



Anthrovision
Vaneasa Online Journal

Vol. 8.2 | 2020
Visual Essays in Post-Digital Habitats

Crafting Essays on Life

Reflections on multimodal approaches and renditions of anthropological research

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/anthrovision/6692>
DOI: 10.4000/anthrovision.6692
ISSN: 2198-6754

Publisher

VANEASA - Visual Anthropology Network of European Association of Social Anthropologists

Electronic reference

Moderbacher Christine, "Crafting Essays on Life", *Anthrovision* [Online], Vol. 8.2 | 2020, Online since 31 August 2022, connection on 15 September 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/anthrovision/6692> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/anthrovision.6692>

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Crafting Essays on Life

Reflections on multimodal approaches and renditions of anthropological research

Moderbacher Christine

I would like to thank my colleagues at KFI – Knowing from the Inside (University of Aberdeen) as well as the organizers and participants in the ‘Crafting the Future of the Visual Essay Workshop’ held at the University of Antwerp for their valuable comments and discussions. Special thanks go to Hamuda and Cise and the other “Bruxellois” who have shared their stories with me. Without their courage and openness, the described project would not have been possible.

Introduction

- 1 The first thing Cise said to me when he arrived in Aberdeen on a cold and rainy day was:

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Video link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/19-2/>

- 2 A little later, he sat down in the office where I spent most days writing his story, trying to fit together the fragments of his life that he had told me during our shared year of carpentry training. I gave him a coffee. Cise looked out the window, still a bit baffled by the ease of his journey, and asked: ‘So, what are we doing these days?’
- 3 I had invited him to come to Scotland to work with wood, like we used to during our training in Brussels. The outcome of our shared endeavour was an exhibition of all the different works undertaken within the research project that first brought me to what Cise described as this gloomy place in the North.¹ So, working wood together was one of the reasons for my invitation. The other was my desire to acknowledge what Cise had so generously given me – his story – and I wanted to give a bit of mine back in return.

Cise visiting in Aberdeen

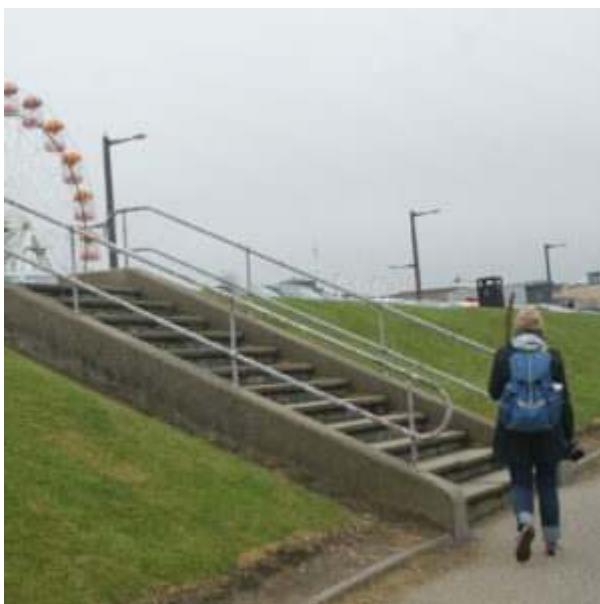


Image link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/64-2/>

Photo by Cise Ibrahima

- 5 Cise, a calm, friendly Guinean in his mid-fifties, is only one of the people who told me their stories during the one-year carpentry apprenticeship that I conducted for my PhD thesis ‘Crafting Lives in Brussels: Making and Mobility on the Margins’ (2019). Having previously lived and worked in Belgium’s capital for many years, my original intention in my fieldwork was to examine the acquisition of skill, through participation in a life-long learning course, developed for migrants and refugees in order to increase their chances within the labour market.
- 6 But throughout the time I spent learning how to work with wood and getting to know the people I worked with, I felt a growing dissatisfaction: while the bodily act of craftwork has gained increasing attention within anthropological research in recent years, individual life stories of artisan migrants are predominantly missing from academic publications². Drawing on the argument that in modern times western education focuses mainly on conceptual thinking – thus marginalising the body (Marchand 2008) – research on craft often deals only with the merely sensorial act of craftwork (often captured through images).

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- 7
- 8 Video link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/41-2/>
- 9 With this focus, an implicit reversal of the Cartesian dualism takes place: the body, not the mind, is elevated to a status worthy of investigation (Odland Portisch 2010: 63).³ As a result, however, the ‘makers’ themselves stay silent. I, for one, was no exception: excited by, and overly tired from, working with wood for the first time, I had barely taken any notice of the makers behind the furniture during the initial phases of the research.

- 10 There were eleven participants at the beginning of the course. Most did not want to be named in my work and remained “curiously distant” towards “this academic” interested in carpentry. During the first day, we had to quickly introduce ourselves to each other, each of us standing next to our assigned workstation. There were nine men, a woman I will call Anna, and myself. Anna, a single mother of two boys, proved to be the most dedicated and persistent during the entire year. There was Malek,⁴ a funny 40-year-old man whose “Ataturk-like moustache”, as he himself called it, was surrounded by a smiley, likeable face that immediately revealed his sense of humour. He was living in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, one of Brussels’ economically poorest districts, with his wife and three kids. Due to his weak French writing skills and his constant nostalgic descriptions of *his* village in Turkey, for quite a while I assumed that he had only recently come to Belgium. Only midway through the training I found out that he was born in Brussels and had lived there his entire life. There was Alexandru from Romania, and three young men of Moroccan descent, one of whom left the training soon after it began. One of them was Yunus, who immediately caught my attention by stealing 20 euros from my pocket unnoticed, then handing them back to me in front of everybody with a proud smile; and Hamuda, originally from Tunisia, who joined the group later on and became the second person with whom I started a ‘long conversation’ (Bloch 1977: 278),⁵ which is still ongoing as of this writing. A young Belgian and myself, an anthropologist and filmmaker, completed the group.
- 11 When I explained my attempt to work alongside them while doing “paid” research, they all looked at me, their confusion written on their surprised faces, until Malek said: “What? So, you mean you have a job already but you want to come here every day at 8.30 am to work? You must be crazy!” His reaction caused shared laughter that was interrupted by a bell signalling the daily morning break at 10.30 am.

Safety footwear



Image link : <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/36-2/> (accessed July 7, 2022)

Photo by Christine Moderbacher

Another Brussels

- 12 It was during these breaks that Hamuda, Cise and I started to discover the area around the carpentry centre, which for most of the participants was also their home: the district of Molenbeek.

Lunchbreak walks in Molenbeek



Image link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/5-2/>

Photos by Christine Moderbacher

- ¹³ There are many things to say and write about Molenbeek's spatial banishment and the dynamics of segregation and ghettoization at work (Mazzocchetti 2012; Moderbacher 2020). What is important for this text is that its national and later international reputation have played a prominent role during my time in Brussels, working, walking and talking with Malek, Hamuda, Cise, Yunus and others, or sometimes just alone to get a breath of fresh air after a loud and hectic morning in the carpentry studio.

Mourning



Image link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/54-2/> (accessed July 7, 2022)

Photo by Christine Moderbacher

- ¹⁴ The events that occurred during my year at the carpentry centre started with the 'Charlie Hebdo shooting' in January 2015 in Paris, followed by a series of other attacks in the Stade de France in Saint-Denis and several mass shootings near coffee shops and restaurants, as well as the popular Bataclan theatre. That the attacks in Paris, and those that were to follow in Brussels, Barcelona, London and other European cities, were organized by terrorist cells in Molenbeek, quickly made its way into the national and international news. 'Europe's most popular Ghetto', "ISIS" European Capital' and 'Crucible of Terror' were only some of the many depictions decorating front pages all across local and international newspapers. The name "Molenbeek" has continued to pop up in international news ever since when talking about Europe's marginalized areas. The events were not only visible 'outside on the streets' surrounding the training centre, due to the constant military and police presence in the entire city. They were also a recurrent topic of discussion inside it. My growing unease about these images spreading on TV, social media and in newspapers made me think more and more about the counter-representations I could contribute with as an active image-producer. While I had so far not used video and still cameras inside the carpentry studio, to avoid – among other things – the aforementioned emphasis on the physical act of craftwork, the increasing focus on Molenbeek seemed to direct my research into one of those places where the camera seemed to be necessary (Rouch, in Henley 2009: 312). But that

was not the only reason for the decision to work with different tools and accordingly to represent my work with an amalgamation of text, image and sound.

- 15 Before going into detail in my decision to use a multimodal approach, I will turn to a more general reflection on the use of a variety of tools within anthropology and position these tendencies within key debates in the discipline. Having already given a glimpse into my own work during the introduction to this article, I will briefly outline the project and turn to my intentions – both within the research and subsequently as a mode of representation – through discussing the online project ‘Invisible Brussels’. By recounting how its content and form emerged, I will touch upon the methodologies I used. I will subsequently introduce the variety of different visual styles I employed and describe an open process of enquiry, that mirrors my general approach towards anthropology. The deliberate fragmentation of the impressions presented will also be part of my discussion. Finally, I point to the merits of creating ‘a variety of materials and processes that are provocative, disruptive, adaptable and reflexive’ (EASA Future Anthropologies Network 2017: 2) with regard to the future visibility of the people we work with, as well as anthropological research.

A New Arena of Debate

- 16 In recent decades, the camera and sound recorder, but also the pencil to draw or the brush to paint, have gained importance within anthropology. They are both research tools as well as means that allow the transmission of anthropology to a broader audience. New sensorial, narrative and collaborative strategies have been developed that have widely contributed to refreshing our discipline. The relevance of the ‘integration’ of these practices into anthropology – in its original Latin sense of ‘*integrare*: refreshing, restoring’ – has long since entered mainstream academic thinking. The ranking of written as against audio-visual outcomes of research is no longer productive and only leads to methodological dichotomies that do not help moving our discipline forward. The still widespread idea of the poverty of the image, I argue, merely stems from a lack of experience with the art of image-making and the relative tools used. As much as anthropologists complain about how “their method” – ethnography – has been exported to other disciplines without deeper reflection, the craft of photography⁶ can be, and has been, equally abused by anthropologists who are not enough practised in it. We cannot aim at the successful integration of non-textual representation without a critical engagement with the specific craft we use, as Pink (2004) has already shown.
- 17 Accordingly, my aim is not to compare and contrast written as against visual or acoustic outcomes, nor to define whether one form is more suited than others in order to present the anthropological endeavour, as has already been done (Cox and Wright 2012; Hastrup 1992; Mead 2003 [1975]). While some anthropologists, like Hastrup (1992), to name one of the most prominent examples, have emphasized the merits of text, and others the merits of film (MacDougall 2006; Mead 2003 [1975]; Pink 2006) or sound (Cox 2010; Feld 1982; Feld and Brenneis 2004), I side with Marcus, who already wrote more than two decades ago:

‘A new arena of debate is needed in which the differences between these two media of representation and their relative possibilities in reconstituting the idea of what anthropological knowledge is, or should be, can be discussed from a starting

position which recognizes a certain identity between them as well as an equality of intellectual standing.' (Marcus 1990: 2)

- 18 Marcus' claim was taken up by Grimshaw and Hart, who insist that if we are to work towards an anthropology of the future, we should talk not about 'what we are *against*, but what we are *for*' (Grimshaw and Hart 1994: 257, italics in original). They suggest that the strength and creative force of anthropology lies within 'a more flexible, constructive approach to learning about the world' (Grimshaw and Hart 1994: 259). More recently, the discussion was taken up by Cubero (2015), who also mentions the mutual potential of different modes of presentation. He suggests approaching anthropology as a creative practice and proposes a common ground 'from where anthropologists can engage with ethnographies made in different media' (2015: 366). My own work then follows Cubero and others such as Grossman (2013) and Van de Port (2018), who argue for the shared potential of textual and visual presentation, as well as those who emphasize the need for more artistically informed experimentation (Favero 2018; Irving 2011; Pink and Salazar 2017). Whether a story that mirrors what we have experienced in the field is created through text or film, or an amalgamation of different forms, is secondary to me. What counts is that the form of anthropological presentation is ethnographically grounded, informed by the knowledge of the craft needed and justified by the topic at hand. Anthropology – the way I would like to practise it – does not always require a strict methodological frame, but rather a series of skills, tensions and vocabularies through which we can try to articulate some knowledge of the world and thereby correspond with it (Cubero 2015; Ingold 2008). For this, all that is required is that the tools we use are up to our task.
- 19 Following this premise, the aims of a multimodal approach and representation of my own work are threefold:
- 20 One is to offer an alternative representation of Molenbeek, and with it of Brussels, to most of those seen on screen and paper (e.g., BBC News 2016; CBS News 2016; Sykes 2015). Accounts that reflect a homogeneous, dystopic image can feed growing xenophobic tendencies and exacerbate a fear of otherness. Despite the existing risk of drowning in an ocean of images, roughly 1.8 billion of which are shared online every day (Meeker, cited in Graf 2017: 157), a visual response has the potential to reach a larger and more varied audience.
- 21 The second main objective is to counter the tendency in the media to portray migrants and refugees like Cise as people with no names and "no distinguishing marks" (Malkki 1996: 388). Standardized discursive tendencies and representations leave no space for individual actions, desires and experiences.⁷ While I wrote in-depth life stories of Cise and Hamuda into my thesis with the aim of resisting prevailing stereotypes, the sheer volume of threatening images that currently arrives on our screens also demands visual counter-strategies.

View from Cise's window



Image link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/60-2/>

Photo by Cise Ibrahima

- ²² Third, using the camera as a mode of presentation grew out of my collaboration with Cise. Not long after we had started the training together, Cise took the camera out of my hands and into his. His passion for the camera grew throughout the research. When making the attempt to allow participants to guide the research and its results seriously, visual methods become an essential component of our shared endeavour. I will briefly discuss this collaboration in the following section.

Notes on Evocation

- ²³ It was not only the performance of oral storytelling that played a crucial role while walking the city and revisiting past places during the early period of our project: the presence of the camera also provoked Cise into revelatory performances, into what Irving describes as the '*dramatisation of being*' (2010: 26, italics in original). In a similar vein, Møhl describes the performativity provoked by the camera as 'semantic densification' (2011: 233, based on Ardener 1987), referring to the special effect that it has on the people being filmed and on what they are doing. 'They may go on living their lives, but they do so in a slightly different manner. One gets the impression that they are performing their own lives', writes Møhl, in an account that echoes what I frequently experienced with Cise (Møhl 2011: 232–233). We mostly used a still rather than a video camera, but I think the effect is similar: Cise proudly posing for me in the city centre; Cise performing past dialogues for me; Cise's smile when asking me to take a picture in front of the airport in Aberdeen, so he can send "proof" of his journey to friends and family. One of the most significant examples of the camera's potential to evoke performances, though, was when Cise and I revisited the reception centre for asylum seekers, the Petit Château, where he had spent the first months after his arrival in Belgium. While we had visited the centre many times before without the camera, this

time Cise suddenly started to replay his first arrival at the centre, pretending to ask the porter whether he had to pay money to stay or not. His telling became more and more dramatic, and he moved around with an expression of insecurity, mimicking his emotions at that time. Instead of approaching the porter, he approached the camera and asked: "Can I stay here for free? I just arrived and have no money to pay!" Upon my answer: "You can stay for free as long as you follow the rules!" he answered: "Ah, well I have learned the rules; I will have no problem then!"

Petit Château



Image link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/11-2/>

Photo by Christine Moderbacher

²⁴ Such a way of working – namely adopting methods and tools along the way rather than planning them in advance – implies a particular conception of presentation.⁸ In the following section I will move towards the decisions I made about the form of this work.

A Web of Thoughts – Reflections on the Chosen Form

²⁵ Quite early into the process, I had noticed that the many different snippets that grew from my work with Cise – the photographs he had made or received over the last 30 years, the visual impressions we both gathered in and around Brussels and other places that became relevant for this work – did not fit into one narrative. Rather, mirroring the different methods and tools I used during my work, as well as my aim to counter-represent existing images, I made the choice to use a montage of text, photographs and short films. The online platform 'Invisible Brussels' therefore bunches together the photos, sound pieces and videos that are spread throughout the written text of my thesis. By using this (plat)form, I also attempt to counter the imposition of a uniform description onto often 'unruly chaos' (Stoller 2016: 157) and break up 'linear reading patterns' (Horstkotte 2006: 127) that do not always reflect the journey-character of anthropological work. Italo Calvino's book *Invisible Cities* (1997 [1972]), which weaves

together 55 short texts that seemingly reproduce impressions of different cities, until it gradually becomes clear that all the narratives speak about the same city, served as inspiration for the title of my work. Putting the material online allows an easy and free access as well as an option to constantly change and continue the work.⁹ The fragments gathered online mirror the idea of lines that appear and disappear into what Ingold has called a ‘meshwork of life’: ‘The lines of the meshwork are the trails *along* which life is lived. ... These lines are typically winding and irregular, yet comprehensively entangled into a close-knit tissue’ (2007: 81, *italics in original*). In my intentions, ‘Invisible Brussels’ spans a web similar to an entanglement of lines in which viewers can move around, stumble at crossings, rest for a moment and follow whatever lines of thought occur to them without imposing a larger structure on the entire work. This also puts viewers into an active role, in which they themselves can choose the glimpses they want to see and also their order.

Images and sound – Like a Painter with a Palette

- ²⁶ Regarding images and sound, I did not want to limit myself to one style. Although my primary filmic approach is influenced by observational cinema (see Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009; Henley 2004; MacDougall 2006), I experimented with using a mix of images that mirror the different sensations that stories and places evoke. Following Van Lancker’s suggestion I worked similarly to a painter: ‘To approach filmmaking as a painter (or rather as a multimedia artist)’, Van Lancker states, ‘requires the consideration of sound and image in all their trans-sensoriality. In this way, their different materials become the “palette” at our disposal, with which to convey sensations, impressions and intentions’ (Van Lancker 2012: 81). This approach then allows materials to be used according to the moods one associates with them. Consequently, I have used a variety of textures. The use of Super 8, with its nostalgic appearance, aims to evoke different sensations compared to those of an HD camera, which can too easily give the impression of mirroring reality. I used analogue photography to refer to the more sensorial and haptic experience of analogue materiality, mirroring the irrevocable link of the present to the imaginary past.¹⁰
- ²⁷ While working on ‘Invisible Brussels’, I have moved more and more towards the creation of haptic images that provoke the senses. Haptic images, as Marks says, ‘are images that are so “thin” and unclichéd that the viewer must bring his or her resources of memory and imagination to complete them’ (2000: 163). By not assuming that ‘all resources the viewer requires are available in the image’ (Marks 2000: 163), they offer the possibility to engage with the filmed subject as well as with the audience in a performative way. They not only invoke individual memory of space, but can also reveal its texture and essence to others, as Stoller (2016) and Van Lancker (2012) have pointed out. The term ‘sensorial’ here is used from an audio-visual and synaesthetic perspective and has only an indirect link with the anthropology of the senses.¹¹ The sensorial approach calls not for descriptions of, or films about, something or someone, but proposes experiencing either a moment in the life of another person or an imaginary dimension of that person. It is concerned with coming to know things via shared experience. Creating sensorial images, evoking instead of representing, is not just about making haptic images and sound, but also about putting into play specific

strategies like asynchronicity, decontextualization and cinematic imagination (Van Lancker 2012: 103).

Postcard from home



Imimage link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/30-2/>

Archive of Cise Ibrahima

- ²⁸ Having mostly concentrated on images in my previous films, developing the soundscape for some snippets was especially challenging. My own lack of experience in, and attention to, sound mirrors a larger problem within anthropology. Feld and Brenneis (2004), as well as Iversen and Simonsen (2010), have highlighted how little education anthropologists receive regarding sound. They call for an anthropology that engages more seriously with audio as a research tool as well as incorporating sound into anthropological research outcomes. Feld and Cox remain exceptions. While the former manages to conjure up an intriguing sense of place through sound in his works *Voices of the Rainforest: Bosavi, Papua New Guinea* (1991) and *Bright Balcan Morning* (Keil and Keil 2002), the latter convinces with recordings of US military aircraft noises in Japan to ‘render the significance and meaning of aircraft sounds in terms of a relationship between their existence at a quantifiable level’ (Cox 2010). Having myself experienced that anthropological training, including training in visual anthropology, invests little time in learning to work with sound despite its poetic potential, I have partly worked with a sound engineer, who has helped me incorporate the acoustic environment, that forms a crucial part of the overall picture I have aimed to present.

Montage – When Strange Things Happen

- ²⁹ The content of each of the impressions slowly grew out of re-reading the stories I collected throughout the research, talking again to Cise, Hamuda and others, and reviewing the material together. The production did not follow a strict order of

developing, shooting and editing as is usual in the film industry. Rather, photographs and videos were created and/or arranged in parallel to the writing, sometimes going back to filming after the editing of one short piece had already started. Assembling images, then, was a continuous work of “montage”.

Porch life



Image link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/57-2/>

Photo by Christine Moderbacher

- 30 While both montage and editing refer to the ‘joining together of different elements in a variety of combinations, repetitions and overlaps’ (Willerslev and Suhr 2013: 1), I use the term “montage” here in the specific sense of Willerslev and Suhr, who remind us that it focuses on ‘making “present by a certain absence” the invisible ground of social life and human perception’ (Willerslev and Suhr 2013: 9, citing Merleau-Ponty). In joining together different elements through a montage, I focused not merely on making a sum out of the individual images, but tried to use its potential to point to ‘something more’, to evoke rather than depict the sensorial, imaginary aspects of lived experience. Looking into a genre called “film poems” proved to be especially interesting for this endeavour.
- 31 A label first applied to American avant-garde films in the 1950s (Peterson 1994: 29), film poems are described as affording ‘an open, unpredictable experience’ and are marked by personal, often private impressions (Peterson 1994: 31–32). Besides the North American stream that gave rise to the idea of film poems, the work of Scottish filmmaker Margaret Tait became an important source of inspiration for my work. Tait described her own approach towards making film poems as poems that start in words and go on in the picture. ‘Out of my own memory and thought’, she describes, ‘I find the external scenes to make a picture from’ (Tait 1983). Her large body of work explores the poetic within the everyday, and seeks to reveal the transcendence of the “ordinary” she intuited through her connection to people and places she loved. Similarly to Tait, I considered the words I exchanged with my research participants as “poems of some sort”, the stories they told me as impulses and starting points to construct the collection of short impressions that constitute ‘Invisible Brussels’. Their words also remain the most pertinent motivation to render visible makers on the margins of the capital of Europe. Makers like Cise.

Tinkering at home



Image link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/10-2/>

Photos by Christine Moderbacher

Little Castle

- 32 In 1993, Cise was 28; he had left his five children and a pregnant wife behind and arrived in Brussels on a cold winter's day. Cold and grey like his first day in Aberdeen, he later told me.
- 33 'I left Antwerp harbour, hitchhiked to Brussels and arrived at Place Bockstael'. Standing outside a subway station he looked around, confused. A man approached, and asked if he needed help. "He was from the Côte d'Ivoire", Cise explained in one of our subsequent sessions. "Later he introduced me to the opposition movement of Guinea in Belgium, back then the RPG, like I told you. In Guinea, it was illegal to be an official member."
- 34 He said: "Come with me! When I arrived, somebody was there to help; now I will help you!" Cise followed the man, whose name he had since forgotten, to his apartment, stayed there for two nights and gathered the information he needed to move on. "He told me to register myself and ask for asylum. He told me where to eat for free and he brought me to the Petit Château."
- 35 The Petit Château, which I already mentioned above when writing about the camera's potential to evoke performance, had previously housed soldiers and, later on, prisoners of war. Transformed in 1987, the large neo-Tudor brick building, which stands out among the others along the canal that divides Brussels, is Belgium's largest and oldest centre for asylum seekers. Located at the very heart of its capital and able to host more than 800 people, it is one of Europe's largest. Ironically, still called 'Little Castle', it was also one of the first places Cise wanted to visit when directing our walks. While he was showing me the window of his former room, posing for images, and replaying the first time he arrived at the centre, a middle-aged man approached us, holding his young daughter by the hand. In broken French, he said to me: "Could you please take a photo of us?" I agreed and took pictures, the man gave me his email address and accepted my promise to come back with the printed photo. Soon after, we left – Cise back to his house to cook for his sons and himself, me back to my place to write down what he had just told me. When I met Cise the next time, he asked: "Did you take the photos to the

man at the Petit Château?" I had to admit that I had forgotten. "I knew that you'd forget, that's why I'll keep reminding you! I will not forget. It is very important. He should have a photo at least!"

The first year

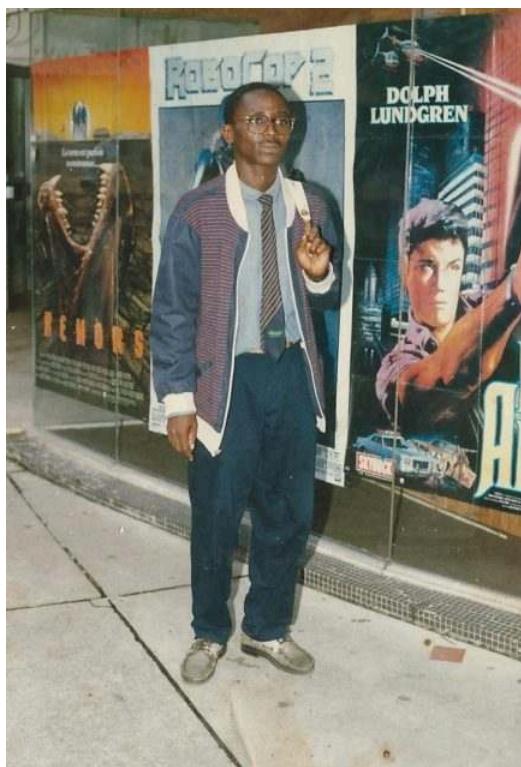


Image link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/26-2/>

Archive of Cise Ibrahima

- ³⁶ It was Cise himself who reminded me many times of the importance of having a 'visual trace' of his life – *to be visible* – in the eyes of others. Throughout the almost three decades that had passed since his arrival in Brussels, he had collected images of his life and organized them into about 20 photo albums, which we looked through together. When I asked him why he had kept all those images during all the years of moving between different houses and often not having enough space, he said: "Well, in the end, it's always the same. Thirty years ago, it was me. Now there are others stuck in Calais.¹² And they will have similar experiences. Maybe I always thought that sooner or later somebody like you would come and take a look and make something out of all this." 'Invisible Brussels' is one attempt to do so.

Lives Beyond Academia¹³

- ³⁷ I agree with Carlo Cubero, who acknowledges a

'lingering paradox within contemporary anthropological practice: there are an increasing number of anthropologists using a variety of formats as their methodologies and for presenting their research findings, while at the same time there is confusion and debate as to the place these works have or should have within the context of anthropological practice'. (Cubero 2015: 365)

- ³⁸ Invisible Brussels can be read as an example of an attempt to advance this implicit claim by using a variety of formats to present one scholarly output. Thinking back on the idea and motivation for ‘Invisible Brussels’, what I believe is my main task is to overcome the tendency of a kind of anthropology that has turned its back on the world, and emphasizes mostly on outcomes that are intended for fellow academics, and characterized by the use of words that have no power ‘to move, to effect or to evoke’ (Ingold 2017: 76). With this, I do not blame “words” or the written text as such, nor deny their power. I do, however, believe that by coupling our doings with those of creative practice, as Pink and Salazar suggest (2017: 5), we can open up to new futures and actively work against our discipline’s ‘tendency to close itself off in critical isolation’ (Pink and Salazar 2017: 3). The creative practice of using words, images and sound not only adds a sensorial component to the research topic, which provides the reader-cum-viewer with additional emotional space. It also multiplies the possibilities to spread research beyond academia and to provide further in depth discussion.
- ³⁹ I am convinced that a productive collaboration between art and anthropology will lead to deeper insight into understanding and representing the relationship between people’s lives and the public realm, and thus move anthropology closer to people. Working with people on the margins of a city that is mostly known for lobbying, commissions, international policy meetings and its ability to ‘breed terrorism’, then ultimately means bringing them out of the margins and into the centre of this work.

This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://journals.openedition.org/anthrovision/6692>

- ⁴⁰ Video link: <http://www.christinemoderbacher.com/9-2/>

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NOTES

1. I am referring to KFI – Knowing from the Inside. A five-year ERC- funded project that sought to reconfigure the relation between practices of enquiry in the human sciences and the forms of knowledge they engender. See: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/research/kfi/>. (accessed July 7, 2022).
2. Exceptions are amongst others Marchand 2009, 2013.
3. I have discussed this in more detail in Moderbacher 2018a: 79.
4. Name changed by the author.

5. Bloch follows Malinowski, describing the core task of anthropology as studying a long conversation that takes place ‘among the people with whom we live during field-work and in which we inevitably join. A long conversation where not only words are exchanged but from time to time also things, animals, people, gestures and blows, but where nonetheless language plays a most prominent part. For him [Malinowski] everything has to be found there, in that conversation’ (Bloch 1977: 278).
6. Photography is only one example. The same could be applied to working with sound, video, drawing, etc. ...
7. Also see Moderbacher 2018b.
8. E.g. while visual tools and walking the city played a very important part when working with Cise, Hamuda preferred telling his story mostly through regular meetings in the carpentry centre or at home.
9. ‘Invisible Brussels’ is an ongoing project. The current Webdomaine www.christinemoderbacher.com/invisiblebrussels/ is only temporary.
10. Media archival images have not been used, owing to the costs involved, but their use is planned for a future continuation of this project.
11. A sub-discipline which, according to Van Lancker, is too often preoccupied with labelling cultures according to their sensorium (Van Lancker 2012: 149).
12. Cise is referring to what has become known as ‘the Jungle’ – a refugee and migrant encampment close to Calais in France and thus only two hours drive from Brussels that existed during my research period (between January 2015 and October 2016).
13. See Ruth Behar’s claim to give research outcomes a ‘life beyond academy’ (1999).
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ABSTRACTS

Reflecting on the use of different tools within anthropological research and its outcomes, as well as positioning these tendencies within recent debates in the discipline, the article draws attention to the importance of form – the poetics of ethnography – as ethnographically grounded rather than a priori asserted. Instead of conveying and justifying this approach through lengthy theoretical argumentation, the work reflects on the ongoing online project ‘Invisible Brussels’, and on how its form – using image, texts and soundscapes – slowly emerged through a constant dialogue with the specific content at hand, laying open the benefits but also the limitations of multimodal approaches.

En réfléchissant à l'utilisation de différents moyens employés dans le cadre d'une recherche anthropologique et à ses résultats, ainsi qu'en positionnant ces approches dans les débats récents de la discipline, l'article attire l'attention sur l'importance de la forme - la poétique de l'ethnographie - en tant que fondement ethnographique plutôt qu'en tant qu'affirmation à priori. Au lieu de présenter et de justifier cette approche au moyen d'une longue argumentation théorique, l'article se penche sur le projet en ligne "Invisible Brussels" et sur la manière dont sa forme - utilisant des images, des textes et des paysages sonores - a lentement émergé grâce à un dialogue constant avec le contenu spécifique en question, mettant en évidence les avantages mais aussi les limites des approches multimodales.

A través de una reflexión sobre el uso de diferentes herramientas en la investigación antropológica y sus resultados, y situando estas tendencias dentro de los debates recientes en la disciplina, este artículo llama la atención sobre la importancia de la forma -la poética de la etnografía- fundada en la etnografías más que como un postulado a priori. En lugar de explicar y justificar este enfoque mediante una larga argumentación teórica, el trabajo reflexiona sobre el proyecto en línea en curso "Bruselas Invisible", y sobre cómo su forma -utilizando imágenes, textos y paisajes sonoros- surgió lentamente a través de un diálogo constante con el contenido específico en cuestión, dejando al descubierto los beneficios pero también las limitaciones de los enfoques multimodales.

INDEX

Palabras claves: fabricación, habilidad, migración, narración, arte, enfoque multimodal

Keywords: craft, skill, migration, storytelling, art, multimodal approach

Mots-clés: artisanat, compétence, migration, narration, art, approche multimodale

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