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Call for papers

Anthropology, audiovisual narratives and Crisis *Gwendoline Torterat, Marie-Pierre Julien & Myriem Naji*

Summary

Taking a critical approach to crisis, we invite contributors to address the epistemological questions raised by the act of filming. How does filming relate to the questions of the critical memory of a crisis, of disappearance and social transformation? What kind of critical analysis can an audiovisual narration of temporalities produce? We seek reflexive contributions analysing the political, economic, and aesthetic dimensions of audiovisual research at each stage of production, from writing through to post-production and diffusion. Who writes and who are the authors? What sort of production and financial methods are involved (sponsored TV or independent productions, specialized producers, etc.) and what are their effects on the 'technological dispositive' itself? How are ethnographic materials edited and integrated into the project (images produced by the actors or the directors, images from archives and the media; semi-structured/elicitation interviews and commentaries)? How do these decisions affect the status of the filmed actors? How does the final shape of the audio-visual object differ from the initial intention through the selections made during the editing stage and the way it is circulated?

The birth of social and cultural anthropology coincided with the emergence of audiovisual arts like photography, cinema, and audio recording (Banks & Ruby 2011; Henley 2016; Piault, 2000). Since the end of the 19th century, audiovisual methods were used both to describe the ways in which different socio-cultural groups behaved (cf. the Albert Kahn media library) and to protect what the colonisation process was destroying. These audiovisual tools were used to categorise forms of humanity scientifically but were also used to interrogate situations of crisis.,

In the second half of the 20th century two western philosophers emphasised the common etymology of 'crisis' and 'critique' from different standpoints (Fassin, 2023 : 19-23): for Koselleck (1959/1988; 2006), a crisis constitutes an interruption in the flow of time, whilst for Foucault (1984) 'critique' allows the emergence of other ways of relating to the present and to the self, which in turn provokes a crisis.

Drawing on these connections between crisis and critique, we invite contributors to question the role of audiovisual techniques in contemporary anthropology. How does their use lead to the way different critiques and critical memories (of people, places, countries, institutions, knowledge/objects, emotions, and thoughts) are constructed in moments of crisis? Epistemologically speaking, in anthropology the term crisis refers to an analysis that focuses on an arena rather than on a socio-cultural group (Olivier de Sardan 2021). What vestiges do audiovisual materials record and protect from effacement, and how do they showcase material traces and save them from oblivion? What is the urgency behind recording the moment, the unspeakable, and the ephemeral (MacDougall, 2005)? Which type of memory is being selected (Puig and Tabet 2021)?

The second Frankfurt School has also related critical thinking to the age of modernity, which began with the philosophy of the Enlightenment that arose at the same time as colonisation and

the development of the slave trade (Fassin 2017). This very Eurocentric philosophy largely ignored minority forms of critique which existed both inside and outside of imperialist society. Scientific ethnocentrism was then deconstructed during the third epistemological and anthropological rupture caused by decolonisation (Appadurai, 1996).

We would like to explore the forms of critical analysis specific to visual anthropology, and how they relate to ‘scriptural/textual’ writing (Grasseni 2008, Grimshaw et Ravetz 2009; Hastrup 1992; Morphy, & Banks 1997). Analyses can be diachronic (Laplantine 2009, Ruby 2000) or synchronic. How have the issues generated by the audiovisual analyses of crises changed (De Heusch 2006 ; Colleyn 2008; Pinney 2016) ? How have audiovisual analyses created a conflict between emic and etic categorisations of crisis?

Which forms of reflexivity has visual anthropology developed that can be applied to its own scientific practices? Which spaces does it open up for internal critique, by allowing minorities to be seen and heard (Devereaux & Hillman 2023; Ruby 1991)? Which types of anthropological narratives tend to avoid the objectivation of the interviewees (Trencsenyi and Naumescu 2021)? Is it enough to hand the camera to those who are being filmed, and how is a collaborative and transcultural film constructed (Ferrarini 2018; Lancing 1989; Macdougall 1992, 1998)?

Following Habermas, contributors could also question the way in which audiovisual anthropology allows us to establish a connection between the two constitutive elements of a crisis: the objective element that is the social fact, and the subjective element that lies in its being defined as a crisis. The disconnection of these two elements can either cause moral panic or lead to the disappearance of the problem (Fassin 2023; Fassin and Honneth, 2022). How, then, do audiovisual forms of expression allow us to compare objectivity and subjectivity? Which connections should and must be made between the scientific and the aesthetic elements (Latour and Morel, 1993)?

The process of categorizing a social fact as a crisis is not linear, but made up of power relationships and resistances, of appropriation and empowerment. Roitman (2014) has identified several stages in this process: how the situation is experienced, how certain actors define what they observe, how the crisis is placed on a global map of crises. While collaboration is inherent in audiovisual materials, as they necessarily involve at least three protagonists, namely the film maker, what/who is filmed and the technician (who might be dealing with images, sounds or editing), how do we highlight each participant’s contribution and how are the final cuts decided (Sebag & Durand, 2020)? How is the hierarchy of contributions to the creation of knowledge constructed in these situations? How do we attribute the appropriate knowledge and skills to the participants (Halstead, 2008)?

We invite contributors to question the role played by audiovisual tools in the critical analysis of the systems in which the specific crisis unfolds (Pink, 2007). Epistemologically speaking, in anthropology, the word crisis does not so much define the object of a problem but rather the frame of reference in which the problem is analysed (Olivier de Sardan, 2021). An anthropological analysis can serve to explore a context that combines strategies from the most local to the most global, groups of actors, and the various social relations in which they act, challenge and appropriate change. How does the dialectic between distance and proximity (temporal, geographical, emotional, or analytical) translate into the audiovisual medium?

Taking a critical approach to crisis, we invite contributors to address the epistemological questions raised by the act of filming (photographs and sound, videos, omission, or replacement of images, etc.). How does the act of filming relate to the question of memory, in particular the

critical memory of a crisis, but also (of forgetting and) of social change? What kind of critical analysis of temporality can an audiovisual narration produce? In other words, we seek reflexive analyses of the political, economic, and aesthetic dimensions of audiovisual research at each stage of production, from writing through to post-production and diffusion. Who participates in the writing process, including the fieldwork stage? Which production methods and funding are involved (sponsored TV or independent productions, specialized producers, etc.)? How does funding affect the technological/audiovisual dispositive itself? How and why are various ethnographic materials put together – whether images (of the actors or the directors, images from archives, from the press, or from social media), or interviews (semi-structured interviews, elicitation interviews or commentaries)? How does this affect the way the filmed participants contribute to the construction of the film and may become authors? What are the connections between pictures and sound - even in situations where it is impossible to produce or use pictures and sound? What intentional biases are produced by the use of these materials amongst the audience? How does the end product differ from the initial intention? What is the impact of the selection processes made during the editing stage? Could the way the film is circulated diverge from the initial idea?

Keywords: visual anthropology, social crisis, reflexivity, filming choices, visual methodologies

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Contributors

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With I. Voléry (2020) *From Measuring Rods to DNA Sequencing: Assessing the Human*, New York et Singapore, Palgrave-Springer, coll. Health, Technology and Society, and with N. Diasio (2029), *Anthropology of Family Food Practices, Constraints, Adjustments and Innovations*, Bruxelles, Peter Lang.

She has been teaching the visual anthropology Master's module at the University of Lorraine since 2013. She was the president of the Association Française d'Ethnologie et d'Anthropologie between 2020 and 2023. She initiated the panel on visual anthropology and crisis at the 2023 Congress with G. Torterat et M. Naji.

Gwendoline Torterat is a post-doctoral Fellow, UMR 8068, CNRS, Nanterre (France). Her anthropological research focuses on the social, cultural and political dimensions of archaeological heritage research and transmission. It also examines how prehistoric archaeological sites can be used for political purposes. She has undertaken fieldwork in France and the Middle East.

Some publications:

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Myriem Naji is an honorary research fellow at the Department of Anthropology, where she received her PhD in 2008. She is interested in productive and creative processes and their significance for livelihood, identity and ways of living. Her theoretical approach is grounded in the anthropology of materiality, embodied knowledge and practices, craft, and work. Her current project, for which she received an EMPK grant, aims to research textile heritage in Morocco. As part of this project and for the past twenty years she has been documenting the making of objects in southern Morocco.