



## SESSION ABSTRACT

### Ethnographic Media Practices

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**Abstract:** Visual anthropology is a subfield of anthropology that does not only study visual culture but also integrates practices of visual media production in anthropological research and reporting. Despite its consolidation as a subfield with its own institutions and discussion forums, visual anthropology has always remained a highly dynamic field, and its practitioners have formulated varied and sometimes opposing interpretations of what visual anthropology is or should be - the 2017 reconceptualization of the field as 'multimodal anthropology' is a recent example of this. This panel considers the interpretations that are currently being developed by a young generation of anthropologists at the University of Vienna.

This panel showcases films and other media projects that have been created by students during courses or research projects at the University of Vienna. Ranging from observational cinema to essay films and from hand drawings to digital interaction, a shared topic of interest across genres is the constructedness of knowledge production. We will consider: which themes and research questions can fruitfully be addressed with visual and audio-visual media? What kinds of attention do they inspire, and what forms of collaboration and reflexivity do they enable?

The aim of this panel is to share experiences and learn from each other. The long-term aim is to contribute to the development of professional networks among junior anthropologists in Vienna. Students of social and cultural anthropology, as well as related disciplines such as ethnology, sociology, or STS, are welcome to present their media work in this panel.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

### Wednesday, September 28, 2022 | Slot 1 | Room 2

Opening Talk by the panel organisers Sanderien Verstappen, Viktoria Paar, and Marie Vodičková

*Marie Vodičková*: Connecting or dividing? Perceptions of living along the (in)visible Austrian Czech border

*Lucía Díez Sanjuán*: Video practices for Food Sovereignty

*Elaine Goldberg & Nora Ederer*: Augenarbeit

### Wednesday, September 28, 2022 | Slot 2 | Room 2

*Murad Gattal*: Escaping Russian Warship: Refugees Without Status

*Lorenz Eimansberger*: (In)visibility: Layers of aesthetic critique

*Helen Vaak*: Whats in the mind if Viennese people

*Marvin Heine*: infrastructures: five connecting encounters within a fragmented city

*Manuel Spornberger*: The Sdream – The Soil and the Solar

### Wednesday, September 28, 2022 | Slot 3 | Room 2

*Alexander Hähnlein*: Building against destruction (participant observer version)

*Caroline Ober*: Participatory filmmaking with a Viennese sex worker

## WRAP UP AND FAREWELL

## SESSION PAPERS

### Connecting or dividing? Perceptions of living along the (in)visible Austrian-Czech border

Vodičková, Marie

There are ones who come for the entertainment. Then there are others who are making profit of that. To do so, they all meet in the (in)famous shopping mall Excalibur City in the Austrian-Czech borderlands, a place still called "Niemand's Land" ("No Man's Land") by so many. What role does the open and supposedly invisible border play for these encounters? Since cross-border interactions are an everyday practice here, the "border" is often seen as non-existent and invisible. This CREOLE master's thesis project scrutinizes ways people from the borderlands perceive and experience the border. To support the arguments and to depict the specifics of daily life at the borderline in a visual manner, the project consists of an ethnographic film that represents two key groups: visiting shopping enthusiasts and local store owners at Excalibur City. They all share their thoughts on how they see the border and to what extent and in which manner it influences their lived realities.

### Video practices for Food Sovereignty

Díez Sanjuán, Lucía

This presentation aims to introduce the videos developed by the students participating in the course "Food Sovereignty – theory and practice of an alternative food and

agricultural system” during the Summer Semester 2022. This is an elective course of the Master in Organic Agriculture Systems and Agroecology from BOKU, conducted by me, Lucía Díez Sanjuán, as part of my role as Postdoc University Assistant in the Division of Organic Farming.

Food Sovereignty is an alternative food paradigm that seeks to radically transform food systems towards a more sustainable, fair and culturally diverse functioning. To do so, not only food and agricultural practices need to be transformed, but also knowledge democracy needs to be expanded by means of new ways of knowing and constructing knowledge. In this spirit, throughout the course we carried out an overview and group discussion on the problems of the current dominant food system and the proposal of Food Sovereignty to address these challenges. In addition, students were briefly introduced into video practices for qualitative social research, and asked to work in groups to create a video with the overall aim of encouraging reflection on Food Sovereignty. The videos developed range from participatory to arts-based videos, and are discussed in a final screening on the last day of the course. Thus, in this presentation, we want to share the experience obtained throughout this course with video practices as a tool for knowledge, communication and reflection about Food Sovereignty. Me, as lecturer, and students from the course, will discuss the lessons learned, as well as the potential and limitations of video practices for participatory, interdisciplinary, and more democratic construction of knowledge. Finally, we hope that by sharing our experience, we can get useful tips and ideas on how to improve our practice in the future.

### **Augenarbeit**

Ederer, Nora; Goldberg, Elaine

The process film *Augenarbeit* follows a pig eye from the butcher to the trash bin in the Vienna General Hospital (AKH). In doing so, it captures the mundane doings of researchers in an optical laboratory - the ZEISS Lab. The researchers want to develop a special microscope, a so-called Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT), for eye surgery - and the pig eye helps them to generate data, to test the microscope prototype, and to train surgeons in using this new technology.

In their film, Elaine Goldberg and Nora Ederer capture a variety of mundane practices: tinkering with cables and optical lenses, selecting, using, and cleaning operating instruments, coding, looking at screens, discussing with colleagues, adjusting equipment, and changing locations.

At a meta-level, *Augenarbeit* suggests that all of the scientific practices in this optical laboratory are practices of visualization: its researchers work through, with, and for images. To enter a laboratory nowadays means to encounter images displayed on computer screens. The vision of scientists has been trained to read and produce specialized images. Therefore, *Augenarbeit* explores how the researchers at the Zeiss Lab interact with the OCT technology in order to visualize eyes.

The filmmakers Elaine Goldberg and Nora Ederer took an ethnographic approach to studying science as culture and practice. With this, they pick up the laboratory study tradition in Science and Technology Studies – and transfer it into a visual ethnography. The film was made in the seminar "Visual Ethnographies of Science: Investigating Knowledge Production Through Media Practice" and aimed at observing

how scientists and physicians see in skilled ways - by producing images of their visual practices. However, seeing is not an innocent practice: Observing the world means constructing and modifying it - this is what this ethnographic project is about.

### Escaping Russian Warship: Refugees Without Status

Gattal, Murad

Russian invasion of Ukraine started on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February this year and continues to this day. It causes a humanitarian disaster with hundreds of thousands refugees from Ukraine fleeing mostly to the European Union countries. Another, less numerous wave of refugees is fleeing from Russia – they are those who do not support Russian authorities' politics and are afraid of persecution for anti-war views or conscription into the army. Most of them are heading to countries that still have direct air connection with Russia and where they don't need visas to enter. Capitals of former Soviet countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus are already overflowed with Russian émigrés. They usually do not receive any protection status from the receiving states and rely on themselves, friends and some NGOs. Azerbaijan due to the authoritarian character of its regime and stricter migration rules is not so popular destination for these émigrés like neighbour Armenia and Georgia. Nevertheless, there are still many people from Russia who prefer to come to Baku or another place in Azerbaijan.

Stories of Yana, Igor and Irina, who spontaneously decided to leave Russia after the invasion to Ukraine had begun, are in the focus of the film which demonstrates how do émigrés from Russia accommodate to live in Azerbaijan without getting a status of a refugee or any other protection or support from the state, and how do they communicate with host society, organise and participate in political and cultural activities.

The film was made for the course "Nothing new in media society? From rock painting to Instagram" I was attending during my Erasmus stay at the University of Vienna (instructor dr. Evelyne Puchegger-Ebner). The topic is different from the theme of my Master's Thesis but they both are focused on non-voluntary, forced migration and integration

### (In)visibility: Layers of aesthetic critique

Eimansberger, Lorenz

I will present my montage film from this summer's term master's seminar "Politics of (In)visibility" by Sanderien Verstappen. The goal of this course was to first engage with the anthropological literature on what can be seen, shown or represented and secondly to produce own films that correspond to theories in these texts. In my presentation I will show the result of my "aesthetic intervention" - a roughly four minute montage film- after which we might discuss some of the points it raises. My montage explores the concept of "politics of indistinction" by Alexei Yurchak (2008) and the question whether an aesthetic critique really holds potential for change. What I want to examine critically is how different this politics of indistinction really is from a mere cynical parody of everyday lived reality. The author holds that the necrorealist's practices sort of politics, paradoxically precisely through locating themselves outside of the zone of politics and the field of oppression vs. resistance (ibid., 212-13). Now, I want to apply this notion to capitalism, and the question whether art can offer a real critique thereof. Our contemporary world seems stuck. Cultural tropes and aesthetic

themes of the past are re-used and venerated, while everyone goes on as usual even in the face of catastrophic crises; could a shift towards a radical rethinking of human potentiality start from questioning our aesthetic production? In order to explore this conundrum, my montage explores the art and music genre Vaporwave, which is caught up between uncritically reproducing previous existing ideological objects, while at the same time being an ironic commentary on those. Does this form of art, of montage, offer something new? Something that could bring about real change?

### **What's on the mind of the Viennese people?**

Vaak, Helen

This short film, which displays the result of my research of street art, reflects on invisible people and their visible stories seen in the Viennese city landscape. Sociologist Brighenti (2007), in the paper 'Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences' connects visibility to a privilege - to be recognized, acknowledged, accepted. A privileged, 'visible' person has a voice whereas the 'invisible' tends to remain both unseen and unheard. I use this notion to bring into light the voices of the 'invisible'. I explore the city landscape of Vienna, by using my own gaze, a gaze of a passer-by. In contrast, yet similarly, to Sier's (2021) and Kudzmaite's (2021) papers, who researched how the state speaks to the public through performative interventions in the public space, I discover how the 'invisible' people speak with the wider public - through street art.

Street art can be seen as a message from invisible people, written visibly onto walls, posts, ground, doors, etc. What makes it extra fascinating is that this art gives voice to the voiceless, to the people of the city, who make their opinion public whilst remaining anonymous. Street art gives voice to their political, social, or personal feelings, beliefs, thoughts and understandings; displaying resistance, power, and/or agency. Discovering the city landscape through the visible messages of invisible people: what is on the minds of Viennese people?

References: Brighenti, A. 2007. "Visibility." *Current Sociology* 55 (3): 323–42. Kudžmaitė, G. 2021. "'Silencing' the border as a strategy to conceal the 'other' side: the case of the Curonian Spit." *Cultural Geographies*: 1-19. Sier, W. 2021. "The politics of care during COVID-19: The visibility of anti-virus measures in Wuhan." *China Information* 35 (3): 274-300.

### **infrastructures: five connecting encounters within a fragmented city**

Heine, Marvin

Everyday life in the modern city, with all its clamorous confusion, is metabolic, constituted and re-produced by the intense encounter of humans and non-humans, of technology, nature, noise and matter. This moving, roving, living system that is the 'city', endures, transforms, falls apart and re-assembles, is composed of countless layers - all swaying along the lines of fragile yet powerful fabrics of various and ambiguous infrastructures, connecting and interwoven networks which „are simultaneously human, material, natural, discursive, cultural, and organic“ (Kaika 2005, 23).

This ethnographic short-film *infrastructures: five connecting encounters within a fragmented city* is the result of my continuing attempt to capture these flows and struggles of human and more-than-human connections, a journey from the airy thickness of transmission to the half-concealed fluidity of sewage systems; from the

standstill of ruined and abandoned infrastructure to the seemingly ceaseless rumbling of urban railway-systems - and finally to the infrastructural deep-time of life, death and decay, as it is unravelling among the chestnut-trees, fear-less deer, and crumbling tombstones in the Zentral-Friedhof of Vienna.

This film has been profoundly impacted by the seminar 'Cities, Planning, Infrastructure', as it was held by Prof. Kurath for the STS Institute; by the seminar 'Ethnographischer Film/Soziologischer Film', organized by Dr. Miko & Frick in the context of the Sociology Department (where parts of this film have been shown for the first time); as well as by the seminar 'Visual Storytelling in Theory & Practice', organized by Dr. Saxinger & Oschmann for the institute of Cultural & Social Anthropology - all of them being part of the University of Vienna, Austria.

Kaika, Maria. 2005. *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City*. New York, NY: Routledge.

### **The Sdream, The Soil and The Solar**

Spornberger, Manuel

Emerging out of a collaborative multi-media project with a befriended visual artist, who designed six immersive virtual experiences (IVEs) for electronic music pieces I produced, this film opens up an experimental, critical space for immersive discourse about new frontiers of the imagination, the design and mediation of non-ordinary aesthetic experiences, as well as anthropological inquiry about the future.

What does the accelerating capacity for constructing and experiencing virtual worlds mean in times of ecological crisis? Can there be a virtual in service of the fertile (i.e. regenerative, resilient eco-systems)? How may a creative engagement with imagined futures translate into collective action, not in the virtual, but in the actual world? What is the virtual even, how does it relate to the imagination, and how do both relate to embodied experience?

Oscillating between spheres, the film unfolds the entanglement between the affective and the imaginative, intensity and extension, utopia and pragmatism, present fiction and future fact, sun-worship and terrestrialism, immersion and escapism, the human and the non-human as well as extinction and thriving.

Visually, we engage with futuristic, machinic, organismic, solar, terrestrial, animist, alchemist and cosmic sceneries, images and narratives, which fuse and flow into each other. As a renaissance, rewilding and radicalisation of the collective imagination seems urgently needed, the role of art, immersive technology and anthropology in this process asks for examination and critical reflection.

The project got transposed from our joint art-project into an anthropological exploration, when I was tasked to make a film in the seminar "Nothing New in Media Society" (Prof. Puchegger-Ebner). The web of issues developed in dialogue with the thesis I am currently working on, about the entanglement between imagination and affect in the context of the hopeful, eco-futurist sci-f genre Solarpunk.

### **Building against destruction (participant observer version)**

Hähnlein, Alexander

The presented film *Building against Destruction (participant observer version)* is the result of the course *Visual ethnographies of science: Investigating knowledge production through media practice* and my subsequent MA thesis research at one of



the *Lobau Bleibt!* occupation camps in the outskirts of Vienna. Even though the camp began in protest against the planned city highway, it also presented an opportunity for participants to create an autonomous, emancipatory, and self-organizing space based on democratic and participatory principles. The leading question for this ethnographic investigation is therefore how a construction like the wooden pyramid emerges from the decentralized social organization observed at the so called “Wüste camp”.

Drawing partly from social movement theory, the film inquires into the little pieces of social interaction like “moods, reflex emotions, affective commitments, decision-making heuristics, identity formation, memories, feelings of efficacy and control, leader dynamics, demonizations, escalations, and so on” (Jasper 2010: 967). Whereas our collaborative seminar film focused on the particular social relationship of material and knowledge in the construction of a kitchen canopy, the presented film version inquires more deeply into the different infrastructures necessary to sustain the camp. The presented film also illustrates the progressive affective entanglement of ethnographer and field site through camera positionality and perspective as well as editing choices about what is and is not shown.

Jasper, J. M. (2010). Social Movement Theory Today: Toward a Theory of Action? *Sociology Compass*, 4(11), 965–976.

### **Participatory filmmaking with a Viennese sex worker**

*Ober, Caroline*

Sex work is legal in Vienna. But it is highly stigmatising. There is a heating debate in the feminist literature and a bias running through many films. Mostly films talk about sex work and prostitution, rarely with them. But in a world of constant external attributions, how do sex workers perceive themselves? How do they want to be represented?

I wanted to answer these questions in my master’s thesis “Overcoming the stigmatisation of female sex workers in Vienna”. I used the method of participatory filmmaking to explore the self-representation of a Viennese sex worker. Participatory filmmaking means that “the participants are not subjects to be explored but co-investigators, co-analysers and co-writers who are actively involved in the design process” (Gubrium / Harper 2013: 67). Besides the participatory visual part, I also dealt with the conditions that influence sex work and the representation of sex workers in film in my thesis.

In my research I got the chance to work with Mariella an Austrian sex worker who works in the industry for more than twenty years. I worked with Mariella on a script about her self-portrayal and some scene she filmed herself and some did I. Just as important was the reflection on the filming process. Mariella was concerned about issues such as being perceived as a woman, the demystification of her workplace, stigmatising conditions, and the reconciliation of private and professional life.

But during the film project I have also encountered some challenges and limitations of participatory filmmaking in terms of authorship, participation, and bias. However, in this research case, participatory filmmaking provided Mariella with the opportunity to empower herself and create her own images and address her stigma.

References:

Gubrium Aline/Harper, Krista (2016) *Participatory Visual and Digital Methods in Action*. Routledge: New York.