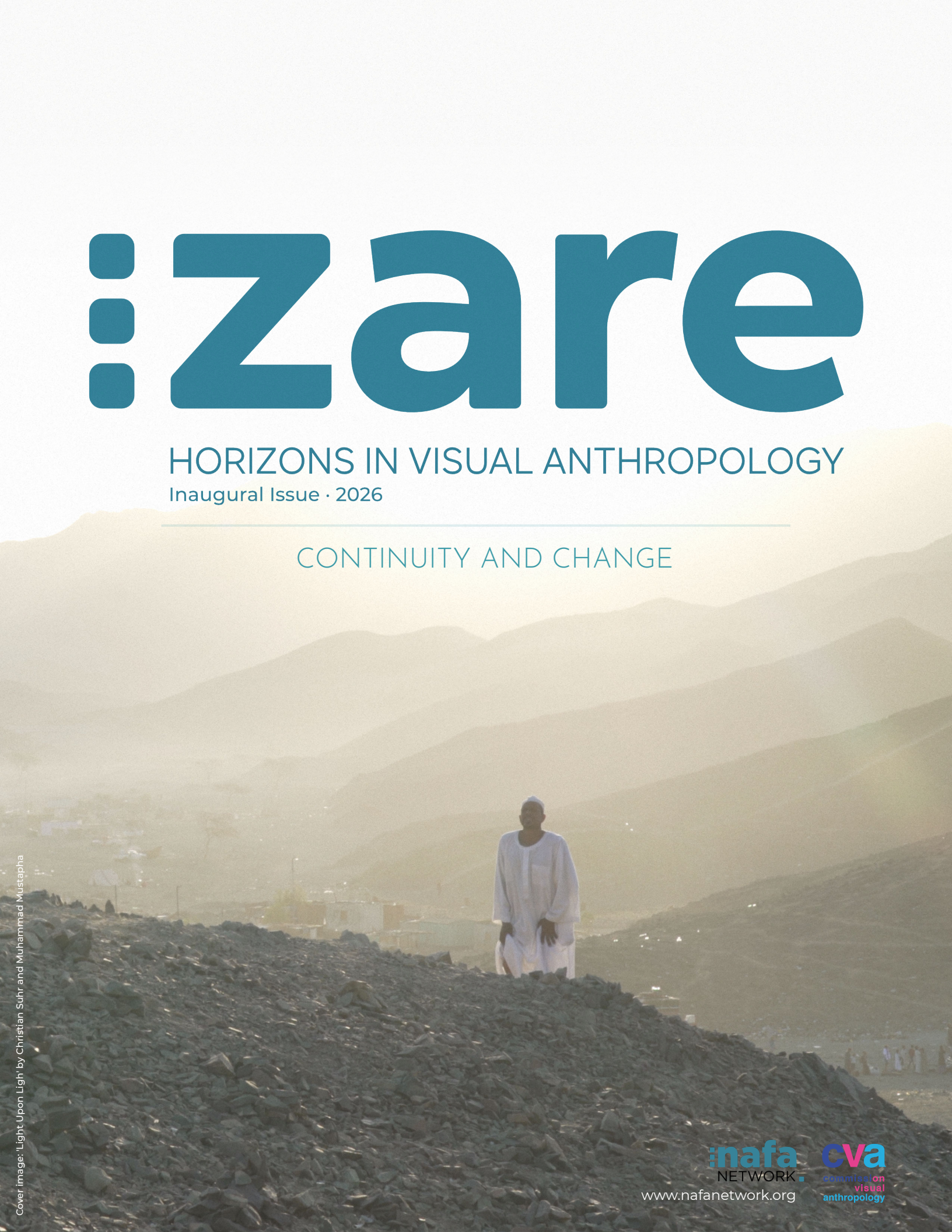
:zare

HORIZONS IN VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Inaugural Issue · 2026

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE



Cover image: 'Light Upon Ligh' by Christian Suhr and Muhammad Mustapha

:nafa NETWORK
www.nafanetwork.org
cva commission on visual anthropology

ABOUT THE COVER'S PICTURE

A friend in Cairo gave Danish anthropologist Christian Suhr a good piece of advice: Stop focusing on the darkness in the world, look at the light instead. Suhr takes the advice and travels through Egypt to understand what light means to the people he meets along the way.

A fieldtrip into the mystical traditions of Islam exploring people's search for light at a time of darkness and political tension in post revolutionary Egypt.

Sonia sees light streaming into her heart from a person's finger. Aya is lifted into a luminous space in the midst of a ritual. Maher travels to the shrine of a holy man to find out if the light and love that people are referring to is real. Meanwhile the film crew, Muhammad, Amira, and Christian trie to find out how they can film these experiences of light and how there can be so much light and darkness in this world and inside themselves.

Frame from 'Light Upon Light' film by Christian Suhr and Muhammad Mustapha

ZARE: Horizons in Visual Anthropology

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Editors' note

by **editorial team**

We're back! After a period of reflection, reorganization, and no small amount of enthusiasm, we're relaunching as ZARE: Horizons in Visual Anthropology. New name, new format, new faces on the editorial board, but the same core drive that has animated the community of visual anthropologists for decades: connecting people across the world and keeping the conversation alive.

At the heart of that conversation is a conviction we share that visual anthropology, in all its forms—film, photography, multimodal research, and digital practice—does something irreplaceable. It makes other ways of knowing visible and experientially accessible, complementing and extending what traditional text-based forms can convey. It brings to the surface what language alone cannot always reach and creates space for voices, perspectives, and knowledge systems that might otherwise remain unseen, unheard, or unfelt. That is what ZARE is for: a magazine by and for the visual anthropology community and beyond, a place to share reflections, essays, and reviews. Above all, we invite you to share your visual, multimodal, and experimental work.

Our editorial board has grown to include anthropologists from CVA (The Commission of Visual Anthropology of the IUAES), NAFA (Nordic Anthropological Film Association), and beyond to better engage with the full breadth, trajectory, and origins of this newsletter. That trajectory has a longer history than many may know. The roots of this newsletter stretch back to 1988, when Asen Balikci, founder of the Commission on Visual Anthropology (CVA), began distributing a printed newsletter to several hundred recipients worldwide. For years, it was the only connection between visual anthropologists across continents. In 1994, Peter Crawford and Linda Jonsen took over the responsibility of producing and sending the newsletter for the next couple of years, keeping the network alive and the community connected (you can read more about this story in the next chapter). Rolf Husmann, the new chairman, revived it in 2001 in the form of a bi-monthly CVA circular. In 2008, the new digital newsletter (pdf) found a permanent home within the newly established NAFA network newsletter thanks to Berit Madsen, Anne Mette Jørgensen, Christian Suhr Nielsen, and many dedicated others. What you are reading now is part of that same story.

We don't want to linger only in the past, though. NAFA has historically been quite Eurocentric, and one of our commitments with ZARE is to steadily expand the geographical reach of our issues, with representation from many parts of the world already reflected in our editorial group and articles.

We're also changing how we work. In the past, the NAFA newsletter was a text-packed PDF sent via academic mailing lists. Then we moved to the website, publishing articles and news both continuously and via quarterly email newsletters, open to anyone regardless of institutional affiliation. We were proud of that accessibility, but it left less room for the creative and editorial experimentation a publication like this can support.

So, we've decided to divide the work more clearly: news and updates from the world of visual anthropology will continue to flow on the website as we receive them, while a quarterly magazine will give us space to experiment with longer-form contributions, essays, and reflections.

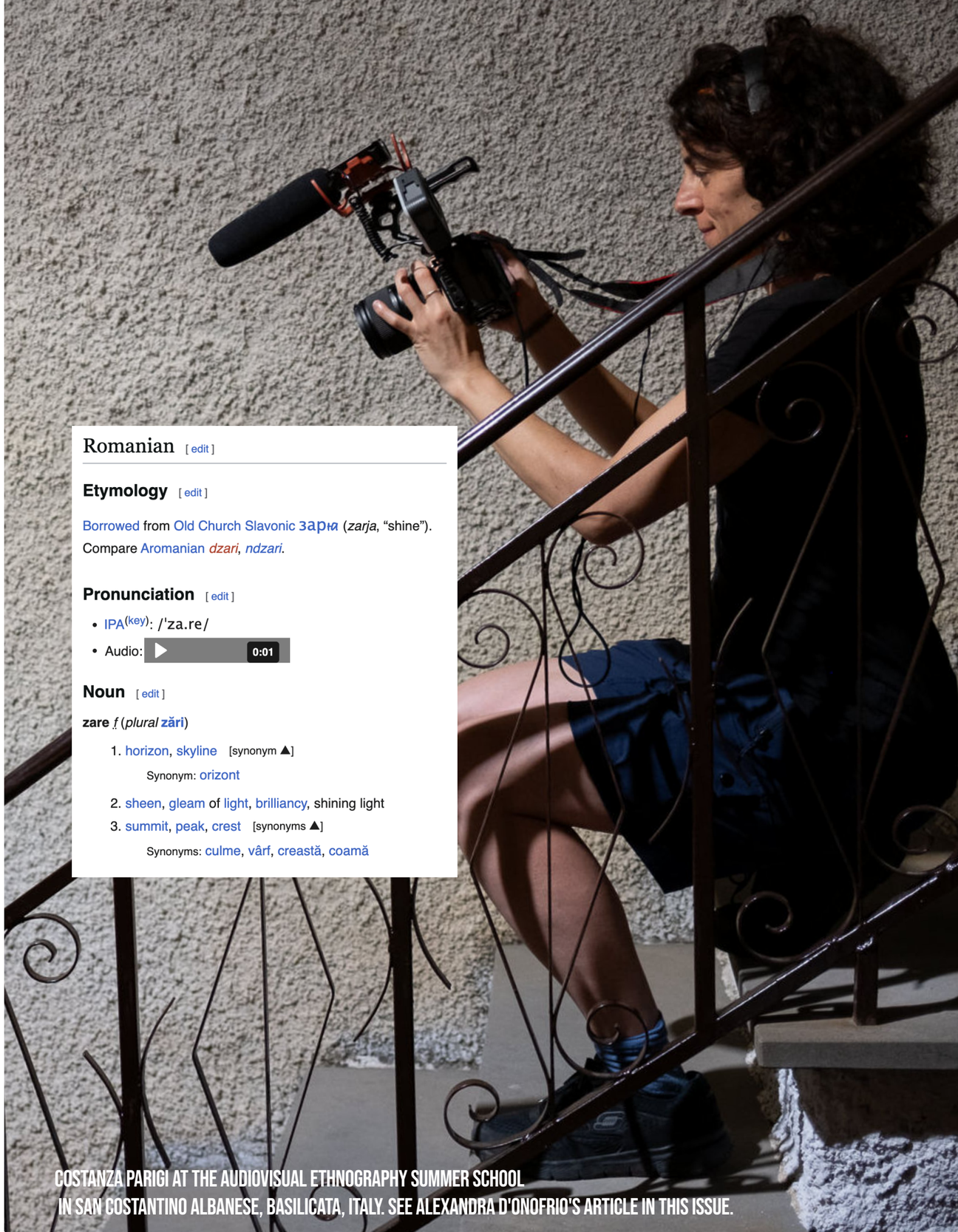
We are keen to receive your contributions for the magazine and news via the "Submit your piece" page in the main menu of the NAFA website.

One of the things we're most excited about is our Visual Anthropology Map, a growing, community-built overview of visual anthropology programs, labs, summer schools, ethnographic film festivals, and collectives worldwide. Take a look in the "VA Map" section of the NAFA website, and more importantly, help us fill it in. The map is only as good as the community behind it, so whether you run a lab, organize a festival, teach a course, or are part of a collective, we want you on there. Please contribute using the submission form mentioned in the introductory text at the top of the VA Map page.

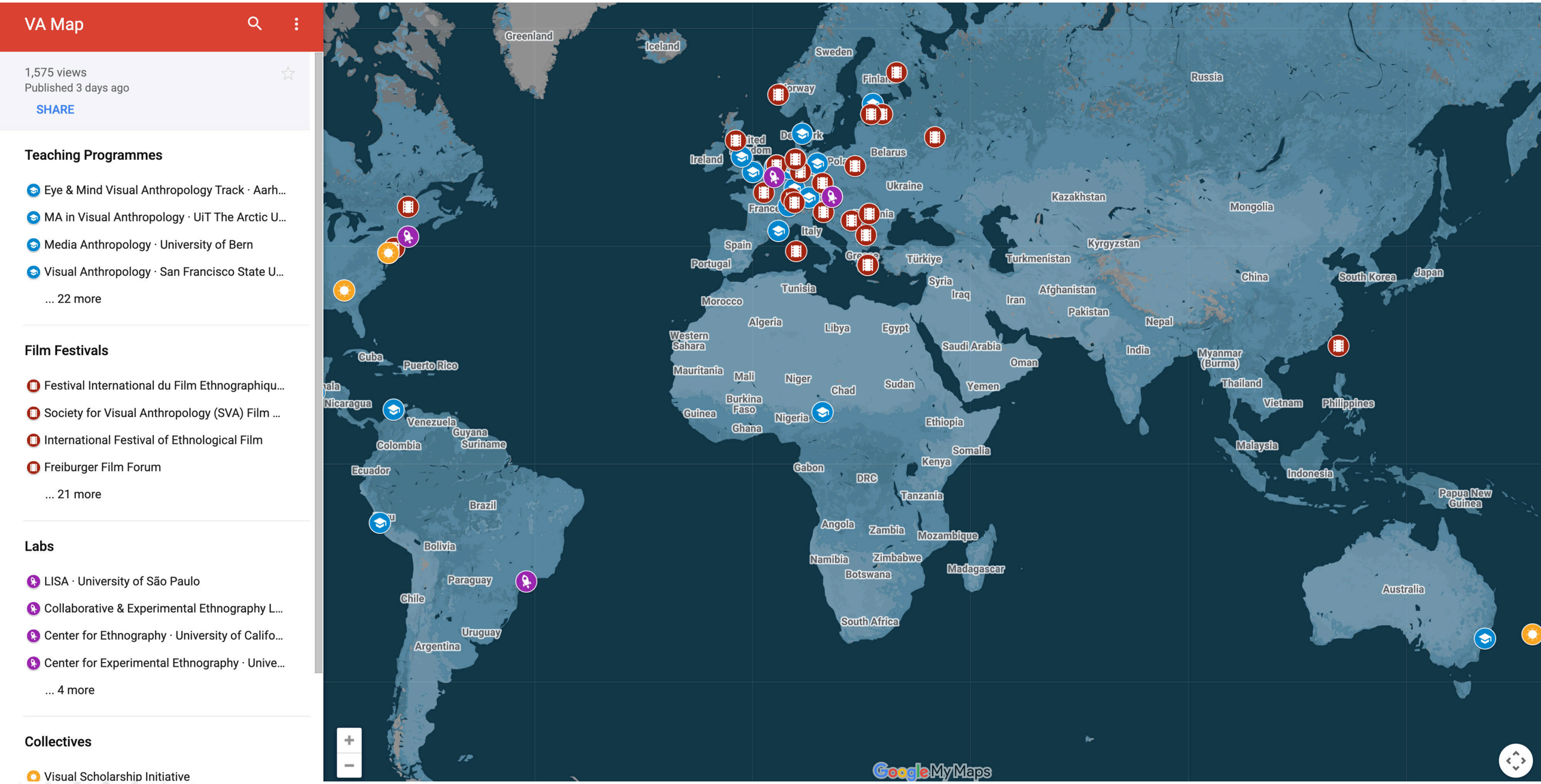
Finally, a word about our new name. "ZARE" is Romanian for skyline, sheen, and summit, an image of reach and the possibility of looking outward from a shared vantage point. It reflects our collective desire to move forward, from our original NAFA nest, into something wider and more expansive.

For the next edition, we invite your contributions, either via email or through the online form on the website. We also welcome your thoughts and suggestions as ZARE continues to grow.

Welcome back to the conversation.



COSTANZA PARIGI AT THE AUDIOVISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY SUMMER SCHOOL IN SAN COSTANTINO ALBANESE, BASILICATA, ITALY. SEE ALEXANDRA D'ONOFRIO'S ARTICLE IN THIS ISSUE.



Take a look in the “VA Map” section of the NAFA website, and more importantly, help us fill it in.

Continuity and Change in NAFA
An interview with Peter Ian Crawford

by **Carolina Némethy**; Interview cameraman: **Emil Hvidtfeldt**

Our efforts to revamp the NAFA Network newsletter into the current, emerging Zare: Horizons in Visual Anthropology magazine are intended to renew a long-standing collaboration between the CVA (Commission on Visual Anthropology) and NAFA (the Nordic Anthropological Film Association). To introduce this transition from NAFA Network to ZARE magazine, we would therefore like to pay tribute to this issue's predecessors, followed by an introduction to how we envision the magazine to unfold. These emerging changes have also rippled through from an ongoing regeneration of NAFA, bringing young visual anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers into active roles to carry forth NAFA's film festival that is Europe's oldest ethnographic film festival.

Prior to NAFA's 2025 film festival, the author interviewed Professor Peter Ian Crawford who, as readers may be aware, is both an ethnographic filmmaker and an established scholar in the theory of visual anthropology. Crawford has also inspired numerous students, many of whom became actively involved in NAFA and broader networks within visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking, such as the CVA, as well as CAFFE (Collective for Anthropological Film Festivals in Europe), among others (see, for example our VA map, www.nafanetwork.org/va-map). This article includes sections of a longer interview, the video of which will be available online.

We meet Peter on a September afternoon at the Ethnographic Exploratory in Copenhagen, where NAFA's 2023 ethnographic film festival takes place, and where numerous students gather for visual anthropology lectures and ethnographic film screenings. The room walls are covered with posters on anthropological film and 'multimodal' anthropology-related topics, and lined with shelves of anthropological books and paraphernalia; an intermingling of the old and classical with the new and emerging anthropologies. Peter introduceds the history of NAFA and its early collaborations with the CVA:

"Well, if we start with NAFA, I mean, I was there sort of from the beginning... The founding meeting of NAFA as an association took place in 1975. But I'm also kind of··· an official historiographer of NAFA [but] there had already been activities before that, three years before that, in 1972, because we have··· a ledger, a book with bookkeeping from then. But the official founding year was 1975, which was before my time. The very first festival was in 1979. We have this annual festival, and I attended that and have been there ever since for the past many, many years. Of course, not only having been the organiser of many of them, but I've been the chairman of what became our film selection committee."

Although representative of the Nordics, NAFA had long engaged with anthropology worldwide, and we were curious to know about its initial years, particularly during a time when Europe was divided, and how the CVA came about to extend this network worldwide.

"There are two things here that are relevant to talk about, at least two things. I think one aspect of that is if we go back to before 1989, before the fall of the Wall, as we say. It was difficult with Eastern Europe because Europe was divided literally by the Wall, but also in a virtual sense. Also because of the way that you communicated. It was inefficient, slow. Letters got caught by this or that service. Anyway, these were difficult times, but one of our first, very first general secretaries, and in many ways the founding father of NAFA, Heimo Lappalainen, from Karelia, had this idea that a lot of interesting things were going on in Eastern Europe, including Russia. And he made a lot of attempts to bring filmmakers from what was then called Eastern Europe to our festivals or to seminars or to various activities, and managed to persuade the authorities to give them visas to come... So that's one thing that affected the way that both I and NAFA became involved in that."

"The other, I would argue, when it comes to the rest of the world, outside Europe, was because of a close friendship and cooperation with another prominent figure - a figure of visual anthropology, Asen Balikci, who himself was Bulgarian, but actually of Turkish origin. He was born in Istanbul, and Balikci means fisherman. But anyway, he had migrated from Bulgaria at a relatively young age with his parents, and had ended up first in Switzerland, then in France, but eventually in Canada, where he had become a professor of anthropology at the University of Montreal. And he became a very important figure in what still exists, the Commission on Visual Anthropology of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, which was one of the first commissions, which are very international. That's the whole idea. It's bringing people from all over the world together concerning whatever the commission is about, in this case visual anthropology. And he was the chairman of CVA.."

"And he got a lot of support from us in NAFA in this — -he had this idea that the commission is for everyone in the whole world, and that our most important task was to make sure that all continents, all countries were represented in what was going on in visual anthropology, that nobody was left out. And he was very good at that. He was an excellent networker. He had travelled a lot in his life, but he had worked a lot together with indigenous communities. So it wasn't just countries all over the world. It was also within countries, indigenous communities, whether it was in the Arctic, where he worked himself on the famous Netsilik Eskimo series, or in Siberia. Or indeed later on, after he had retired from his position as professor in Canada — funnily enough, he actually migrated back to where he came from, to Bulgaria, where he was until he died. And when he came back to Bulgaria, he started making films in Bulgaria. He was already in his, well, certainly his late seventies then, and he made, most of the films he made there was working together with small ethnic groups in Bulgaria, groups that weren't well known outside Bulgaria. Anyway, he made one other film that was commissioned by the World Bank, which was more a sort of straight-forward documentary film about how old-age pensioners survived in post-socialist Bulgaria, because they were heavily affected by the fall of the wall, in that pensioners were relatively well off in Bulgaria until the fall of the wall.So those were the two things where NAFA, directly and indirectly, really got involved in other parts of the world, or other parts of Europe as well."

"(...) What happened with the commission was that, one thing that Asen introduced as part of this attempt to involve everybody in the whole world, was the so-called CVA newsletter, which is now being completely restructured and rethought. But in those days it was printed, that was what you had in those days, it was a printed newsletter. And the commission's most important task was to make sure that not only did we get input to the newsletter from all over the world, but that it was also sent all over the world, which was quite costly of course, because the postage costs were phenomenal. And then I became the editor of the newsletter, and my task was not only to edit it, it was actually also to send out that newsletter. And I believe we had over 1,000 subscribers. The only thing we had to do at one stage was introduce a proper subscription that people had to pay for, except if they were from developing countries, just to cover the postage costs, not to cover the printing, etc., but to cover part of the postage costs. And it was amazing, because it was really sent out to the whole world. And that's how I, that really was an important step in how I got to know a lot of people all over the world. So I really have to thank Asen for that. His efforts in all this really helped me develop contacts all over the world, literally."

Peter's story brings up the networked engagements through which anthropologists make their work possible. To our surprise, these sometimes coincidental encounters led him to participate in the establishment of visual anthropology in Kunming, China.

"This is the result of a whole series of coincidences.··· But my adventure, I would call it, in Kunming was started by the fact that two, no, more than two, a group of visual anthropologists in Germany, including my very close friend, Rolf Husmann, who in the meantime has left visual anthropology and academic life completely to be a full-time sports coach for blind

women. Another long story. But anyway, he was involved in this project in which they managed to get quite a lot of money from the Volkswagen Foundation in Germany to start up a project of developing visual anthropology in China, specifically at the University in Kunming. And then they invited people in to teach. But they also needed to have an international advisory board. And that's what I was invited to sit on. After a few years of running, they wanted to run a postgraduate course in visual anthropology and filmmaking. So I went there for, I can't even remember, a month or so, teaching about 20 postgraduate students, including relatively old members of staff who had the disadvantage of not speaking a word of English, although probably more than I spoke Chinese. But it was very enjoyable. And I met several of the students who had been through the visual anthropology course, but who were now postgraduates, including a group that we called the Gang of Four, which in a Chinese context is funny. One sadly died some years ago. But I became very close friends with that group of four, and I'm still a close friend of three of them. They've been very successful in what has become now, as you know, a thriving visual anthropology environment in many parts of China. One of them, Bao Jiang, is the person in the National Chinese Academy of Social Sciences responsible for visual anthropology. So they've really done well. And then I went back later, two years later or something like that, when we had a huge conference, to celebrate that the whole project was ending. So they organized a conference to end it in 2004."

What would you choose to work with if you were an emerging anthropologist today?

"I'd probably not go to the other side of the world because I feel increasingly uncomfortable about the way that we Europeans are going to parts of the world. But in a sense, letting them do their own stuff. I would probably definitely not engage in what would be called a 'collaborative film project' because the whole term 'collaborative' to me has become, I think, an awkward term, an awkward concept. Some of the examples of what are called 'collaborative projects', I feel quite uncomfortable with because they cover projects in which there is a kind of neocolonialism. And certainly in the sense there's no doubt who is getting most of the advantages from it. And I have this funny feeling also seeing some of the film projects or the results of some of these projects that we see in some of the films that are submitted to our NAFA festival that those that blatantly describe themselves as collaborative, I often feel are not so. And why are they doing it? If someone needs to use that label, I get suspicious. I have a feeling that there's something behind this that doesn't ring true in a sense. Having said that, I'm not saying that there aren't lots of good collaborative projects out there. And briefly going back to what I said earlier about the commission on visual anthropology, this was something that we heavily supported in the 1980s and 1990s. Especially with indigenous communities. Asen himself ran numerous workshops with indigenous communities, teaching them how to make films. But I don't think I would go to the Pacific or to the South of Africa or places like that. I would probably do anthropology at home. Perhaps with immigrants. But I honestly don't know how to answer your question."

What kind of advice would you have for young visual anthropologists today?

"Apart from finding an editor, well, I think that maybe that would be part of the advice. To really think about positioning yourself. And truly, truly find out how you're positioned in the sense of not only how you yourself see yourself as positioned, but by finding out how other people actually see you. And I think that is the problem with many collaborative projects – that this is where they fail. Maybe the reason why I'm not very comfortable with the term collaborative filmmaking, I mean, anyone who has been informed by Colin Young's ideas about observational filmmaking would know that one of his main points about observational filmmaking is how you intrinsically build up relationships with the people with whom you are filming which is not the same as collaborative filmmaking, it's something different. But where I feel that Colin really was onto something is that the most important aspect of that is the profound respect that you have to show those people that you're filming with. And I feel that in a lot of collaborative filmmaking, that respect is not there. It's something else that is driving the project. Whereas observational film, certainly in Colin Young's sense, was exactly that. It's about respecting people. It's also about — but that is Gary Kildea — about respecting the moment as he calls it. But behind respecting the moment is respecting the people, the people that you're working with. In a completely different way than what I very often see in collaborative filmmaking. And I think sometimes that is easier in a context in which you, by nature or from a starting point, have a more equal relationship with those with whom you're filming. And equal relationships are actually difficult to establish. They have to be there in a sense. Or you have to work a lot on it. Of course, over the years, I feel, and I hope they feel, because in Tromsø we've had loads of students from so-called developing countries, mainly from Africa, and some of them have become very close friends of mine. And I feel that I have a kind of equal relationship with them. But this is after, in some cases, 20 years. So I couldn't, just to carry that idea forward, I couldn't make a film about them until now. So you have to take 20 minutes to start shooting someone that I've known for 20 years. So it's tough. It's tricky, I think. But it's all about relationships. And I think that is in many ways a way of wrapping up stuff, because basically that's what anthropology is about. It's about relationships. It's about relationships between people who are going about their lives, no matter how they're going about their lives. But that includes you, because you're going about your life as well."

STILL FROM INTERVIEW WITH PETER IAN CRAWFORD

ZARE is a visual anthropology magazine

NAFA's 2025 Ethnographic Film Festival

Skopje, North Macedonia

by **Carolina Némethy**

From October 8th to the 10th, the 44th Nordic International Ethnographic Film Festival (NAFA) was held at the National Museum of History and Ethnology in Skopje, North Macedonia. The festival was deliberately coordinated with Kratfest, which took place in the town of Kratovo from the 12th to 14th of October. Together, these events formed an extended week of ethnographic film screenings and rich scholarly exchange, bringing together local and international filmmakers, anthropologists, and audiences.

The 2025 NAFA programme presented a diverse selection of ethnographic films addressing themes of migration, belonging, place, livelihood, human-environment relations, and social movements. Each screening was followed by a Q&A session with the filmmakers and an open discussion with the audience, fostering critical dialogue and shared reflection. The choice of venues, the scenic setting, and the close collaboration between the two festivals created an engaging experience with films, community, and local immersion.

In addition to the selected films, this year's festival featured a special session dedicated to films from the Sahel, chaired by Sidy Lamine Bagayoko from the University Yambo OUOLOGUEM of Bamako, Mali. The screening session included Fousseyni Maiga's The Crazies as well as *Made for Water* and *Navigate on the Sand* by the Sahel-On-Sahel Collaborative Visual Anthropology project.

The third day of the festival opened with another special session, "Experiments in Multimodal and Public Anthropology: Multimedia Websites," led by anthropologist Martin Gruüber from the University of Bremen. His presentation introduced multimedia ethnographic projects such as *Sensing Bees* and *Walking Windhoek*, alongside his ongoing research on human-honeybee relationships in Cameroon, Japan, and Germany. Of particular significance was his contribution to audio-visual research methodologies, including his recently published handbook, *Sharing the Camera: A Guide to Collaborative Ethnographic Filmmaking*.

NAFA continues to welcome innovative and experimental approaches to ethnographic filmmaking, encouraging critical and sometimes challenging discussions about what constitutes ethnographic film. For instance, filmmaker James Davoll screened his 2022 ethnographic film Tributary about covert data centres. His experimental technique emphasised a sensorial approach to push the intersection of the visual and sonic land/seascape. Reflecting on his experience at NAFA 2025, Davoll remarked (see right page):

FRAME FROM JAMES DAVOLL'S FILM 'TRIBUTARY'

Indigenous Students as Filmmakers:
A Participatory Autoethnography Project at Unicamp, Brazil

by **Alice Villela** and **Hidalgo Romero**

GIH IN AUDIOVISUAL WORKSHOP. AUGUST 2024

What happens when you hand cameras to Indigenous students navigating university life thousands of kilometers from home? At Unicamp, one of Latin America's largest universities, an innovative audiovisual workshop did exactly that — transforming a retention challenge into a powerful opportunity for self-representation. Over two years, five Indigenous students from the Baniwa, Tukano, Tikuna, and Kumaruara peoples became the ethnographers of their own experiences, creating intimate short films that reveal the complex realities of bridging two worlds. This collaborative visual anthropology project, developed by local filmmakers and anthropologists in partnership with the students themselves, demonstrates the transformative potential of participatory research — where those typically studied become the storytellers, and academic inquiry becomes a shared creative practice.

On November 21, 2017, a historic decision changed the course of one of the largest universities in Latin America: Unicamp (State University of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil), approved ethnic-racial quotas and the indigenous admission exam. As mechanisms to combat inequality and racism, and with a view to democratizing access to education, these policies were implemented in 2019. Since then, the university has welcomed hundreds of students belonging to historically marginalized groups who have always faced great difficulties in accessing public higher education. In Brazil, federal law 12.711/2012, enacted in 2012, established quotas for Indigenous and Black students in Brazilian universities.

Unicamp currently has more than 400 indigenous students belonging to more than 40 different ethnic groups enrolled in various undergraduate courses. However, the adaptation and retention of these new students has proven to be an enormous challenge. Indigenous students are generally older than others and arrive at Unicamp accompanied by their families, creating numerous financial and logistical problems. T; the food offered by the university causes them discomfort and health problems. D; differences in lifestyle and distance from their places of origin generate feelings of homesickness and loneliness, causing many students to develop mental health disorders. The vast majority of students come from Amazonian contexts, and the distance and high logistical costs make it impossible for them to visit their territories and communities of origin on a regular basis.

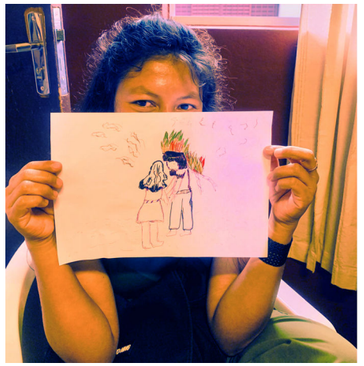
Unicamp is committed to creating alternatives and solutions to address these issues, such as support groups, retention scholarships, interdisciplinary programs, and research and university extension projects. In this context, in early 2024, Alice Villela, anthropologist and professor at Unicamp's Faculty of Education, and Hidalgo Romero, documentary filmmaker at the Cisco Laboratory, jointly created the project "Audiovisual autoethnography of indigenous students at Unicamp," an audiovisual workshop that resulted in the production of short films and provided scholarships for participating indigenous students.

INDIGENOUS TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AFTER THE FIRST MEETING IN MARCH 2024

The workshop was designed as a way to problematize the experiences of these students based on their own audiovisual ethnographies. With activities in the final stages, the course has a total duration of two years (from March 2024 to March 2026). The class includes five Indigenous students from different fields: economics, literary studies, speech therapy, physical education, and media studies. They are from the Baniwa, Tukano, Tikuna, and Kumaruara ethnic groups. Thus, the coexistence of Indigenous students has been recorded from the perspective of these students themselves. The short films resulting from this workshop present aspects of their daily lives that escape academic institutionality and are essential to understanding the type of experience being built by these students in Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil.

The idea of "autoethnography" was freely incorporated into the project as a methodological contribution and approach. Here, autoethnography is conceived as a form of qualitative research that starts from a critical analysis of personal experiences to reflect on broader social practices. It is a genre of autobiographical writing, but also a methodology and a theoretical-conceptual proposal for academic research (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). As a methodology that represents a convergence between the "autobiographical impulse" and "ethnographic analysis," it constructs interpretive narratives of silencing mechanisms by exploring biographical, political, and social aspects in writing (Spry, 2009) or in audiovisual narratives, to adapt to the project in question.

The diverse audiovisual collection that has come to be known as "Indigenous cinema" is a rapidly expanding field in Brazil and brings together films made by Indigenous authors, as well as works made in partnership with non-Indigenous directors.



TATIANE DISPLAYS A DRAWING PRODUCED IN THE AUDIOVISUAL WORKSHOP. APRIL 2024

DRAWINGS PRODUCED BY STUDENTS BASED ON THE PROMPT TO BRING AN IMAGE THAT CONVEYED THE IDEA OF BELONGING IN THEIR TERRITORY. APRIL 2024.

The first experiences of lindigenous self-representation in the country only came about at the end of the 20th century. That was when audiovisual training workshops aimed at this audience emerged, driven by two innovations: VHS technology and portable video equipment. This is the case of Vídeo nas Aldeias (VNA), an independent project created in 1986 by French-Brazilian filmmaker and indigenist Vincent Carelli.

In the first few months of the workshop, we focused on theoretical training based on the following guiding principles: 1) discussion about what constitutes reality; 2) notions of image; 3) what is audiovisual ethnography; 4) territory and belonging. During the meetings, we worked with reports, drawings, photographs, short videos produced by the scholarship recipients, and film clips. In the second semester of the first year, we began practical training, which included both practical classes on camera handling and audio capture, as well as how to conceive a film project based on the students' choice of topics of interest.

The second year was entirely dedicated to each student's film project, filming, and editing. The themes they chose reflect on issues that affect their daily lives. João, a Baniwa man from the São Gabriel da Cachoeira region of Amazonas, is an economics student and has a special relationship with food. João made a short film about food for Bem Viver. His people are known for their cuisine, especially for making a very tasty pepper. In his village, cooking is a very old tradition. When he arrived at Unicamp, he literally got sick. The food served at the University Restaurant seemeds of poor quality to him, so he starteds cooking not only for himself but for other lindigenous students. For him, the issue of quality food is central to the university inclusion of lindigenous students at Unicamp.

Dani Yepa, from the Tukano ethnic group and a student of literary studies, came from São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas. She is interested in reflecting on how the indigenous admission exam experience has changed the academic perspective of non-lindigenous teachers and students. From a reverse anthropology perspective, her objects of interest are "white people" and their form of socialization and acceptance, as well as the testimony of lindigenous students about the process of entering university. Daniela's film consists of interviews with lindigenous and non-lindigenous people living in the Unicamp space. They talk about their experience with the admission of indigenous students through the lindigenous entrance exam.

Gih, from the Tikuna ethnic group and a speech therapy student, arrived at Unicamp from the Upper Solimões River with her newborn daughter. Without her support network, she faces the challenges of being a single mother far from home. Her main problem is how to manage her time. She has great difficulty educating her daughter, studying, and working at the same time. She is always very tired and sleepy. Gih's short film follows a day in her busy routine from an observational approach and daily videos she records throughout the day.

Among all the difficulties that Andreia, a member of the Kamaruara ethnic group and a student in the Midialogia (Media Studies) course, faced when she arrived at Unicamp in 2024, the greatest was making new friends, especially among non-lindigenous students. She identifies common problems among ethnic groups and those from public schools and understands that peripheral, Afro-descendant, and lindigenous populations share the same difficulty in making friends, to varying degrees. She is interested in understanding how inequalities in Brazil are reproduced in an educational context. In Andréia's film, she visits Unicamp, interviewing lindigenous students about what it was like to make friends when they arrived in Campinas.

Karine, a literary studies student, is from the Tikuna ethnic group of the upper Solimões River, in the state of Amazonas. She grew up in an evangelical family and, although she speaks the Tikuna language fluently, her parents deprived her of experiencing some of her people's traditional rituals. At Unicamp, she meets other Tikuna students from other villages and regions who have experienced Tikuna traditions more intensely. Together, they form a traditional music group and begin to perform. In this context, she comes into contact with the traditions of her people in a very intense way, as she had never experienced before. For her, the city of Campinas became the place where she best understood her people, her culture, and herself. Karine's short film features footage of her daily life, video diaries, and archival material from her childhood and adolescence in her village, interspersed with first-person narration.

As these films near completion, they stand as more than documentations of individual struggles and triumphs — they represent a methodological intervention in how universities understand and support Indigenous students. By centering Indigenous perspectives and creative agency, the workshop challenges traditional academic research paradigms where Indigenous peoples are subjects rather than authors of knowledge. The short films will be screened at Unicamp and other universities, not simply as testimonials, but as vital pedagogical tools that can inform institutional practices and foster deeper dialogue about equity, belonging, and cultural difference in higher education. In a country with 291 mapped Indigenous peoples, these five voices offer just a glimpse into a much larger reality — one that demands continued attention, resources, and most importantly, the space for Indigenous students to tell their own stories, in their own ways.

JOÃO, DANIELA, GIH, ANDRÉIA, AND KARINE FILMING, INTERVIEWING, AND DOCUMENTING BODY PAINTING. AUGUST 2024-SEPTEMBER 2025

Visual Trust

Reliability, accountability and forgery in religious, scientific and social images

Visual Trust is a research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC, 2021-2027) and directed from the University of Barcelona. From visual anthropology, the project explores how trust and distrust are built in scientific, religious and social images. The project combines ethnography, visual analysis and audiovisual production to understand the role of images in contemporary life and contribute to a central debate in the social sciences: what makes an image perceived as credible, authentic or suspect.

Conversation with Roger Canals **PI of 'Visual Trust' ERC Project**

by **Juan Francisco Cuyás**

Juan F. Cuyás:

To begin, what was the initial idea that led you to develop the project? More specifically, what theoretical or ethnographic gaps did you identify at the time?

Roger Canals:

Thank you very much for the interview. The idea of doing the Visual Trust project was born around 2019 when people started talking about artificial intelligence and the whole debate around disinformation and "fake" images that adopted a photorealistic aesthetic. It was starting to be said that this "new" visual ecology could lead to a kind of confusion, of panic around images.

And I saw that there was a lot of debate around this supposed danger of images and a lot of fear about the eventual impossibility of discerning between "authentic" and "deceptive" images. And then I thought three things. First, that this debate about trust and distrust in images was not new but was almost as old as images themselves.

Secondly, it was a debate that was being talked about in a very abstract and generic way. I felt that this debate was not rooted in people's empirical experiences. No one had asked people what they considered a reliable image and an unreliable image, what was an authentic or fake image, or how they understood visual deception.

Thirdly, I thought that this debate was being held without images, based only on words. And then I had the idea to visually investigate the issue of trust in images, which is an issue that has always been part of the debate around images.

In other words, I wanted to delve deeper into this debate by adopting a bottom-up perspective. I wanted to know what people from different social and cultural contexts think about it and question the sometimes too-easy generalizations that are made. I wanted to think about this debate about images also using visual means of research and publishing the results.

Juan F. Cuyás:

The project focuses on scientific, religious and social images. By bringing these three areas together, were you aiming to question the usual separation between them? What did you hope to explore by placing them in dialogue?

Roger Canals:

ERC projects encourage researchers to adopt comparative, transdisciplinary and experimental perspectives, to try to make associations of ideas and perspectives of analysis that are not obvious. I could have done a project only on religious imagery, only on images in science or only on photography and digital photography and artificial intelligence.

But these projects allow you to take a riskier perspective. And that's what I decided. I said, "What would happen if we put these three types of images together?"

Because these three types of images cover what has been understood from a Western tradition as the three great spheres of culture. The religious image is the sphere of the afterlife, of belief. The social image is the image of the sphere of the human; it is the image of culture and society.

And then the scientific image is the image linked to knowledge of the natural world. I thought it would be interesting to put them in relation. Not to further reify this distinction, but to show how they are all in fact linked to each other.

For example, knowledge is produced through religious images, which also intervene in social life. We can also adopt an almost religious position in relation to certain social images. Medical images or astronomical images are scientific images, yes, but at the same time they have a social life, they participate in people's lives, and they also constitute social and imaginary relationships. Therefore, the approach of the project was an analytical experiment, a conceptual essay.

I imagined the meetings with the researchers as a collage: one showing images of galaxies, another showing an altar, another showing a photojournalism image, another showing an artificial intelligence image, and that's what it ended up being. The idea was to put into practice the principle of thinking is assembling, that is, thinking about trust in images was like assembling different images and seeing what the continuities and discontinuities are.

Juan F. Cuyás:

One of the project's main contributions, I think, is to show that visual anthropology is not only about working with the camera and thinking through it, but also about reflecting on images themselves, on the act of looking, and on the visual dimension of culture.

In this regard, how does the project position itself in the broader tradition of visual anthropology, from ethnographic cinema to more recent experimental practices?

Roger Canals:

With this project I wanted to bring together different areas of visual anthropology that have sometimes been approached separately, but that I believe are completely inseparable. On the one hand, I wanted to do a project that was an anthropology of images, studying how people relate to and through images, returning to the basic question of what an image is, and relating it to the issue of trust, which is also a very relevant concept today because we are in a crisis of trust. Then I wanted to experiment with the camera. I am a filmmaker, and I really like filming.

I wanted to make a film that takes up the long tradition of ethnographic cinema and updates it with new debates about experimental cinema, participatory

ROGER CANALS DURING THE FILMING OF CHASING SHADOWS IN GUINEA-BISSAU IN 2017

cinema and multimodality. I also wanted, with all this, to return to the theme of reflection on the gaze, to the question of what it means to look. There is this idea that looking at an image is also giving the image a meaning and imagining what could be beyond that image.

And finally, I also wanted to experiment with modes of writing and visual representation. Therefore, I wanted to do research on the image, exploring visual research techniques, reflecting on the gaze and experimenting with visual writing. That is why I wanted to make the project interact with the new currents of experimental and multimodal anthropology.

The idea was to make films that could be framed within the tradition of ethnographic cinema, but also to leave the door open for photography essays, short films, sound essays or even 360 degrees. And to understand all these options as complementary, not mutually exclusive. And there is also a very important element that I have always tried to tell the research team: Visual Trust does not have a style. In fact, I am against the category of style. I think the category of style works against research because it imposes an aesthetic and an

PUERTO-RICAN WOMAN PERFORMING A 'BEJIGANTE'. FRAME FROM ONGOING RESEARCH FILM BY ROGER CANALS ABOUT THE FESTIVITY OF SANTIAGO MATAMOROS IN LOÍZA, PUERTO RICO. EXPECTED RELEASE 2026

approach before the research itself.

Visual Trust has an ethic, but it doesn't have an aesthetic. And the proof is that the films that are coming out of Visual Trust, as well as the different visual essays or the photographs themselves, are in dialogue with very different traditions. Some films are more observational, some films are more reflective, some films are more experimental, some are more dialogic.

And I think that's very good, that within a project there is all this richness.

Juan F. Cuyás:

Visual Trust is one of the few projects explicitly framed as 'visual anthropology' to receive ERC funding. What does this recognition mean for the status of visual anthropology within the broader field of anthropology and social sciences? Do you see it as marking a disciplinary shift?

Roger Canals:

I think it is an important step for visual anthropology. There are other projects that have also been funded in international or national calls, but the fact that a project presented from the beginning as one of visual anthropology receives funding from the ERC is very good news. And it is news that indicates that the somewhat peripheral or secondary character that visual anthropology had within anthropology itself and within the social sciences in general is changing.

This change operates in two ways. One, in the sense that reflection on the image and research with images is increasingly transversal. It is almost impossible to conduct studies on advertising, on youth or on consumption without taking image into account.

But also, that researching using visual methods and technologies and visual modes of writing is a competence and an ability that is increasingly accepted as one of the things that every researcher should be able to do at one level or another. So, I think that projects like this show the validity and contemporaneity of visual anthropology. We live in a world in which there are often many generalizations, in which there are phrases that are supposed to explain very different social realities.

Anthropology is critical because it starts from concrete, lived experience and examines it carefully, showing the plurality of ways in which people inhabit and make sense of the world. In that sense, what I find particularly interesting about this project is precisely its attention to how people trust images and how they also act, relate and produce knowledge through images themselves.

Juan F. Cuyás:

I find it important not to reduce visual anthropology to a methodological approach. It is often treated as just a set of techniques, when it could instead be understood as a broader way of approaching and explaining anthropology as a whole.

Roger Canals:

Absolutely. I think that visual anthropology allows us to expand the field of anthropology itself, proposing new topics of study: specifically, the topic of images, the topic of the gaze, but also the topic of emotions, that of sensation and that of the anthropology of the senses, which are very connected. At the same time, I think that visual anthropology is a trend that is increasingly of interest to filmmakers, photographers and even designers, precisely because of what anthropology brings that is unique: this knowledge through direct experience.

Juan F. Cuyás:

Yes, yes, there are many researchers who come from very diverse fields, and this is necessary because it makes the interdisciplinary dialogue possible.

Roger Canals:

I encourage readers of this magazine to also venture into applying for projects. I think that one of the great things about ERC projects is that you can create a research team where researchers have different but complementary backgrounds. Doing long-term projects of this type, like this five-year project on visual anthropology, and being able to build a research team like the one I had – which has been a fabulous team – is very enriching. What we need to do now is for the different projects, the different departments and the different schools that are working on similar lines to establish a dialogue and, in this way, continue to promote the study of the image through the image.

Juan F. Cuyás:

For anyone considering applying for an ERC grant, what kind of strategic or intellectual advice would you offer?

Roger Canals:

The suggestion I would give you is to write the project you really want to do. That is, sometimes we think about projects more according to the format of the call than according to what we really want to do. I think that the ERC is conceived in such a way that they are original and unique projects. If we think too much about making it fit into a very specific mold, the project will be born haphazard. What I would tell you is to really do the project you want to do. Imagine it on a blank piece of paper. Take advantage of this project to experiment. If you want to make films, consider the possibility of making films. The project needs to include things you have done before but at the same time open you up to things you have never done before. Because this is the secret to having an ERC-funded project.

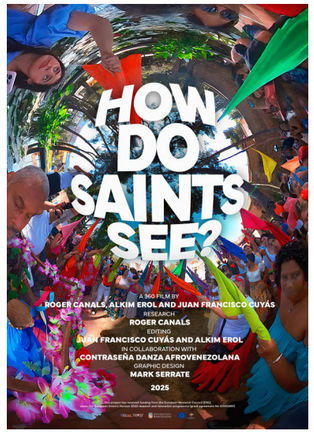
Juan F. Cuyás:

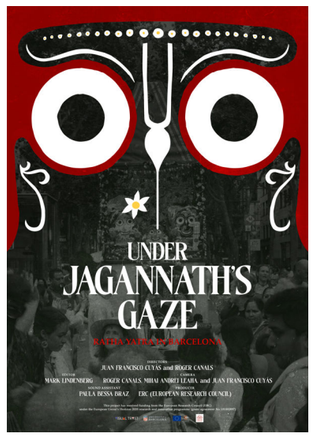
Very good, thank you very much Roger

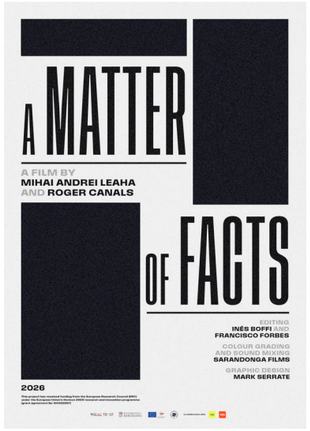
Roger Canals:

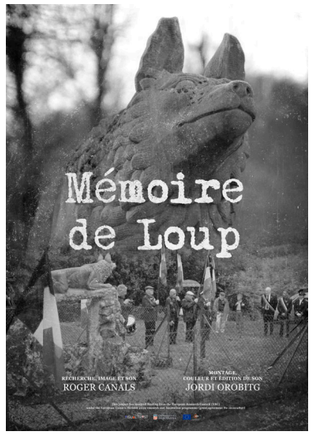
Thank you as well.

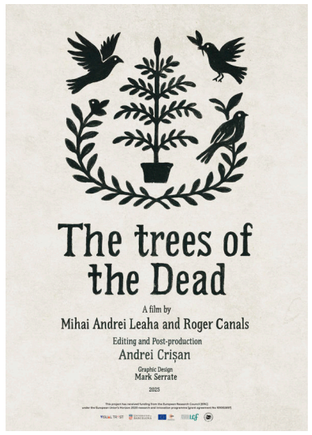
Juan Francisco Cuyás is a visual anthropologist and PhD candidate at the University of Barcelona, where he is part of the Visual Trust project.

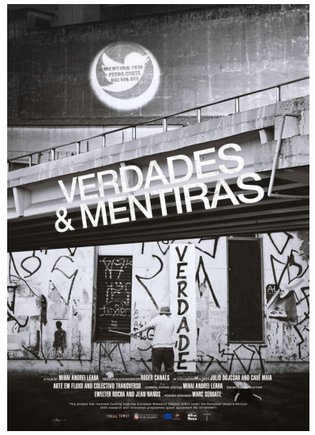


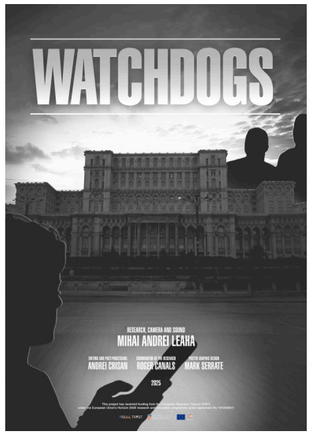


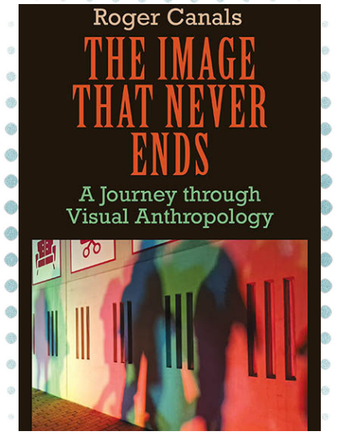












POSTERS OF FILMS AND PROJECTS DEVELOPED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF VISUAL TRUST

LISBET HOLTEDAHL WITH SUSAN WHYTE BY KNUD FISCHER-MØLLER

CONTRASTING WORLDS

Lisbet Holtedahl's ethnographic films and her contribution to the development of visual anthropology

by **Saara Waara**

> *"Our understanding of the world sprang from our safe, protected lives in Norway and Denmark. We were curious. We had a great appetite for discovering the world, but we were completely unprepared for the reality of what those notions entailed. We had no idea that we had set in motion a process of change that would transform our view of the world".*
>
> Lisbet Holtedahl, in her book "*Maine Soroa*" (2023 [1970])

NAFA, together with the film project *Madame Lisbet*, held an ethnographic film seminar in the Ethnographic Exploratory of the University of Copenhagen. The organizers were delighted to see Holtedahl's colleagues, former and present students of visual anthropology at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø, and Holtedahl's family come together. We extend a warm thank you to Barbara at University of Copenhagen for preparing the place for us.

There could hardly be a more fitting way to describe Holtedahl's career than the seminar's title Contrasting Worlds. For over fifty years, Holtedahl's long-lasting engagements in northern Cameroon and in a small fishing village in Northern Norway have shaped her career as an initiator of several collaborative projects between West Africa and Northern Norway. Beyond this, Holtedahl is a visionary, artist, scholar and an ethnographic filmmaker. Holtedahl's career as a visual anthropologist began in Maine Soroa, Niger in 1970, after accomplishing 5,700 miles together with her husband in their small Citroen 3CV from Paris to Niamey.

Niger - Norway

Holtedahl's first, what could best be described as an educational, didactic, film, *Niger-Norge* (1975) is composed of photocollage and film clips from Tromsø and Maine Soroa. With her use of sound and photographs, she teaches us about the women's and girls' roles in both places.

Holtedahl takes up the notion of ethnocentrism, partly to provoke the then-contemporary discussions she was surrounded by in Northern Norway. What she considered herself as beautiful images and experiences from Maine Soroa, she hoped to convey to the audience in Tromsø. Her efforts were received with pity towards "the poor people of Africa". Many chose to see poverty instead of beauty. Not only was her material perceived through an ethnocentric lens, but there were more challenges to come as Holtedahl continued to pursue cross-cultural communication and collaborative visual anthropology in between Europe and Africa.

At that time, the common challenge for anthropologists was to get the visual point across. Many spent their careers fighting to convey that images and film were legitimate tools for research. It was a struggle to gain recognition for the visual within a field dominated by textual anthropologists who dismissed drawings and film as legitimate anthropological methods. Moreover, it was all male, Holtedahl adds.

Holtedahl recalls her professors at University of Oslo, Axel Sommerfelt and Fredrik Barth, as wonderful and challenging, yet very serious and sometimes a bit frightening to students. They did not use images in their publications. Moreover, what Holtedahl sees as her most important academic contribution, Hva mutter gjør er alltid viktig (1987) has no pictures. Quentin Gausset asks Holtedahl, "where did the visual go?".

It was the spirit of the times.To be taken seriously one had to primarily use text. "There was sometimes a negative attitude towards pictures. My professors – they looked down upon what they called the diffusionism of continental ethnography. Like the Germans talking about the cultural items and contamination, diffusion of culture traits and all that." Despite this climate, Holtedahl was allowed by professor Arne Martin Klausen, who headed the Ethnographic Museum in Oslo, to make an exhibition of Dogon-masks in 1967. "I have been so interested in seeing and I spent hours looking at masks from Africa, you see. Somehow, I was pulled by my own greedy eyes. I love looking at people. I take great pleasure in following gestures and expressions and reading emotions – just without any other ambitions. So, this was the milk I drank in the beginning. Mostly the training we had as students of ethnography did not include the visual dimension. I felt they were not interested in my visual interests. It was like I wasn't 'pure' -maybe rather 'not focused'-) enough, not sharply concentrating enough on the analytical enterprise."

Le Chateau

Holtedahl's *Le Chateau* (2018) was screened in full and the remaining time was spent on discussions. According to Peter Crawford, *Le Chateau* is a masterpiece, but it did not come easily. Roughly ten years of passive and ten years of active filmmaking.

In much of her previous work, Holtedahl has emphasised women and gender issues, but in *Le Chateau*, as in the preceding film about the Sultan of Adamaoua Province, *The Sultan's Burden* (1993), she focuses on the elite, rich and powerful men. In Le Chateau, Holtedahl was not allowed to film Al Hajji Abbo's four wives, excluding the scenes we see in the film.

Al Hajji Abbo was not only one of Cameroon's most influential figures but also a towering presence in West Africa. Holtedahl recalls him representing military power, police power, political power and financial power. Despite being uneducated and starting his career as a driver, he was a self-made man who skillfully leveraged societal upheavals to advance his own interests.

For a very brief synopsis, it can be said the film follows

the construction of Abbo's palace in the outskirts of Ngaoundere during the 2000s. More broadly, it touches on issues such as power, land acquisition, relationships between the Occident and West Africa. According to Holtedahl, it shows how people get rich in Africa, what it means to stay rich, and how necessary it is for rich people to deal with the West.

Holtedahl recalls that Abbo was very difficult to work with. He was a man of ambiguity and of two personalities. One was friendly and challenging, while the other was unpredictable and nasty.

Crawford asks a rather surprising question, "Did Abbo consider you as a friend?"

"He certainly considered me as a close friend but as a female one, and his ideas about women do not correspond to the occidental, concepts. So, when we are together alone – as you see in the last scenes – the way he behaves, he confesses a lot of things about his wishes and thoughts. He asks me things about the white people. It's very obvious that I am his friend. He's behaving very warmly, friendly and trustworthily. I have always been able to trust that he will be there; to allow me to get into his house and participate in events but he's really an unpleasant person, often. He has been very tough with me, in a way that has been painful. He says himself that he deliberately frightened people so that he could make them do what he wants. He has shouted at me to get out with the camera and after four years of filming and in spite of a signed contract that implies my right to show the future film publicly and on TV, suddenly refused the film ever to be screened on TV and publicly. He would only authorize screenings in schools for educational purposes. I felt I just had to continue filming as if nothing had happened. After some years, I got accustomed to the, indeed, tough working conditions.

Little by little, we became friends. I started to understand that he had two personalities. The other person I liked very much because he was challenging, he showed concern for me. He asked questions about my husband and my family and my health, and my problems with the university. He supported me in the crisis. Somehow, he consoled me. Like saying, this is how it is in Africa, this way of behaving."

Crawford adds that the question about friendship is an important one. How we work with people in the film, whether it is easier to make films with people if you are friends, if you sympathize with them, one way or another. You like them for what they are doing or are. "I'm asking because there are examples in documentaries and in ethnographic films of filmmakers who have almost made it their hallmark to film people who they in principle hate. Like Nick Broomfield, the British documentary film maker who is trained by our mutual friend Colin Young. Several of his films are made about people he dislikes, yet he manages to portray them in a way that doesn't show them as nasty but with respect. He made a film about (Eugène) Terre' Blanche, who was a white supremacist in South Africa and it was amazing how he could make such a nice portrait, honest and revealing, not praising him but representing him as a human being, I suppose."

"Is it easier to make a film with people we like or is it easier with people we dislike?"

Holtedahl and Abbo could have been described as friends. However, in the film Abbo makes it clear that friendships between an African and European are not possible due to different cultural views. That a European is interested in an African if there's money in question. This is how Abbo interprets his relationality to his European colleagues and employees. Not through friendship, but through common financial interest. However, Abbo's friendship and friendliness with Holtedahl didn't match this explanation.

My wonder remains. How did Al Hajji Abbo come to place his trust in her and allow her to follow him nearly everywhere with her camera. Who gets to be welcomed into the most intimate sections of life? Who is trusted and who establishes a strong mutual liking and bond in between their protagonists? Surely not everyone. The skill of gaining access has been just one of Holtedahl's many qualities throughout her career. She dares to touch, she dares to come close, to encourage and yet address critical questions. She has placed her life in danger several times pursuing this path. While watching *Le Chateau*, I couldn't help but ask, did Abbo agree to be filmed in order to become a film star in his own film? All this despite the potential risks and consequences the exposure might bring along? He wanted the white people to learn about his richness and intelligence, but what else did we learn from *Le Chateau*?

According to Holtedahl, this experience taught her more than she could bear about power in Africa. "It's been so painful and tough to fulfil the work that I wouldn't recommend any anthropologists to take the risks". In spite of this, she believes the film is more important than she believed, and that we don't see descriptions of how richness develops day-to-day in Africa. "We always get the information about Africa from the Norwegian point of view. It's linked to

westerners – not from the bottom-up descriptions so to speak."

Collaborative film-making

Holtedahl is asked whether she considers her films collaborative, but there is no simple answer to this. Holtedahl herself wouldn't call *Le Chateau* collaborative, but based on a reciprocal relationship. Also, as a continuous fight. "A struggle. It was a humiliating yet gratifying process with many compromises···The collaborative elements were very violent. It was collaborative in a sense that he [Abbo] accepted me and excused himself when he went over the top. He had more power in a local setting but he felt continuously that I could potentially have more power than him. He wanted the film for his mausoleum but at the same time he also felt it was dangerous for him. It was a tough game."

Crawford adds that in the wider context, collaborative film making has been a bit of a buzzword for twenty years and it is often regarded as a rosy red thing that we are doing because we are nice people and we want to collaborate but that it is much more complex than that. "I think a lot that's been called collaborative is not collaborative or is so in a way that almost can be considered as neo-colonialist. On the other hand, I think observational film-making and a lot of films that you have made are definitively within the ideas of observational film making. Colin Young once said that all observational film is collaborative. Because you can't make these kinds of films without getting into close relationships with people. Not necessarily friendships as we talked before but a close relationship."

Continuing the discussion problematising collaboration in anthropological filmmaking, Lisbet reflects on her own intentions.

"The idealized version of my own ambitions throughout my academic career has been to problematize the practice in our Occidental world, of what we call a collaboration. I feel that everything I've tried to do as a politically engaged academic, is to criticise and correct and oppose colonial aspects, as I see them. What was strange and foreign to me was the academic community and how academics behaved. I observed anthropologists more eagerly than anybody else. Anthropologists use the word collaborative, but in my eyes, don't practise reflexive analysis of their own gaze, own look upon others. I screened the film on Ersfjordbotn on television and my anthropological colleagues criticized me for having exposed the bad taste of the fishermen's housewives. With all their China and plastic flowers. They said that it was an ethical problem and I should not have been allowed to screen it. It's about patronizing, even though you don't see it yourself. When you are an eager anthropologist, and start talking on behalf of others, you very quickly jump into an assumption that you can estimate what way you can take care of others. This kind of tendency is practiced all over in the development institutions. They want to take care of [the subjects] and they use the word collaborative."

"Luckily, when this discussion arose, I received letters from these women saying it is the first documentary they see on TV about women in coastal villages. The women were very proud of it and they could feel that the film allowed them to feel stronger as actors outside the village. They could breathe."

"For me, in my whole academic career, what has been the greatest experience of success is the happiness of the women from that village."

At the end of the seminar, Carolina Némethy asks, "If you were to do visual anthropology today, as someone young, what would it be? What would you do differently? As technology has changed so much, the world is so different."

"I would be an activist for sensuality and erotics, and the violence of technology" are Holtedahl's first reflections. Due to today's technology, we can get closer. Holtedahl refers to a recent ethnographic film made by Albert Osbæck Milking (2025) about the use of technology at Danish cow farms, following lives co-produced by cows, humans, and machines. "This is in itself a field and how do we become insensitive? That's something I would like to work on··· In my childhood I spent summers at the farm of my father's family. It was a tiny and poor farm. Some eight cows and four pigs and a horse. I remembered all these fantastic things, when I saw Albert's film. And I remembered the cows of the nomads that were in my surroundings through fifty years in Africa. You see these beautiful animals. In the film, these beautiful cows go into machines, the steel arms going in and out of their bodies and throwing the contents of their bodies around. It's an incredibly visual thing. Very violent. I think as anthropologists we don't deal enough with sensuality and more intimate emotions, our own and other people's. We look for the social organization, but weare often scared of touching different aspects of lives and relationships. I would like to push it."

Visibility, Resistance, and Indigenous Image Politics in Colombia

by **Pablo Mora Calderón**

Although I was born in Bogotá, my family comes from the Cundiboyacense region, an Andean area in the center of Colombia that was profoundly affected by Spanish conquest and colonization, to the point that the Indigenous communities once organised into large chiefdoms had disappeared by the end of the seventeenth century. My work as an undisciplined anthropologist and an uncertified filmmaker has been devoted to research, audiovisual creation, and sustained engagement with collectives and communities across different regions of Colombia. Documentary film practice, I found, was a strategic form of cultural and political expression.

Like many anthropologists of my generation, and without claiming to be exhaustive, I owe a great deal to several figures who marked decisive ruptures in my formation. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla shook me out of the functionalist North American anthropology of the 1970s by foregrounding conflict, exclusion, and the ethnocide of Indigenous peoples in Latin America. The Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda helped me commit to combating intellectual colonialism and proposing a situated science through Participatory Action Research. Jay Ruby (2000) showed me the dilemmas of visual anthropology within the broader crisis of ethnographic representation in the 1990s, encapsulated in his well-known distinctions between speaking for, speaking about, speaking with, and speaking alongside others. And the Brazilian anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho (2002), who opened paths toward a postcolonial ethnography centered on the narration of subaltern voices. From there, I gradually moved towards collaborative anthropology, understood not only as a mode of knowledge production but also as activism: a practice that raises epistemological, ethical, and political questions, including those of authorship, intellectual property, and the persistent questions of for what and for whom, forcing me to rethink my own position amid the erosion of the notions of voice, authority, and authorship.

When I began, I assumed that visual anthropology already existed as a clearly defined theoretical and analytical field, and that entering it would be relatively straightforward. I was quickly frustrated. The debates of the 1980s and 1990s revolved largely around the legitimacy of a subdiscipline daring to claim a place within Anthropology with a capital "A." This coincided with a moment in which technologically mediated visuality was rapidly expanding as a social and cultural force. Numerous texts appeared on new visual regimes linked to the construction of modernity, while within anthropology the controversy centered on whether visual anthropology could be considered a discipline with its own challenges or merely a technical tool, as Margaret Mead (1975) famously argued. For Mead, field anthropologists should carry a film or video camera in the same way they carried a notebook, to record what she once called the "last Mohican." Her program was less one of visual anthropology than of improving ethnographic data collection through audiovisual technologies.

Others suggested that visual anthropology might develop a particular method. Yet very few were willing to formulate it as a discipline with its own ideals of knowledge construction and its own epistemological relationship to the world, capable of producing knowledge through narratives not dependent on writing. The debates were fragmented. There were celebrated experiences, particularly collaborations between anthropologists and professional filmmakers in the United Kingdom and France, but no forceful formulation that could claim: here is a discipline, with all that such a claim implies within academic culture and the training of the social sciences.

Amid this lack of clarity, one ends up advancing blindly, cultivating a terrain that involves not only thinking about images or the audiovisual but also producing audiovisual narratives themselves, an endeavor that remains deeply controversial within academia. At the time, visual anthropology was largely conceived as an analytical project: to account for what societies do with the images they produce, why they produce them, what meanings those images hold, and the contexts in which they circulate. This amounted to a broad analytical program concerned with visuality, the audiovisual, and the sonic as cultural phenomena.

I largely bypassed these purely academic discussions and instead developed a practice in which written reflection and audiovisual production advanced in parallel. I adopted a position that departed from disciplinary convention, finding that audiovisual media allowed me, without abandoning anthropological commitments, to circulate knowledge within a society increasingly disengaged from writing. This led me to the conviction that knowledge can be produced from non-scriptural perspectives, beyond semiotics or debates about the visual sign's capacity to signify. In other words, I came to understand that images can metonymically condense cultural meanings rather than requiring exhaustive analytical unfolding through text. For that reason, I quickly abandoned the need to situate myself within visual anthropology as a formal field, even as–paradoxically–I began teaching visual anthropology at several universities.

My work consisted, if the expression is permitted, in rendering invisible the enunciation that comes from a centered disciplinary discourse and instead amplifying meanings produced outside the discipline. This has to do with the capacity for resistance and counter-hegemonic creation of groups that have not had a voice, or more precisely, whose voices have not circulated through academic spaces. I recall my student years, when I brought artisanal fishermen, with whom I was working at the time, into university seminars. At the time, this was scandalous. Today it is commonplace. But this is not about the old and naïve ideal of "giving voice" to those who lack it. Rather, it is about constructing a political scenario in which others can not only occupy a democratic space but also intervene, dispute, and assert their own versions of the world through other discourses. This is what I have sought when accompanying processes such as those in the sacred Indigenous mountain range of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, particularly in contexts of media transfer or appropriation by the communities themselves.

From a political standpoint, questions of authorship and expertise generate persistent unease. Is what an external analyst says somehow more "true" than what people articulate in their own terms? I do not believe so. The contemporary turn in representation driven by

the force of social movements has decisively unsettled expert knowledge, often beyond academic debate and within arenas of political struggle. Alongside this critique, other approaches have emerged that deploy audiovisual tools from different epistemic positions and political sensibilities. Historically, collaborations between academics and social movements have produced decisive results, from Participatory Action Research to the methodologies of solidarity movements. At the same time, a broad movement of filmmakers, anthropologists, and others has taken shape, working beyond disciplinary affiliations to make visible diverse forms of self-representation.

This is not a condescending gesture toward "the other," allowing them to speak in a world of exclusion and prejudice. This is a struggle. A struggle over meaning, unfolding amid deep inequalities and differences. At certain moments, images that for long could not emerge clearly can do so now. And this does not refer exclusively to audiovisual discourses or to media technologies and platforms that render them visible, but to images in a broader sense: as metaphors for cultures, discourses, and political decisions made by social actors in specific historical contexts. This struggle takes the form of conflict because hegemony exists. The interests of certain social sectors exist, are firmly entrenched, and easily fuse with the existing media landscape. They present an appearance compatible with democracy while expressing profound exclusions. These struggles for eloquence are not only battles over hegemonic spaces, but also over the construction of alternate spaces, not necessarily or exclusively counter-hegemonic.

Most Indigenous audiovisual makers are part of ethnic movements which, despite differences and nuances shaped by their communities and organizations, understand communication as a strategic dimension of their intercultural politics. The works they produce function as instruments for negotiating utopias and emancipatory desires related to sovereignty, citizenship, economic development models, and cultural policy. In this sense, Indigenous communicative experiences cannot be understood as mere artistic exercises or representations of reality, but as strategies of political agency oriented toward the defense of life and the transformation of prevailing "civilizational" paradigms.

Indigenous authors and their works have compelled critics and specialists to reconsider audiovisual practice in its relation to morality, politics, and aesthetics. Although these works have not fully entered the canon of Colombian cinema, their vigorous existence is increasingly recognized.

As Georges Didi-Huberman (2018) has noted, today Indigenous communities appear to be exposed through the media and are thus more visible than ever. They are the objects of documentaries, tourism, markets, and reality television. Yet this exposure is paradoxical: communities are exposed precisely because they are threatened –in their political and aesthetic representation and in their very existence. The question, then, is how peoples might expose themselves without exposing themselves to disappearance.

Over the past three decades, Indigenous communities across the Americas have asserted the right to create and recreate their own images. Demands for access to audiovisual technologies, control over representation, the return of images, self-production, and networks of exchange converged into a continental agenda grounded in resistance and self-determination. Since then, the growing production of Indigenous images has intensified the crisis of Western representation while amplifying Indigenous presence in contemporary struggles over sovereignty, citizenship, development models, and cultural and communication policies.

At the same time, as visuality has expanded through photography, cinema, the internet, and electronic images, Indigenous peoples have moved from concealed resistance to strategic visibility. Yet this has not meant total exposure. Practices of concealment persist, not only as the result of hegemonic exclusion but also as deliberate refusals of visibility, opacity grounded in political will rather than imposed invisibility.

The transition from mechanically reproduced images to electronic images has entailed radical epistemic transformations. Indigenous communities took nearly a century to acquire dominion over technical images; today, as digital visibility expands uncontrollably, new risks emerge. The condition of visibility itself is unstable. Ther are things we cannot see, and the things we do see are not to be trusted.

There is no consensus on this transformation. For some Indigenous thinkers, technologies are tools to be appropriated and domesticated. For others, such mastery is dangerous and requires critical antivisual strategies to avoid "contamination." Electronic images are volatile, ephemeral, and contingent. As José Luis Brea (2002) has shown, they have altered the ontological, technical, and cultural status of the image, privileging circulation over stability and volatility over permanence.

The introduction of information and communication technologies into Indigenous worlds over the past three decades has disrupted representational codes, perceptual regimes, imaginaries, and social practices. The impact recalls the electrification of Europe in the early twentieth century. As Aby Warburg warned in 1939, instantaneous electrical contact erodes mythic vision and symbolic thought. Whether contemporary digital connectivity produces a similar rupture in Indigenous territories remains an open question.

The task, then, is for anthropology to explore, from multiple perspectives, the vast terrain of aesthetic and political practices that emerge at the intersection of Indigeneity and visuality. This intersection involves attitudes, perceptions, techniques, desires, and power relations that shape unequal regimes of seeing and being seen. A critical agenda must address colonial wounds and symbolic violence, while also foregrounding Indigenous acts of resistance, refusal, and reconfiguration through which visual, sonic, ritual, and performative practices recover political force and dignity.

The condition of possibility of the visible rests on a crisis of the truth of the visible. In a time when the audiovisual is omnipresent, anthropology must continue asking what cinema and art reveal –not only about others but about the limits of seeing itself.

Translated from Spanish by Andrew Simon Tucker

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Immersion, Inspiration and Collaboration: 2025 Audiovisual Ethnography Summer School in San Costantino Albanese (Basilicata, Italy)

by **Alexandra D'Onofrio**

In late July, the small Arbëresh town of San Costantino Albanese came alive with cameras, conversations, and creative energy. From 21 July to 3 August 2025, it hosted the Audiovisual Ethnography Summer School: two weeks in which students, researchers, and practitioners explored the power of sound and images within a landscape steeped in history.

The Summer School formed part of Il borgo dei suoni (The Village of Sounds), an ambitious initiative promoted by the municipality and supported by the Basilicata Region. The project aims to revitalise inland towns by nurturing cultural production: bringing together festivals, educational programmes, and artistic encounters that foster exchange and, ultimately, invite people to rediscover these places. Alongside the Summer School, Il borgo dei suoni featured a vibrant music festival, new publications, and workshops developed with the local primary school.

Founded in the 16th century by Albanian refugees, the town remains a living centre of Arbëresh culture: the language is spoken in the streets, Byzantine rituals animate the church, and musical traditions continue to shape local identity. Nestled in the Basilicata region - for long a magnet for anthropologists, writers, ethnomusicologists, and artists - the area carries a rich legacy of research. In the 1950s, Ernesto De Martino documented its distinctive cultural practices, contributing to an enduring fascination with the region's expressive forms.

Today, despite challenges such as emigration, depopulation, and aging, the town thrives with life during holidays and summer, when returning residents fill its squares, participate in its well-preserved customs, and reconnect with its striking landscape.

The Summer School was organised by the Rome-based publisher Squilibri, known for their dynamic promotion of publications on traditional music and their commitment to safeguarding intangible heritage, a commitment made evident through their organisation of public events and projects dedicated to its development and protection.

The scientific committee and coordination team behind the Summer School brought together an exceptional group of scholars and practitioners. From the University of Milan, staff from the Audiovisual Ethnography Laboratory represented by Nicola Scaldaferri collaborated with Lorenzo Ferrarini and Alexandra D'Onofrio from the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester. Both Scaldaferri (originally from San Costantino Albanese) and Ferrarini have spent many years researching this region, work that culminated in the influential book Sonic Ethnography (Manchester University Press, 2000). The entire team shares a strongly collaborative approach to audio-visual ethnographic research—one that bridges social sciences with the arts, documentary with fiction, and fieldwork with artistic experimentation. This ethos of openness and co-creation infused the spirit of the entire programme, shaping a two-week experience that felt both rigorous and boldly inventive.

The teaching staff was headlined by Pat Collins, who offered an intensive four-day masterclass. Widely recognised as one of Ireland's most prolific directors, he has made more than 30 films spanning documentary and dramatic genresfeatures. His presence helped shape the foundations of the research and audiovisual work that followed, grounding it in key principles of filmmaking—commitment to content and craft, attunement to feeling beyond mere seeing, responsibility toward the people and stories portrayed, and an understanding of sound as a vital expressive force.

The shorter 1-day workshops were delivered by an inspiring group of scholars and artists: Leandro Pisano, a curator, writer, and independent researcher exploring the intersections of art, sound, technoculture, and the political ecologies of rural and marginal territories; Rossella Schillaci, a documentary filmmaker and anthropologist whose work blends observational film, new media, VR, and animation to create immersive narratives; Magali De Ruyter, an ethnomusicologist currently developing creative multimedia formats in pedagogical settings; and Marco Lutzu, an ethnomusicologist, filmmaker, and curator specialising in multimedia and immersive projects. Adding to this rich mix, Steven Feld joined remotely to present a workshop and screening of his film on the Accra puppeteer JC Abbey. From the local University of Basilicata, Francesco Marano contributed a session retracing the history of visual anthropology in the region—an invaluable reminder of the long-standing research legacies that continue to shape Basilicata today.

Supporting the teaching team were two colleagues from the University of Milan: Giovanni Cestino, who supported the teaching activities, and Shan Du, who documented the entire Summer School. Meanwhile, Lorenza Scaldaferri —also originally from San Costantino Albanese—coordinated logistics and oversaw the web communication strategy, ensuring that daily activities flowed with ease.

The Summer School attracted widespread interest through an international open call, resulting in an impressive number of submissions from around the globe. The 12 selected participants were awarded full scholarships—including attendance, accommodation, and meals—and collaborated in pairs to produce six original pieces of work:

“Ver e taral” by Dinesh Raj Upadhyay (Nepal) and Costanza Parigi, a short film capturing the serenade traditionally performed in the village on the eve of a wedding.

Sadaf Biglari (Iran) and Noemi Filetti, who created an immersive virtual tour documenting the making of taralli, the local savoury biscuits.

“Bird, What Have You Seen Today?” by Anna Natia Japaridze (Georgia) and Tiziano Locci, a poetic short film celebrating the Arbëresh polyphonic singing tradition.

“Tutto un bosco” by Panos Achniotis (Cyprus) and Giovanni Astorino, an intimate portrait of a local shepherd and his relationship to the surrounding landscape through the memory of his father.

“Richiami” by Chiara Cavarzan and Paula Bessa Braz (Brazil), a multimedia installation gathering testimonies from emigrants reflecting on their ties to the village.

“The Sound of Wood” by Emelie Isaksen (Sweden) and Margherita Vita, a sensory exploration of two local instrument makers and their deep connection to the wood they work with.

In addition, Shan Du’s documentary “Out of Frame” offered viewers a behind-the-scenes look at the Summer School’s most significant moments.

Each evening came alive with screenings of films by Feld, Collins, Schillaci, alongside rarely seen footage from local archives. Guest filmmakers Gianluca and Massimiliano De Serio joined as well, enriching the discussions around poetic portrayals of the local music customs. The screenings drew large local audiences, many visibly moved by the chance to encounter familiar faces, landscapes, and traditions on screen, as well as to see stories from other corners of the world.

During the final two days, participants presented their completed works in an open event dedicated to the community—a heartfelt moment of shared appreciation, dialogue, and return. The sense of connection between guests and residents was palpable, making the final showcase one of the most meaningful moments of the programme.

The impact of the Summer School extended well beyond San Costantino Albanese: several of the final works have already been selected for Ethnofest—the Athens Ethnographic Film Festival—testifying to the creative strength and international resonance of the participants’ films.

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HORIZONS IN VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY