
DOING ETHNOGRAPHICALLY GROUNDED MUSIC VIDEOS

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ABSTRACT

This paper establishes the topic of the monographic number of Visual Ethnography that its authors co-edited. It begins with an account of how they found themselves in the situation of producing music videos while they were doing ethnographic fieldwork, and how it pushed them to gather other researchers with similar experiences in conference panels and this dossier. After proposing a definition for ethnographically grounded music videos, the authors present the contributions to the dossier. The paper closes with a more theoretical proposal, centred on the idea of ethnographically grounded music videos as transmodal outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Visual ethnography, collaborative research, music, co-utility, transmodality

BIO

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1. Why this dossier

The idea of editing a monographic number of *Visual Ethnography* on ethnographic music video making came from a series of encounters we (Dario and Eugenio) had at conferences of anthropology and ethnomusicology. But it came, most of all, from our different experiences as videomakers-ethnographers. Different but with at least one point in common: the surprise we had discovering that a collateral and nearly accidental by-product of our academic researches, turned out to be a central piece of the ethnographic knowledge we produced.

I (Dario) remember very well the first time I presented an academic paper on the topic. Around twenty people were assisting to a panel dedicated to collaboration in music and dance, and my paper was centred on different attempt of ‘shared research’ I made along my career. I talked about the unforeseen adventure I had of co-producing music videos with musicians of the Caribbean island of San Andrés, Colombia. When the time for the debate arrived, silence was broken by a single astonished question: was it true that one of the music videos reached around 7 million clicks? Yes, it was (it reached 58 by the date). And then, silence fell again.

I was quite out of sorts when I left the room, but on the stairs one of the people that attended the panel stopped me. “I’ve shot a music video myself while I was doing fieldwork”, she said, “but I never talked about this in a conference.” Shortly after, another person told me the same thing, letting me understand that he did not considered his experience as a music video maker sufficiently ‘scientific’ to be shared with other scholars. When a third person confessed overlunch that he let some rappers talk him into not one, but three music videos, I understood that the society of the videomakers-ethnographers is secret, but not necessarily small.

Meanwhile the other editor of this dossier, Eugenio, had co-produced a music video with the Big Tree Collective in Goma, Congo (Giorgianni 2017; Mista Faba et al. 2015). And we decided to gather some videomakers-ethnographers in a panel of the 2016 AIBR International Conference of Anthropology. Apart from us two, the other panellists were Kieran Hanson, author of a documentary on the new dawn of creativity in audio-visual media in post-war Sierra Leone that contains two music videos (Hanson 2011); and Yushi Yanohara, a Japanese ethnographer and rapper who worked with an hip hop crew in Cameroon. Number of people assisting: 3. Attending other conferences we were luckier, perhaps due to their organization in plenary sessions and not parallel panels: many people, few questions, a lot of perplexity and – sometimes – more private confessions.

This great deal of absence and silence, and also, of whispered sympathy and palpable suspicion, made us clear – partially, to our surprise – that our line of research was somehow hard to talk about within the confines of ethnographic decency. What makes unspeakable the experience of having made music videos while doing ethnographic fieldwork? We will try to answer this question in the next section (where we make a try at a definition for ethnographically grounded music videos). But the reason that got us to organize this monographic number is that we are persuaded that it is worthwhile to share these experiences of videomaking, and to reflect on their (possible) contributions to the ethnographic process of knowledge making.

The book and DVD *Ethnomusicology in Audiovisual Times* includes our first trying of systematizing ideas on ethnographically grounded music videos (Ranocchiari & Giorgianni 2018), and a track with a short compilation that can help the reader to get an idea:

<https://vimeo.com/223282472/ff6887ac01>

We do understand the perplexity of many scholars to consider a music video as an ethnographic outcome. In my case (Dario), the story of my resistance to the idea to be involved into this kind of visual productions dates to 2002. During the fieldwork for my first long-term ethnography – that I made in Lisbon with African-Portuguese rappers (Ranocchiari 2011) – I refused many times to film the music videos they wanted to make. The fear of the ‘good ethnographer’ to lose control on the research data, to fail discerning the product of participant observation to what my participation had contributed to create, is the same fear that made me initially refuse to produce music videos during my second long-term fieldwork. In 2009 I had already spent some months living in the Caribbean island of San Andrés, working on a project on the relationships between musical practices and performative ethnicity (Ranocchiari 2020), when Iván Samir and Maki Egusguiza, enthusiastic partners of the little production company Cotton Tree Media, asked me to cover their cameraman in the production of some music

videos they were preproducing. Initially, I did not accept. I wanted to study *their* music videos for *my* research: how could I do it if I had accepted? How could I analyse these videos if my aesthetic choices and preconceived ideas on ‘a Sanandreaan music video’ had contributed to shape them? But I eventually agreed, mostly due to the friendship I had begun to share with Maki and Iván. I had no suspect that since then my relations with the musicians of the island would change radically.

Without realizing it, my role had shifted from that of a researcher who wanted to work *on* Sanandreaan music, to *another actor* of local music scene. An actor that was involved in the production of a musical artefact (the music video) that was anything but secondary for the music market. This passage of status intensified the relations with my research subjects. Doors that I had been knocking at for months, unfolded spontaneously. Interviews I haven’t been able to get, transformed themselves into friendly lunches in which relevant topics for my research flowed more plentiful than the (abundant, by the way) whisky.

However, producing the first videos (Land Rose 2011; Rayo & Toby 2011) I made what I could for limiting my creative contribution and to follow as strictly as possible what director Maki Egusguiza told me to do. I tried to take advantage of my participation to the video making for building ethnographic data that were consistent to my research program. But as months go by, without even realizing it, my interest into the music video making has replaced the academic priorities of my research agenda. As I wrote elsewhere (Ranocchiari, forthcoming; 2015) I got carried away during the shooting and editing of the two other videos (Colombian Party Cartel 2011; South Side Crew 2011). I just accepted to lose control on the situation. For instance, I followed closely the editing (I had refused even to witness the editing of the first videos). Reading my diary once back to Spain, I realized with surprise that field notes had shifted into production notes: the intense experience of collaborating with my local partners into music video production overlapped any other ethnographic concern.

I (Eugenio) also felt a similar sensation of intensification when I worked with Congolese musician Mulele Matondo Afrika to his video *Seke Bien!* (2016). When I mentioned in our first conversation that I had in my mind to do a music video clip with him, I had already told him I was interested in Congolese music, and we were having a pleasant chat on the topic; but since he realised I was into videos, the discussion started vibrating at a more intense frequency. As we were envisioning the possibility of *doing something together*, the exchange of information between Mulele and I went deeper, and faster: he started browsing through folders and folders of raw footage while sharing with me his ideas about visual strategies and politics in music and images. When he finally invited me to join his current video clip project as a camera person, I felt the thrill of a new, sparkling dimension expanding through my research. In no time, I was booked for a video shooting session on 24 hours notice.

The day after, as soon as I arrived at the shooting place – a warehouse undergoing restoration in North London – I got enmeshed in a boisterous nexus of art-making. A small crew of Mulele’s friends had gathered, each with their own creative agenda. The singers were still recording their vocal lines through a studio microphone plugged into a laptop while the actors were painting dots and lines on each other’s faces and arms. Mulele was showing some Congolese dance patterns to his dancer friends, who were replicating his movements including their repertoires into the choreography, the song playing in a loop from the speakers, over and over again.

Except for Mulele, nobody had heard the song before, and the lyrics in Lingala were incomprehensible to part of the crew. The participants tuned in to the project’s general mood by looking at each other’s artistic practices, eventually discussing some detail about their part with Mulele. Rather than focusing on the *significance* of the song, they were more concerned with exploring the creative potential of the performing space that was taking shape.

Decorative elements were adding up on the set, animated by the light of trembling candle flames as were the bodies of the dancers and actors rehearsing their routines. The camera already on, Mulele was briefly explaining to the protagonist of the clip, a Londoner of African Caribbean origin, that one of her roles in the video was that of an African priestess. A Congolese backing vocalist who was taking a break from singing joined the conversation, suggesting her how to express the evoking of ancestral powers in a short choreographic sequence. Amused, she started to explore her role, moving her body on stage and playing around with the shell necklaces, the straw skirts, and the other objects Mulele had spread around over the floor.

Sensorily overloaded, I was astray, needlessly trying to understand the whirl of symbols, information and codes acting simultaneously in the same space. My attention was constantly shifting between the

(dis)play of body painting, skin tones, muscle movements, colourful clothes, intricate rhythm patterns, and multilingual verbal exchanges between the artists. The rich texture of the whole creative process was way out of my control.

Yet, I was there to film: I had to commit my body to the task of fruitfully using the camera in such a frenzied environment, and everyone was expecting me to do my part. Unable to just observe, I surrendered myself and got absorbed by that acephalous crew of music makers. Like any other participant, I stopped asking questions in my mind and started paying attention to the performances, moving myself and the camera in the space to canalise the flows of creative energies into the lens. I realised that the performers were directing the film more than myself: the actors' bodies, the *mise-en-scène*, the lights and shadows in the room were generating most of the narrative drama in the video, balancing the selective power of the camera operator.

The video clip was growing on its own. The original idea had expanded, fed by the artists' contributions. Each action was repeated and changed in front of the camera, each scene led to the next one through unforeseen creative dynamics. The synergy between the participants was gradually intensifying together with their enthusiasm: the atmosphere was a mixture of relaxation and creative frenzy. Pushed by the collective excitement and by the beauty of what was happening in front of me, I started engaging with the performers through the camera, spurring them, intervening in the stage dynamics, constantly feeding back. It felt nice. The concern of navigating an overflowing stream of information was compensated by the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful practice. At some point in the shooting, Mulele unexpectedly told me: "Man, it's your turn! Take your shoes off, step in the circle, and dance, just express yourself. I want you in the video, definitely!" Awkward and embarrassed, I passed the camera to Mulele and randomly danced on the improvised stage, happily entangled in that audiovisual web of authorships and representations.

My first experience in collaborative ethnographic music video making was astonishing. When I started editing the video clip a few days later, I wanted to reproduce the creative processes I had witnessed. Hence, I structured the video around the participants' dynamics and improvised narratives, respecting their paces, with little editing. I was wrong. Mulele participated in the editing changing my concept, tailoring my sequence to the song's polyrhythm, demanding faster image changes, interpolating different scenes, introducing jump cuts, adding effects in postproduction. During the long editing process, he remastered the song a couple of times and did a few shooting sessions on his own, each time adding material to the editing timeline, reworking the cut, rethinking the entire video depending on new ideas or feedback. Although reluctantly, I had to accept his choices: the video clip was for *his* song, and it was up to him to decide what suited best for Kinshasa bars, or Congolese TV channels, or African web radios, or whatever audience he was aiming at. The final result was an amazing assemblage of images, sounds and digital effects that keeps amusing me ever since, where I can hardly distinguish my ideas, editing and camera work from Mulele and his artist friends'.

The few fellow researchers we met who have experienced music video making – and the fewer ones who were keen on sharing these experiences with us at conference panels and seminars – all came upon very similar environmental conditions. The overlapping of various artistic practices and technical expertises make video clips very rich, yet complex processes over which the researcher cannot exert complete control. A multimodal artifact, the video clip is the nexus of multiple agencies, agendas and discourses whose audiovisual outcomes are often surprising and potentially bewildering, and rarely rest on the researcher's will. These are probably some of the reasons why video clips are not spoken out loud by ethnographers. Due to the very same reasons, we consider music video clips to be thriving research fieldworks and promising loci to rethink the discipline.

2. Ethnographically grounded music videos

If someone should watch the video clips presented in this dossier without reading the papers, she could hardly distinguish them from other music videos and guess that they are ethnographic products. In fact, music video clip is an autonomous audiovisual genre that assembles and operates outside of academia, ranging from video art and music experimentalism to commercial (Arnold et al. 2017; Illescas 2015; Frith et al. 1993). But most notably, it is the global language par excellence of the transmission of music trends and the mass consumption of music goods.

An ethnographically grounded music video does not necessarily have to rely on specific stylistic features, or autonomous filming techniques, or univocal methodologies. The creative aim of the researcher in accordance with the other actors involved is central in this kind of visual productions: creative, as the main aim in doing an ethnographic video clip is to produce, rather than to represent, what happens in front of the lens. The music video composes music and sounds, images, moving bodies, places, digital effects and other non-human actors into a hypertext that accompanies, expands, or is counterbalanced by a related musical text, establishing with it a multifaceted relationship beyond representation.

By joining this creative endeavour, the researcher partakes in the manufacturing of one or more staged music performances which will be re-manufactured through montage. The final outcome is a collective assemblage of multiple creative practices and discourses wherein anthropology is minority, for the complexity of its conception, production, and circulation overflows the limits of academia. To embark on a video clip production means for the ethnographer to largely share their control with a plethora of creative actors. The outcomes, the forms, the creative inputs, the communicative strategies, and all the other agenda shaping it are unforeseeable and depend entirely on the specific situation.

This unpredictable, unstable research attitude leaves no space for any epistemological dictatorship: the researcher has no means to impose their views and their representational forms, for there is no space for them other than the camera movements in the field and a place in the edit suite, squeezed in among the other participants. Music videos allow no time to procrastinate decisions, nor space to make between researcher and fieldwork to rationalise, decant, digest the experience. The use of music video clips as a research method entails a radical collaborative commitment, puts into effect post-ontological objections to the division between theory and practise, and radically shares the power of producing knowledge between the research protagonists by substituting invention to representation as the main research rationale (Dattatreyan & Marrero-Guillamón 2019).

Besides entailing a radical commitment to collaborate, the peculiar attitude of the ethnographer operating the camera for a music video touches on another nerve for the academic community: the role of the researcher's emotions, tastes, desires, opinions, and senses.

Like many ethnographic music video stories say, to be involved in a video clip is great fun. Low-budget music video production – a situation that applies to most if not all the case studies below – often entails a network of friends and partners sharing skills, interests, creative tasks, resources, locations, and free time, who join efforts to imaginatively carry out their artistic endeavour. The ethnographer usually gets involved in the project as a volunteer camera operator: she is just a node of the video clip network, a resource that the producers – sometimes the musicians themselves – have gathered free of charge. The usual outcome of these creative dynamics of mutual help is a friendly environment where the researcher, as everyone else involved, can experiment with new languages, play around with ideas and roles, and meet interesting people. This fosters personal exchanges with the research subjects, on a deeper personal level, and also increases the amount of information circulating between the ethnographer and the other research subject. But this comes at the cost of a consistent shift in the researcher's position: the ethnographer loses their aura of prestige and becomes workforce, having to be ready to renegotiate entirely or substantially the research agenda. Moreover, producing a video clip implies for the researcher to expose feelings, to rely on emotions, personal tastes and sensorial impressions, deliberately interfering with every cultural dynamic at play through irreversible decisions taken in the blink of an eye, far away from any academic comfort zone. This intense fieldwork involvement, its thickness and messiness, oblige the researcher to take position – a position very close to the other research subjects.

Music video making brings creativity and proactivity to the forefront of ethnographic practice; consequently, the ethnographer's choices, tastes, personal inclinations become immediately visible and directly shape the musical object of the research. The audiovisual ethnographer plunges into the observed dynamics, collapsing every remnant of distance between the subjects and the objects, the outside and the inside, the lens and the scene. The practice of music video making imposes to the researcher a bodily commitment and a sensory saturation that become non-verbal communication, emotional intelligence, intimate connection to the fieldwork and its protagonists. The ethnographic music video clip allows anthropologists to produce knowledge with their bodies, to communicate with their interlocutors – both in the field and afterwards – through the fabric of dreams, desires, and feelings, activating new contaminations between anthropological disciplines and other human practices.

Giving a minimalist definition to these peculiar visual artefacts, they are basically music videos produced while (part of) their authors was doing ethnographic fieldwork; whose fieldwork they influenced and from which have been already influenced. As we explain in the last section of this paper, our ambition for the future ethnographic use of this kind of videos is bigger, but at this early stage, we use the term ‘ethnographically grounded music video’ mainly in this more generic sense.

So they are not conventional ethnographic videos. They don’t document any aspect of the real life of local communities. They don’t portray directly the daily life of subjects that are representative of a certain cultural context. They don’t tell the story of an ethnographic encounter... they are rather one of the consequences of it. If that weren’t enough, they are works of fiction that move on the imaginary level and not on the level of the academic documentation of cultural practices. Recalling an old debate, they try to work on ‘the true’ and not on ‘the real’, as conventional ethnography does.

Fiction is helpful in ethnography mostly when it is used as a methodological tool for achieving a level of knowledge (about the musicking; the creative process; the social significance the subjects ascribe to what they do) that would not be achieved in any other way. The title of the dossier and at least two of the papers evoke the concept of ‘ethnofiction’ as close to that of ethnographically grounded music video. Jean Rouch’s ethnofictions are among the first and most accomplished ethnographic visual experiments that try to go beyond factual representation and scientific authority. In these films, participants are encouraged to express themselves establishing a direct relationship with the camera: the cultural aspects that are captured on film are those of their personal and cultural imaginary, not the product of some kind of phenomenological observation of social life.

As we wrote elsewhere,

“Our idea of participatory music video transfers to a musical context Rouch’s practice of ethnofictional filmmaking. After all, participatory music videos share with ethnofictions the idea that people express, through a performance facilitated by the camera, some aspects of a more intimate truth that otherwise would stay implicit. The central importance that Rouch gives to improvisation and spontaneity at expense of the narrative combines very well with the non-narrative structure of most music videos. And even if the pre-conceived or even pre-recorded musical track limits in some way the freedom of improvisation and requires a certain shooting plan, it also allows experimentation with the video layer largely independent of the audio layer.” (Ranocchiaro & Giorgianni 2018)

The hybrid, ambiguous status of music video clip as a communicative mode is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the academic reticence we have encountered so far. This special issue presents a series of ethnographic experiences that embrace the otherness of music video clip into the academic debate, exploring the short circuits and the hybridisations, rethinking fieldwork and producing critical discourses *from* the otherness of the music video clip intended as a mode of production of knowledge.

3. The papers. Notes on the contributions to the dossier

The papers collected in this monographic number of *Visual Ethnography* are all about experiences of academic and non-academic researchers who participated into music video making processes while doing fieldwork.

Locations, social contexts, music genres and visual approaches are different from each other: rap by native Mapuche artists in Southern Chile (Rojas, Blanco & Mellado 2020), Brazilian pop music in São Paulo (Leaha & Hilgenberg 2020), working class rock in Southern Spain (Yáñez 2020), women-centred music in Mozambique (Boswall 2020), Brazilian funk, again in São Paulo (Boudreault-Fournier, Hikiji & Caiuby 2020) and Indigenous rap in Edmonton, Canada (MacDonald 2020). A problem of space made us decide to not include here our personal papers on the videomaking experiences we had with Congolese musicians in Africa and in the diaspora (Eugenio) and with Caribbean and Al Andalus-inspired musicians in Colombia and Granada (Dario).

The dossier opens with the paper by Rojas, Blanco and Mellado on the production of a music video with rappers of a Mapuche community in Valdivia, Southern Chile. The authors analyse their collaborative experience of co-creation as a possible way to go beyond the ‘ontological turn’ in anthropology. Having Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Philippe Descola and Bruno Latour as principal references, the perspective of the ‘ontological turn’ strongly invites to ‘take seriously’ the ontological

premises of the people the ethnographers work with. The authors of this paper took this challenge to the extreme consequences and decided to accept that the anthropological discourse (usually shaped by academic modality of knowledge transmission) should respect the format their epistemic partners (Marcus & Holmes 2008: 83) consider more adequate to convey the message: the rap music video. A music video – and not (only) an academic paper – as a product of collaborative research, as a ‘serious’ vehicle for critical knowledge as in the best hip hop tradition:

“The process of building the video clip [*Nuestro Territorio*], besides destabilizing the researcher/researched dichotomy, made the academic emphasis of the results and consequential limited reach of the resulting knowledge more complex. In other words, it allowed transit in and out of academic circles.” (Rojas, Blanco & Mellado 2020)

In the article that closes the dossier, Michael B. MacDonald expresses a similar concern for what we define, in the last section of this paper, ‘transmodal outcomes’. Reflecting on the making of a sort of expanded hip hop video, the musical ethnofiction *Unspittable* that he produced with Canadian Indigenous rappers from Edmonton, the author notes that this kind of video allows the researcher-artist to engage into the production of screen objects that traverse different media, networks and audiences, while at the same time they maintain a commitment “to the study of musical meaning in its broadest sense” (MacDonald 2020).

If MacDonald rethinks the classic form of ethnofiction harmonising it with Les Blank’s conception of music film as a piece of music, in which everything happens musically, Boudreault-Fournier, Hikiji & Caiuby (2020) use their paper to reflect on the music video sequences contained in their ethnofiction *Fabrik Funk*. If these authors consider the ethnofiction as a way to approach, through fictionalization, the fabrication of the everyday, the music video sequences break the daily routine of the main character, the aspiring funk MC Negaly, a young women from the district of Cidade Tiradentes.

Like MacDonald quoting Les Blank, Mihai Andrei Leaha and Katharina Hilgenberg consider their audiovisual collaboration with Brazilian pop artist Kasper Maldonado as an act of musicking – rather, of ‘videocliping’, paraphrasing Christopher Smalls – and approach ethnographic research as mainly a moment of co-creation spurred by the dialogue between “epistemic partners.” The article understands ethnographic music video clip within the frame of multimodality, as the encounter between multiple voices, artistic practices and political wills. Coherently, the essay is structured as an assemblage of written texts, time-lapse animations, photographic collages, and the music video clip, reproducing the non-linear multivocality of the research and calling for an active reception by the reader/viewer/listener.

The space, “a locus of entanglement between human and non-human agencies,” assumes a crucial importance: the Kasper Factory, an artistic hub close to Sao Paulo’s Municipal Market, provides the creative environment, the political discourses and clashes, and above all, the encounters that animate the artistic endeavour of Kasper, the authors, and their friends. In agreement with Rabinow, the fieldwork becomes assemblage-work, the creative act of putting together the different components of the musical texture. The no-budget production of the video clip for Papoula, a love song between Kasper and a puppy flower, requires the participants to multiply and swap their roles during the video production: this creative roleplay is the scenario where the authors transform anthropological practice into multimodal invention, endorsing the political stances of freedom of expression and the joyful imagination of an artistic collective facing homophobia and repression in contemporary Brazil.

Analysing their multiple roles of anthropologists, filmmakers, and friends, Leaha and Katharina Hilgenberg take particular attention to the scenography and the mise-en-scène of the music video clip as elements of a ‘spatio-temporal event’ of great ethnographic thickness, wherein the creative involvement of the researchers is the key factor to explore the complex fabric of the musicians’ imagination.

The relation between artistic creation and research that Leaha and Hilgenberg raise is a recurring subject throughout the dossier, and the paper by Karen Boswall is not an exception. The British anthropologist and filmmaker, who lived 17 years in Mozambique, writes about the making of a series of videos entitled *Fala Minha Imã* (*Speak My Sister*). The collaborative production of the videos, that arise from workshops with the aspiring filmmakers and conclude with a tour of screenings in the places where the films were shot, is deeply concerned with gender equality. They have the precise objective of provoking discussion about the treatment of women in both the audience and young filmmakers (female

and male) that participated in the project, expressively defined by Boswall as ‘the knowledge makers of the future’.

The knowledge makers of the future are not ‘informants’ in an extractive research, but active parts of a collaborative project of video production that serves as a catalyst for the construction of shared knowledge. As in the videomaking experience described by Rojas, Blanco and Mellado, also Boswall’s paper is a response to the invitation to ‘take seriously’ the ontological premises of her epistemic partners and to put all the project at the service of building a better vision of the future. From here comes the choice to use the filmic language of Mozambican music videos. The intention is not to replicate the gender bias that often define mainstream music video language (Illescas 2015), but to accept that *that* filmic language is the principal aesthetic reference for young filmmakers (and audience). It can be re-semanticized, helping to reach an audience that would remain indifferent to filmic products like documentaries, that are conventionally considered more adequate to ‘educate consciences’.

The idea of counter-appropriation through audiovisual spaces and the use of music video language to foster rhetoric of contestation are also the main research focus of Paloma Yáñez Serrano, who addresses her experience of producing a “rural-punk” music video by Chotajo, a rock band of agricultural workers in the province of Almería, Southern Spain, as a collateral experience she had while doing fieldwork on one of the most important intensive agriculture areas in Europe. By analysing the filmmaking experience of this do-it-yourself band, the author explores through the video clip the (environ)mental ecology of a generation facing cultural and economic collapse. Music becomes a practice of everyday resistance channelling the anger and the sense of displacement experienced by young people, providing them with alternative popular narratives at the same time as letting them seeking refuge in a musical escapism, away from the industrial reality they live immersed in. The music video clip is an adequate language to reveal the existence of counter-discourses and to foster unconformity by overlapping musical imaginaries to local landscapes.

4. Towards transmodal outcomes

The contributions we selected show that an ethnographically grounded music video can be a musical ethnofiction, either thought as an autonomous product or inserted in a longer cinematic text, as in the case of *Fabrik Funk*. It can be of the same duration of its related music track, or it can expand into a feature film like *Unspittable*. It can be conceived as an audiovisual language colliding with cinema like in the *Fala Minha Imã* series, where documentaries are turned into musical portraits through the attitude of the video clip. They can also be conceived as video art pieces like *Papoula*; as instruments for community activism like *Nuestro Territorio*; or as collaborative devices maintaining the format of commercial video clips while promoting musical unconformity like *Menos Animal*. These forms, by no means exhaustive of the potential range of ethnographic music videos, are not mutually exclusive: in fact, they overlap and graft in the ethnographic experiments presented in this issue. Nonetheless, despite their eclecticism, these experiments introduce a coherent set of methodological choices and critical discourses based on the two elements they have in common: a creative drive in the use of camera while doing fieldwork, and a radical commitment to collaboration.

In fact, a common point to all the contributions is the idea that the process of video making is a shared space-time in which it is possible to produce something that would not be possible to produce otherwise. It would not arise in a series of in-depth interviews, it would not emerge as a result of the revision of observational fieldnotes nor through the meticulous editing of many terabytes of observational footage. In spite of the different situations and solutions that the authors found in their diverse research contexts, we all agree that music videos such as those described in this monographic number can be considered as fieldwork devices unfolded through creativity by the various subjects involved into the research process. As Estalella and Sánchez-Criado underline:

“In these situations, the traditional tropes of the fieldwork encounter (i.e. immersion and distance) give way to a narrative register of experimentation, where the aesthetics of collaboration in the production of knowledge substitutes or intermingles with the traditional trope of participant observation. Building on this, we propose the concept of ‘experimental collaborations’ to describe and conceptualize this distinctive ethnographic modality.” (Estalella & Sánchez-Criado 2018: 2)

But it is not their experimental or creative nature *per se* what interest us mostly of these particular fieldwork devices that are the ethnographically grounded music videos. We are much more interested by what their non- or para- academic nature allows us to do: to open up the research process – the process of ethnographic knowledge making – to people that would be, in a more conventional methodological frame, passive ‘informants’. The interest we have for improving a music video based ethnographic methodology comes from the commitment we feel towards the transformation of the research practices in anthropology and ethnomusicology in a non-extractive, collaborative, shared sense.

To accept to ‘lose control’ and produce music videos with artists that are interested in this kind of product (and not, for instance, in academic papers like this) means to leave behind the idea that ethnographic collaboration means only to share everyday life during fieldwork, or to recognize co-authorship when we write in specialized journals. We consider very important to respect what one of us defined as the principle of ‘co-utility’ of the research outcomes (Ranocchiari 2016). In this perspective, to do collaborative or shared research doesn’t mean only to unfold an efficient methodology for co-researching, but also to find a way to produce outcomes that are equally useful for the different subjects engaged. For instance, this paper is useful for who, like its authors, operate (also) in academic circles. The songs underlying the videos are useful for the musicians that composed and recorded them. But the ethnographically grounded music videos that were born from the encounter (the listening, the dialogue, the negotiation, the sharing) between academic and non-academic subjects, are quite a different thing.

As Dario notes in a recent publication, the problem of the final products is one of the less considered in the literature on collaborative research. Almost always “the process [of co-researching] is rightly considered most important than the product, or, in other words, the process *is* the product, the outcome” (Miguel, Ranocchiari & Sardo 2020: 377). But if we want the impact of a shared research to go beyond the restricted circle of people who had the opportunity to participate in it, it is very important to transform the ephemeral process of co-researching in more persistent (and shareable) products. This is exactly what videos like those of the project *Fala Minha Irmã* and that of the Mapuche rappers described in this dossier by Boswall and Rojas, Blanco & Mellado try to do.

What is important here is to overcome barriers imposed by the *modality* of knowledge transmission and to produce research outcomes that can be understood both inside and outside academia. It is not a problem of medium, of using writings rather than audiovisuals, live performance or any combination of them (i.e. through digital ecosystems). It is definitively a matter of mode: how do we shape the knowledges originated by our experience of shared research in an equally efficient way for all the implied subjects?¹ This paper, this dossier, the conferences we attended and the ethnographic documentaries we produced, respect modalities of knowledge transmission that are valid and effective for the international community of scholars. A conventional music video moves into a completely different modality, sharing another specific knowledge to a different target of people through music, photography and montage. If we really want to do research respecting the principle of co-utility, the challenge is to produce transmodal outcomes that are capable to transcend these sealed modalities of knowledge transmission.

But is it possible to make coexist the heart of the knowledge built through a complex process of co-research and co-creation into a peculiar audiovisual product such as a music video? We think yes and we are working on it.² Perhaps, neither the pioneering experiences described in this dossier nor the other we are aware of and that we couldn’t include here, have yet produced thoroughly transmodal music videos. However, they are first steps toward them and we hope that collecting these accounts in a monographic number of *Visual Ethnography* can help achieving it.

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¹ Our use of the term ‘mode’ is not the same that scholars like Collins, Durrington & Gill (2017) propose when they talk about multimodality (see also Dattatreyan & Marrero-Guillamón 2019 and the paper by Leaha and Hilgenberg in this dossier). In the emerging field of multimodal anthropology the main focus is on the media ecologies in which we are immersed (also) as ethnographers, and ‘mode’ is referred as related to the public and collaborative use of different combinations of media platforms. In our case, the reference is less marked by technological interfaces. Here, we are not referring to the transmission medium, but to the way in which the knowledge is received and convey meaning, independently from the nature of its support.

² For example, Dario Ranocchiari with the postdoctoral project “Ethnographically grounded video clips as tools for the participatory research of activist practices” (UGR Fellows, Universidad de Granada) and the Diego Carpitella Grant by Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venice).

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