SHORT PROPOSAL

Title: **Multimodal appreciations: Prototyping kits for the evaluation and institutionalisation of more-than-textual ethnography**

Our project is an experimental response to a stubborn impasse: How to institutionalise more-than-textual ethnography? In the last decades, practitioners of ethnography across the humanities and social sciences have started to develop ways of working and producing output beyond the strict confines of established academic genres (11, 12). Inspired by the arts and design (14,19), diverse explorations in multimodal storytelling, collaboration, and public engagement are opening up new forms of ethnographic description and intervention (1, 3, 4, 5, 8,10,16).

Notably, most ethnographic experiments—whether with digital platforms, collaborative photography or film-making, comics, games, or performance—grapple with the uncertain contours of human and more-than-human experience. In doing so, they grasp slippery research objects, phenomena and practices that otherwise remain outside of the apprehensible, because they entail, for example, difficult to verbalise embodied practices of trauma (7, 17), multispecies contact zones (2), intricate atmospheric relations (29, 9) or controversial environmental phenomena, such as pollution (18) or fracking (6).

This multimodal turn in ethnographic practice has resulted in a proliferation of more-than-textual forms that are not just impossible to classify, but also at odds with institutionalised modes of disciplinary knowledge production. Indeed, when examined against the broader field of research practice and publication, multimodal research remains marginal. This is particularly apparent in university programs, where students are socialized to see text as the most advanced and transparent form of research representation and communication. Similarly, the leading academic societies, top scientific journals and other major publishers of research have trouble in appreciating or accommodating multimodal research. Despite the important openings created by multimodal works, they are often taken as amusing experiments that produce interesting artefacts but remain (stubbornly) exceptional – rarely seen as of equal value when compared to articles and monographs. We have experienced this first-hand through our own efforts to institutionalise and publish multimodal research.

The current situation is problematic but to a certain extent understandable, as peers, reviewers and supervisors are confronted with a complex conundrum: What criteria should be employed to evaluate such multimodal singularities? Acknowledging this problem is the starting point for this project and leads to important further questions: What are the conditions or sensibilities needed to recognize and articulate whether they are 'good' or 'bad' accounts? Might the works themselves contain the necessary elements for such an appreciation, evaluation, and articulation? How can those socialized into text-dominant forms come to feel competent to determine whether multimodal works are relevant contributions to scholarship?

This project responds to this conundrum by creating the grounds for two experimental moments that correspond to two challenges, namely **evaluation** and **institutionalization**. The first moment is constituted by a set of immersive exercises designed to identify and describe the affordances of six more-than-textual or multimodal research artefacts. The second moment is a set of prototyping exercises designed to produce toolkits (13, 5) that can facilitate the institutional production and evaluation of future multimodal research.

In the **first experimental moment**, we are inspired by artistic and design research, fields which have specific systems for assessing multimodal more-than-textual works. These systems involve attuning the senses to the works as well as developing particular forms of discussing, conceptualizing, writing and documenting the processes associated with their production. This is perhaps clearest in art criticism which is central to enabling the evaluation of artistic work. Multimodal ethnographic artefacts, however, cannot be assessed with the same criteria and practices as art or design. Nevertheless, our first experimental moment takes as its starting point the need for an immersive and synesthetic exploration of each multimodal work in order to apprehend, appreciate and document their ways of intervening into and segmenting the world, rendering it sensible and articulable.

This process, however, goes beyond identifying and describing the elements that make up *what they are* to also identify and describe their effects or *what they do*, conceptually and analytically. We see this process as generative of valuation criteria, concepts, and documentary practices that can transcend the specificities of any single multimodal work and inform the prototyping of a range of toolkits which we will use in our second experimental moment. To enable the move from immersive experience to prototypical design, we will convene the first of three workshops. Here we will draw upon the results of our first experimental moment and engage the producers of each of the six multimodal works, along with one academic expert in each particular modal form, to imagine the toolkit elements necessary to facilitate the production and evaluation of future multimodal research. The results of this research will directly feed into our construction of toolkit prototypes.

In our **second experimental moment**, we will design, produce, and test elements of one or more toolkits that might facilitate the institutionalisation of multimodal experimentation in learning and publishing. These elements will likely include:
  i.   a short manifesto or positional paper problematising multimodal evaluation;
  ii. a set of materials and guidelines that enable users to create teaching syllabi, experiment with and experience the gaps between producing multimodal works and how others might evaluate them;
  iii. a manual with self-guided experiments in multimodal research, such as sound walks or a role-playing game;
  iv. a protocol providing ways for users to detect the analytic and conceptual affordances of multimodal research;
  v.   a set of exercises aimed at developing ways to write and talk about these affordances;

vi.   a handbook on submitting and evaluating multimodal theses at BA, MA and PhD levels.

We will test these various elements in our second and third workshops. In the second workshop, we test toolkit elements with a group made up of producers of multimodal research (distinct from those included in our first workshop). In the third, we test other toolkit elements with a group made up of potential evaluators – journal editors, academic publishers, and university program coordinators. We take the results of these workshops to refine the toolkit elements, and then make our experimental processes and output available as online material (including a downloadable versions of our kits) and an open-access book – all in German and English. These will then be circulated within the German- and English-speaking world to a range of institutional gatekeepers as well as promoted widely through networks of ethnographers, advancing the goal of institutionalising multimodal experimentation and the new and exciting research avenues it promises.

Timeline of Work: 18 months	
Months 1-2: Identification of Works	We review multimodal ethnographic artefacts from across German- and English-speaking worlds before settling upon six exemplary works. These may include sound installation, graphic novels, video or film, textual experimentation (novel, poetry), performance, or multisensory walks.
Months 3-9: First Experimental Moment	We undertake an immersive multi-sensory exploration of the six multimodal works and hold our first workshop with producers and experts. In some cases, our explorations will require travel or other measures that create the conditions to appreciate the work as it was meant to be.
Months 10-13: Second Experimental Moment	We produce and test toolkit prototypes in two workshops.
Months 14-18: Produce and Translate Results	We produce and translate final versions of toolkits and document the experimental process in a website and an open-access book, and then circulate and promote these materials.

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