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Entanglements that matter

Sevasti-Melissa Nolas and Christos Varvantakis

We are delighted to launch this new online journal of *entanglements: experiments in multimodal ethnography*. In so doing, we aim to engage with some of the challenges and questions that contemporary multimodal ethnographic practice throws up: What knowledge do multimodal and multimedia encounters generate? What languages are available to researchers to describe the coming together of different modes and media? What are the everyday practices involved in such convergences and divergences? How might these encounters themselves be described?

These questions have emerged out of our individual and joint practice over the last 15 years. During this time we have experimented with visual ethnographic methods in various forms: as approaches to documenting a field that take us beyond the text, as found objects that cast an eye on the past and present, as ways of documenting everyday life and creating publics, as well as collaborative methods for policy evaluation. It was also during this time that a field of multimodal ethnography begun to emerge and coalesce bringing together researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. While this field of enquiry is still young and constitutes an open space we do maintain that it is currently undergoing a coming of age and we aim to explore this liminal space and its tropes.

The choice of name for the journal conveys something of an orientation towards multimodal ethnography that is both emerging in the literature (Pink 2011) and which resonates with our own experiences. Research is often an attempt to disentangle everyday experiences, those of our interlocutors as well as our encounters with them, and multimodality is no exception here. The analytical approaches of the social sciences tend towards the creation of order out of complexity asking us to categorise and organise our experiences and data in issues, themes, narratives and discourses. The messy actuality of practice, with its sensory dimensions and emotional hues, is often lost in this process (Ingold 2011). What if a different logic guided our analytical and practice endeavours?

Entanglement conveys a meaning of bodies coming together, those of images, producers and consumers. It is a knotting and twisting of different modes of knowledge generation, and of the intersecting and enmeshment of media of production, representation and consumption of lived experience. It also conveys a



meaning of the political as visual representations invite involvement of an audience and implicate a viewer. An entanglement is an adventure, a desire line through a data set perhaps. It calls to mind excitement, risk, confusion and matters of the heart. It is in this sense that Laura Marks (2002) talks about the haptic and the erotic coming together when multimodality is involved. Analysis here is a 'touching, not mastering'. It involves an engagement with the senses, observational, audio and visual for sure but more importantly synesthetic, a resonance between different senses, and an openness to one sense triggering another. As such, this sensory dimensions of entanglement is an intimate and proximal practice, a mimetic form of analysis, of becoming (an)other.

Entanglements call for a paradoxical form of agency from the researcher. On the one hand, the researcher is called on to go beyond categorisation and interpretation: it is a form of agency that assumes and necessitates invention as the researcher is 'called on to fill in the gaps in the image, engage with the traces the image leaves' (Marks, 2002). Yet, at the same time these close up entanglements with the visual image dissolve distinctions between figure and ground and in so doing, simultaneously asks the researcher to give up their own sense of distinctiveness from an image and to relinquish control. By framing the research encounter as an *entanglement*, our aim is to open up a space of discussion around researcher experiences with precisely these sort of complexities.

There is another reason for insisting on entanglement and its communication. Given the distance between such a logic and received notions of analytic practice in the social sciences - of distance, of categorisation and of dis-entanglement - it is not surprising that for a novice of multimodal ethnography the practice of paradoxical agency becomes something of a mystery, confusion and possibly, though hopefully not, prohibition. In a historical moment where the transmission of technical and epistemic knowledge in higher education relies heavily on the peer-reviewed journal articles, and where opportunities for cultivating phronetic knowledge - practical know-how - is often solitary and painstakingly acquired, there is a need for spaces, on and offline, in which communities of practice can take shape and through which researchers can mutually support each other. This journal is one such space, the accompanying JISMAIL multimodalethnography@jiscmail.ac.uk is another, and the workshops we have run in London (November 2017, March 2018) and Athens (February 2018), as well as a forthcoming summer school (June 2018) in Tirupati in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, are further ones.

Phronetic knowledge emerges in the banalities and hurdles of everyday practice. It is the messy actuality in all its corporeality, at once sensory and emotional. We have used theories of everyday life (de Certeau, 1984) to organise the ethos and structure of this journal and hopefully provide the conditions for such knowledge to be captured. We have envisaged space for the exploration of possible entanglements, through stories (recits), experiments and experiences (captured in the french word 'expériences' and English false cognate) and re-views, returns and reviews of multimodal material with relevance to the development of a language for expressing and communicating multimodality.



A récit is a short story or anecdote; récits are often told to amuse, entertain, intrigue, or warn and in other ways impart knowledge and experience from practice. Experimentation and experience, and their sharing, are key to the cultivation of phronetic knowledge. As such, in many ways, phronetic knowledge remains informal, open and incomplete. Re-views are critical reflections on works scholarly, artistic or other, which may prompt us researchers to consequently re-think our multimodal research practices.

As such, *entanglements* occupies the dual meaning of a journal as both a professional platform for communicating ideas captured in a more diary-like format. The very word journal stems from the Latin diurnal, meaning 'of the day' and communicating duration across a day. Journaling, as such, is a practice of documenting everyday life, a space between private and public thoughts and feelings. As such, *entanglements* is a space for experiments in multimodal ethnography that touch upon methodological, analytical and theoretical terms.

We will be publishing articles, in various, multimodal formats, which address particularities in collecting and analysing different media in ethnographic research, across the social sciences. We are particularly interested in papers that creatively incorporate the use of different media - be that still image, video, audio, drawing, video games, coding or other - to produce experiments in theory, analysis and critique.

We hope to address frustrations in facing (seemingly) disconnected kinds of data but also the analytical possibilities that bringing such data in dialogue with one-another and exploring them over time and in discussion with the research interlocutors, might open up to. We are interested on research that addresses multi-sensory and embodied aspects of the everyday experience, also in their critical and political dimensions.

The inaugural issue opens with Récits, which hosts three brief photostories from ethnographic research conducted in the context of the [connectors study](#), an ethnographic research in three cities, aiming to explore the relation between childhood and public life. In the first piece, "Banter in fieldwork", Vinnarasan Aruldoss discusses playful exchanges and teasings around his hand-writing with a child interlocutor, and situates humour and teasing in social research. In her piece "I hope we are not boring you" Melissa Nolas discusses sleep deprivation, sleep and work-life balance in an account from a first visit to a research interlocutors home. Christos Varvantakis, in the piece "To part with one's dolls" discusses interweavings of play and coming of age around the liminal gestures that a child interlocutor devised when she was about to part with her dolls.

The section *expériences* hosts a piece by Alexandra Bulat, on her experiences of escaping the constraints of her research topic guide to open up to other media and modes. Alexandra provides an account of how a political moment and her emotional state signified a decisive turn in her methodology. And thus her reflective piece critically



discusses research conventions and attempts to incorporate the emotional and political selves of the researcher in capturing the realities of the field among her interlocutors.

In the section Re-views, Elsie Whittington provides a reflexive and multimodal account of her experiences and encounters during a workshop on multimodal ethnography (“[Making Connections](#)”) which we (the editors) organised in London in November 2017 - Elsie’s account is accompanied by audio contributions on the re-view made with Rebecca Webb. In the next piece, “Understanding children’s viewpoints and participation” Fransesca Vaghi discusses her own data in the light of her experience of participation in the aforementioned workshop, and the messiness and non-linearity involved in research that is situated in, and aims to theorise, the everyday.

It is our intention and hope that the entanglements becomes an online point of destination for interdisciplinary research that draws on the emerging and ever expanding practice of multimodal ethnography.

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