



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

More-than-text, less-than-? Reflections on Multimodality in Mobility and Migration Studies

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Abstract: Multimodality is a buoyant trend in current anthropology. It positions itself as a fundamental reaction against text-centric representations underlying the legacy of anthropological authority. Multimodality encompasses for the diverse ways of knowing the human experience through visual, auditory, and other modalities. However, the move beyond textual representations allows for, but also poses challenges to new forms of ethnographic knowledge production. This workshop reflects on this tension as it figures from the perspective of researchers who work with groups who are mobile, ir/regularized, under-/documented or possess some other form of cross-border experience. What does it mean to produce images, sounds, objects beyond or in addition to texts about and with these groups? How do we position ourselves vis-à-vie our interlocutors, academic as well as public worlds, and what issues - epistemological, methodological, ethical - are dealt with in the process? In what ways does multimodal research (fail to) overcome the unwritten boundaries of conventional academic knowledge production?

With this workshop, we aim to provide a platform to mutually learn about various approaches that employ non-textual approaches with mobile/migrant populations. While we share a general optimism about the promises of the multimodal turn, we also move beyond its celebratory framing and are interested in the full spectrum of promising, pragmatic, and problematic dynamics of more-than-textual research endeavors. We invite presentations that reflect on, but are not limited to the following topics:

The theoretical and methodological advancements and challenges of multimodal research in contrast to textual representation;

The ethical implications of conducting multimodal research with mobile and sometimes irregularized or under-/undocumented groups;

The ubiquity of multimodal research in research landscapes and its in-/efficiencies in the dissemination of knowledge to public audiences;

The implications of multimodal research for early/mid-career researchers and how it interacts with personal commitments, time management, as well as publication pressure;

SESSION SCHEDULE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 3 | Room 3

Laura Lamas Abaira: Mapping the other(ed) city: Migrant domestic workers' crafted cartographies of Hong Kong

Alberto Gerosa Volontè: Dea, Migrants Built this City

Iepke Rijcken: Blueprint for the Future: Insights from Multimodal Collaborative Research with Migrants and Cross-border Workers

SESSION PAPERS

Mapping the other(ed) city: Migrant domestic workers' crafted cartographies of Hong Kong

Laura Lamas Abaira

Since the 1970s Hong Kong has been a primary destination for Southeast Asian female migrants. The foreign domestic workers (mainly Filipino and Indonesian) constitute the 4.5% of the HK population, even though they are largely exposed to very hard living and work conditions, often characterized by abuse and exploitation. These women are forced by law to live in their employer's houses where they work between 12-18 hours a day and in most cases, they don't have their own room or private space. On their day off (Sunday) they all go out driving to an intensive occupation of the public space across the city. This is particularly striking in the central area of the island, comprising the financial district, the most expensive and luxurious area of HK. Through an origin-based (country/region) spatialization, squares, sidewalks, parks, and walkways become full covered by camping tents, open umbrellas and cardboard boxes (often including self-made walls) which serve as a rug for picnicking, napping, singing karaoke or dancing, among many other activities; therefore, modifying the physical, social and cultural landscape of (Monday to Saturday) Hong Kong.

The relationship of these women and the city becomes mediated by the power (dis)continuities between the public and private spheres in a context in which both, the physical and symbolic dimensions of the space(s) matter. Based on a nine-months multimodal ethnography which includes among other creative methodologies the crafting of 30 mental-emotional cartographies through participatory inquiry, this presentation explores the potential of arts-based methods in: (1) creating unique spaces for emotionality, self-reflection and self-expression; and (2) to both decoding and representing intangible layers of the experience that remain unreachable to conventional methodological and text-centric representational models.

Dea, Migrants Built this City

Alberto Gerosa Volontè

The collectively written "Dea. Migrants Built this City" is both a documentary and a fiction film, a challenge to stretch the ethnographic film towards the feature fiction form without compromising ethnographic rigour.

Dealing with the precarious situation of women domestic migrant workers in Hong Kong and transnationally, it has posed several questions about the challenges of non text-based scholarship. The methodological questions we faced was to being unable to share specific theoretical points with the participants, as well as having to choose between aesthetic and academic priorities most production days. Ethically, the responsibility of the final artwork had to be on the shoulders of the main investigator, for legal reasons. Although this was not a chosen situation, it still meant that the participants could not be credited as authors. The boundaries and dichotomies of the written scholarship were overcome in several aspects: working with only an oral script, we did not need to face different literacy levels, and watching the film roughcut as a group allowed for a much more significant participants' agency in intervening onto the form and content choices of the final work. Moreover, the specificity of the chosen film distribution channels (festivals, theatrical release) meant that many of the deeper analysis chances posed by the film, had to be cut out in favour of a more conventional narrative structure, that would impact a larger audience.

Blueprint for the Future: Insights from Multimodal Collaborative Research with Migrants and Cross-border Workers

Iepke Rijcken

Drawing on our roadmap for a playful exploration of different visual and participatory methods with research participants/partners, this paper proposes an exploration of insights derived from multimodal research practices. Drawing from the theories of the play ethic and conviviality, our collaborative approach pushes us to have confidence to be spontaneous, creative and empathic, and centre our research methodology around the passions and enthusiasm of all involved. We advance a convivial research approach, which integrates methods of cooperative knowledge production while enhancing a deeper understanding of how people can live together and cooperate despite differences. Working with migrant and cross-border workers in the Polish-German border region, we organised creative collaborative workshops in our project. Through diverse workshops on story-telling, basic filming techniques and cyanotypes - an old photo printing and photocopying method (from which the word 'blueprint' originates), we produced meaningful dialogues together with our research participants/partners. Key topics of identities, recognition of qualifications, activism and engagement, and fluid perspectives on the future emerged organically during these sessions. Moreover, the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the relationships formed with Ukrainians appeared to play a pivotal role in shaping the narratives and perspectives of our participants/partners. As we demonstrate, these creative practices led us to non-verbal experiences and emerging topics, which we could not have come up with in advance. Our playful and multimodal methodology helps to reflexively engage and discover multiple lifeworlds and perspectives on the future.