interview or take info, of places you want you visit and locations you are going to show (inside or outside shots-make sure you have special licenses for shooting)
- ◉ You need to make a combination of the correspondence between speech and pictures

The shooting script

Timeline of your documentary

Who is talking?/what do we hear?

What we see?

For example:

Scene 8. Day. UoM-Entrance
*Vibrancy of Student life**

President of the Student's Union
Cut to voice over

Live takes from
cafeteria, garden, still

photos of events, activities

.....

Scene 9. Day, UoM-
Environmental Groups

Members of the Environmental

Takes from the garden,

Group

Photos of activities

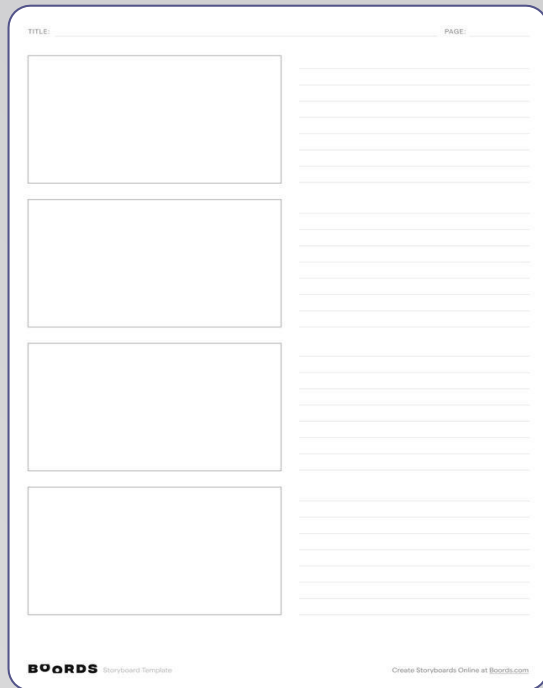
**You always need to remind what the scene's objective is about for documentaries*

*** Take notes when you need a special prop e.g. an old typewriter*

Narration Script

- ◉ Often voice over plays an important role. Depending on your documentary genre and aesthetics you need to develop a narrative that is not wordy but serves the idea you had and the form you followed.
- ◉ Your voice over cannot “impose” meaning i.e. for example if you don’t have compelling visual don’t try to compensate that with your narrative
- ◉ The above is especially significant for photo-essays where voiceover and still photographs are used

Storyboards



- It very useful to use storyboards in order to match what you want to say and what you want show but also what style the visual will have
- Today there are specialized software to help you, but you have use your own sketches.

Editing Script

- ◉ The of editing is when your finalized version of your film will become possible. The shooting and editing script might share similarities but often the changes are significant
- ◉ During editing you know what the material of the shooting is and what combinations allowed you to make between sound and image. There, you need to reshape and clarify your argument-idea.

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