

# MULTIMODAL ANTHROPOLOGIES

## Essay

# Multimodal Ambivalence: A Manifesto for Producing in S@!#t Times

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For those of us located in the Global North, 2021 began with a barrage of media content documenting a coup attempt in the United States, the United Kingdom's split from Europe after four years of Brexit deliberations, and talk of mass vaccinations amid the uneven global devastation of COVID-19. For the three of us, with our connections to South Asia, Latin America, and West Africa, current Euro-American media-tized stories were supplemented by ongoing narratives of state-sponsored sectarian violence in India and Brazil, police brutality in Nigeria, and "Southern" stories related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

In each of these cases, social media has fostered contradictory participatory potentials. On the one hand, social media has the potential to foment the creation of shared and iterative conspiracy theories, disinformation, and right-wing plots. From QAnon to antimask and antivaccine discourses to anti-immigrant "Leave.EU" campaigns in the United Kingdom, the circulations of images, texts, and videos have sowed the seeds for an amplification of white supremacist violence, a rejection of public health guidance, and a rearticulation of virulent nativist political thought in an age of capitalist dispossession. On the other hand, just as multimodal making and circulation strategies on social media have played a role in fomenting right-wing violence and homicidal disinformation, they have also played an integral part in social movements towards justice. Grassroots mobilizations of images, videos, and texts collocating collective imaginaries towards various projects of recognition and solidarity in and across Chile, India, Thailand, Argentina, and Puerto Rico, just to give a few examples, demonstrate the ways in which the "multimodal" plays an important role in generating the potential for visualizing, articulating, and conceptualizing different futures, both online and off.

It is in this context that we take up the mantle as editors of the Multimodal Anthropologies section of *American An-*

*thropologist*. On the one hand, we are thrilled to continue the important work of supporting, facilitating, and eliciting multimodal anthropology projects that "dive into a broad range of methods for doing our work" and that strive "to understand and define what counts as knowledge production in increasingly expansive ways" (Chin 2017). Indeed, in the last several years, anthropologists have embraced multimodality as an opportunity to collaborate and invent with our participants, to create alternate pathways for the circulation of anthropological knowledge, and, more broadly, to rethink, recalibrate, and reimagine ethnography as the epistemological grounds for our discipline.

For those already working within the strictures of visual anthropology, multimodality has offered the opportunity to bring various forms of technical and conceptual expertise to the multimodal table. Indeed, a growing number of anthropologists and those working in adjacent disciplines have affirmed and expanded on the potential of extratextual forms of representation, communication, and theorization and continue to look for guidance and potential collaborators. For those bent towards an activist and engaged anthropology, multimodal approaches build on earlier imaginings of a "shared anthropology," only now there is the potential to meet our participants in the shared realms of social media and together create projects that circulate more widely and, we hope, help to address the pressing social and political challenges of our time. In short, multimodal experimentation has been and continues to be an important growing edge of the discipline, and one we hope to serve in our tenure as editors of the section inaugurated under the editorial leadership of Deborah Thomas and curated in wonderful and unanticipated ways by Samuel Collins, Matthew Durlington, and Harjant Gill.

However, even as we are excited about engendering and enacting a multimodal anthropology, we are also ambivalent about its trajectory, given the broader media-saturated world-historical context in which we are living. We are particularly wary of noncritical engagements with digital communications technologies, which have been fetishized as the foundational medium for multimodal work. An uncritical engagement with the new digital tools at our disposal can easily aid in reproducing and sustaining the "bad habitus"

of capitalism—as it reifies projects and structures of inequality (Takaragawa et al. 2019), reinscribes and propagates problematic representations of the so-called Other, and incites extreme forms of speech (Pohjonen and Udupa 2019) that fuel xenophobic nationalist projects while also potentially overshadowing other nondigital and embodied forms of multimodal knowledge production. Our ambivalence is grounded in a recognition that the illusion of democratic circulation of media in the digital realm makes it easy for us to either embrace a romanticism that the digital will somehow save us (Noble 2018) or amplify an anxiety that the digital itself is the root cause of rupture (rather than the imperial and colonial histories that are the foundations of our shared global condition) (Udupa and Dattatreya, under review). Algorithmic orders, in short, make it easy for us and those with whom we are in close conversation to fall into a never-ending loop, mostly anchored in events unfolding in the Global North, that reproduce ahistorical and geographically limited understandings of the present.

*Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines ambivalence as the “simultaneous and contradictory attitudes or feelings (such as attraction and repulsion) toward an object, person, or action.” Paying attention to these contradictory affects as they are linked to objects, persons, ideas, and so on helps us to orient ourselves differently to the world (Ahmed 2006). An orientation to multimodality that takes seriously one’s mixed feelings reminds us that narratives that paint the digital world as a democratic space or that offer opportunities to simplistically “even the playing field” are dangerous fictions. An embrace of our ambivalence towards anthropology, we suggest, helps keep us honest about tendencies within the discipline to reproduce liberal assumptions, unreflexive understandings, and colonial frameworks even when our practices are reimagined on different grounds. As such, we depart from Ciara Kierans and Kirsten Bell’s (2017) ableist theorization of anthropological ambivalence as a “bi-polar” register that pits moral imperatives against relativist ones. Instead, our turn to ambivalence as a methodological and ethical stance is an embrace of what Sara Ahmed (2021) calls “killjoy commitments” to engage in world-making that begins with an apprehensive but hopeful recognition of the unequal worlds we inherit and our positions in them. Part of our hopeful killjoy commitment is to constantly remind ourselves that any multimodal endeavor we dream up must be contextualized in the broader digital proliferation of content and its fraught political potentials.

For us, an ambivalent multimodal anthropology “stays with the trouble” (Haraway 2016) and perhaps even makes trouble. Rather than pivoting on false binaries, an ambivalent multimodality recognizes and critiques the ways in which the digital (re)produces neocolonial forms of extraction, exclusion, inequality, and representational problematics. Yet, an ambivalent multimodality doesn’t necessarily stay at the level of critique or recognition; it also seeks to open spaces of hope and speculative possibility. An ambivalent multimodality allows us to utilize the detritus of capitalist technoscience

and encourages us to hack its latest advances to invent new pathways for shared representations, all the while staying with the reflexive recognition of knowing that we are, in multiple ways, complicit. It helps us produce work that contends with the fact that neither us as anthropological makers or the technologies we use are outside the frame of imperialism and capitalism. Ambivalence, we suggest, is a particularly productive techno-material-affective register and political stance that holds the potential for helping us move past the problem of reproducing a “stir in the same old anthropological frame” (Minh-Ha 1992) that promotes avoidance strategies when it comes to contending with the larger structures of power that shape the ways in which we work and the objects/tools we work with.

This short essay—written as a manifesto and an invitation—engages with an ambivalent multimodality in three different frames: the visual, the collaborative, and the sensorial. Our manifesto is a means not just to participate in the vibrant theorization of multimodality that has unfolded over the last several years in the discipline but to embrace an ambivalence towards its promise and potential and to offer an invitation for you to do the same. In short, our embrace of “the manifesto” as a rhetorical device is as much a call to action as it is about theorizing the affordances and limits of multimodality in the present conjuncture. In what follows, we briefly mark the ways in which an ambivalent multimodality has the capacity to draw our attention to the different problematics of doing ethnography in the contemporary moment while recognizing, simultaneously, the tremendous opportunity it presents for us to imagine anthropology on different grounds. We believe that when we account for those problematics in creative-critical ways—including the ways we are deeply embedded in and complicit in them—we open speculative possibilities and potentially enact anthropology otherwise. We conclude this short essay by discussing the experiments we will take up to create a different sort of review process for this type of work, one that is transparent, dialogic, and guided by the key tenets of our manifesto.

### UNSETTLING VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Our vision of an ambivalent multimodality builds on Collins, Durrington, and Gill’s (2021) interrogation of the colonial frameworks that continue to inform visual scholarship and ethnographic filmmaking and the opportunities that multimodality offers to disrupt them. They state in their farewell essay that they are “encouraged by the opportunities multimodality provides for reframing disciplinary canons and foregrounding scholarship that does not fit into feature-length documentary-conventions, that are authored from the margins, and that “celebrate diverse experiences and cinematic sensibilities, especially as the technologies and formats evolve and we rush to update our collections.”

Yet, to decolonize anthropology and visual scholarship means not only that we embrace multimodal experiments that challenge existing taxonomies of ethnographic media but also that we sustain an ambivalence regarding these

projects as we do so. Such a move necessitates that we engage with existing genres of media forms by becoming more attentive to the formal language and technical elements of production. All too often, anthropologists eager to use cameras have focused on gathering content and producing work that leaves problems of aesthetics, technique, and form unattended, uncritiqued, and/or undertheorized. We contend that to make meaningful interventions, we need to consider how the formal aspects of media work are intrinsic to how meaning is produced, the ways in which taxonomies are (or aren't) successfully challenged, and whether and if the qualities that make media forms distinct from writing are successfully mobilized. Here, to be a visual ethnographic maker, whether for our own individual projects or as facilitators or collaborators, requires a rigorous exploration of how and why we are using visual equipment and how we might structure our nontextual arguments or inquiries to challenge existing ways of seeing.

Relatedly, we must fearlessly quell the iconophobia (Castaing-Taylor 1996) that has characterized this subfield and, indeed, the discipline more broadly and embrace aesthetics as an element of multimodal work that “can be used to reconfigure questions, generating ways of knowing that resist translation but exist in productive tension with other knowledge forms” (Grimshaw 2011). In other words, we call for an attention to multimodal work as both a method of anthropological inquiry *and* its product. This process requires us to approach technology—new and old—with ambivalence. We must avoid taking for granted the media technologies we use and break with the allure of the always “user-friendly” and “intuitive” form these objects increasingly take. Inevitably, the scaffolding of these intuitive and easy-to-use interfaces creates a technical materiality that not only helps us frame the content produced but delimits the possibility of thinking through how something can be said, explored, and contested.

From drones that help normalize and reproduce a new militarized surveillance god's-eye view to social media platforms that prompt us to compulsively share what's on our mind, new-media scholar Lev Manovich (2001) reminds us that the computer (and any other technological object, for that matter) is asking us to follow the mental trajectory of its designer. This mental trajectory is not divorced from military, surveillance, and other capitalist interests; it is also not divorced from other systems that perpetuate inequality based on a designer's or developer's own racial, sexual, gender, and ableist aporias. We have witnessed scandal after scandal related to technologists who reproduce technological racism under the guise of neutrality and innovation (Benjamin 2019). Each intuitive system is entrenched in capitalism's long history of militarization and the surveillance of nondesirable Others (see Brown 2015). Tech objects materialize these systems, helping ease their reproduction with a click of a button and through the mediations they produce. We've seen the creation of light sensors for soap dispensers that could not recognize darker skin tones or algorithms that

consistently reproduce pornographic violence against Brown and Black women or self-driving cars that don't detect and stop for darker people crossing a street. We've also seen that those who obtain value and recognition for “innovative technological solutions” to global problems seem to consistently be whiter and more affluent, even if they might not actually be the ones “making” these objects or even if their solutions don't seem to have made any significant dent in the myriad global inequalities we face. As we approach our own media-making tools with ambivalence, let's reframe the ways of seeing, hearing, and interacting that are sold to us as intuitive and suspiciously neutral.

Herein lies the importance of hacking, of experimenting with new ways of using new and old media technologies, in order to develop and deploy a multimodal language that is attentive to the formal while being necessarily flexible. After all, no matter how sophisticated our tools become, they work through their coupling with the human. We heed Odell's (2019) call to activate a form of image production that reflects “resistance-in-place.” For Odell, to resist in place is to make oneself into a shape that cannot so easily be appropriated by a capitalist value system. In making ourselves unrecognizable to the needs of productivity, we can revive and reconfigure older tech, becoming radical bricoleurs who appropriate and hack capitalist technologies in ways they were not designed for and commandeer techno-praxis to create these new shapes.

Let's also embrace the poor image, which Steyerl (2009) characterizes as one that “mocks the promises of digital technology” for it reminds us of the violent and accelerated circulation of images that is part of audiovisual capitalism, a capitalism that banks and trades on our attention. Many of us work in areas of the world or with communities that live on the other end of the so-called digital divide, where landlines coexist alongside dial-up internet cafes and non-smartphones. In the collaborative spirit of multimodality, new technological assemblages that resist-in-place are there for us to make with our interlocutors. Let's move towards producing what Glissant (1997) argues is a “right to opacity,” a means to represent as “that which cannot be reduced” to Euro-Western demands of transparent knowability. Let's produce works that offer “an aesthetics of accountability” (Ginsburg 2018) by developing formal elements of visual media that “prioritize the relationship of the film to the subjects who appear in it,” and who might have made with us.

### THE ETHICS/POLITICS OF COLLABORATION

An ambivalent multimodality recognizes that collaboration, one of the cardinal potentialities of a turn to extratextual engagement, is fraught and complex and shot through with multiple dynamics of power. As Savannah Shange (2016) writes, collaboration in anthropology is a term/concept we should readily associate with the discipline's history of aiding and abetting colonial and imperial projects of governance, present-day state violence, and the neoliberal university's capacity to co-opt our political impulses towards its own goals.

The questions of who we are collaborating with, to what ends, and under what conditions are necessary “killjoy” questions (Ahmed 2021). These questions force us to confront how a project we conceive of with others might, in its enactment or circulation, produce the conditions for various forms of harm, some of which in our digital era are beyond what we can imagine, anticipate, and inform our collaborators about (Stout 2014).

As importantly, explicitly formulated collaborative projects that don’t take into careful account the future ownership and circulation of collaboratively generated material and the capital its movements generate unequivocally have the potential to reproduce an extractive colonial anthropology. It is imperative to collectively and iteratively ask how images, videos, and other forms of shared knowledge could be utilized in present and future projects. But even more crucially, we suggest that it is important to start with an ethic that whatever is collaboratively produced under the banner of research has, at the very least, the potential to be mutually beneficial on a number of vectors (Dattatreya 2020). Dwight Conquergood (2002) describes this move as one that entails engendering a “caravan” of shared socio-political and economic interests. Conquergood’s use of the caravan as a metaphor is particularly poignant when we consider collaborating with/ eliciting the participation of those who are economically, socially, and politically positioned differently than we are and might even be placed at risk by participating in our projects. If we are inviting people to take the risks associated with sharing their time, their efforts, and their labor, it seems important that discussions around the political, social, and economic value of a shared endeavor—beyond participation stipends or the good feeling of sharing space together—are had explicitly and early on (Nakamura 2008). Otherwise, the journey the caravan implies only includes some in its potentials while decidedly leaving others out.

As importantly, we need to take account of how collaboration might work as a form of defense, a kind of shielding tactic or means to deflect responsibility. As Claire Bishop (2012) argues, in art worlds the evocation of participation or collaboration—particularly when projects involve the dispossessed, the vulnerable, or the excluded—can and does short-circuit necessary critiques regarding the political and aesthetic resonance of these projects. Similarly, in anthropology, “collaboration” can offer a way to deflect difficult questions that creative production with others generates, functioning instead as a ready-made explanation for technical shortcomings, clichéd aesthetic reproductions, and limited engagements with the political. For multimodal collaboration to matter, ambivalence around its promised potentials must collectively explore the ways in which making together affords opportunities for “study.” For Moten and Harney (2013), “study” refers to the intellectuality people take up in their everyday lives in response to the circumstances they inhabit. An ambivalent multimodality engages with forms of study already present on the ground to critically and creatively find ways to create together. Crucially, this process is

ambivalent because it doesn’t simply yield to the intellectual ideas and aesthetic concerns of our interlocutors because they seemingly represent a unique, ontologically exceptional way of seeing, nor does it impose our particular frameworks for seeing onto a collaboration. Rather, it creates the crucible for deliberation and disagreement that allows for multiple reflexive and imperfect forms of expression to emerge.

An ambivalent multimodality also acknowledges that collaboration and creating together are not always possible in the ways we want or imagine. Recognizing moments of refusal, the limits of what and how we can or cannot make together as well as what we can and cannot say in a project is a productive pathway to produce ambivalent multimodal work. Considering the limits of collaboration, as well as the inevitable mistakes, misunderstandings, and imperfections of collaborative processes, even “bad” collaborations can be generative of critical questions and forms. What shared processes are being named when we evoke collaboration or participation, and what processes are left invisible? How do we think about instances when an interlocutor tells us it is not worth their time to collaborate even as they are still willing to appear in the project? How do we track the ways that a refusal leads to new introductions or unforeseen pathways?

Another register to think about the importance of refusals in collaborative projects is with regards to representational refusals: What to do with things that emerge in processes of making together that are not meant to be written or made visible? Where does working around and with those limits take us? Audra Simpson’s (2007) notion of “ethnographic refusal” has inspired us to dwell in the ambivalences of collaboration and to see the encounter with a limit or refusal as a moment of creative possibility. For Simpson, ethnographic refusal is characterized by a “calculus of what you need to know and what I refuse to write in” by knowing there are limits to what we ask and what one can say in a project. Much like Glissant’s (1997) call for a right to opacity, the basis of refusal seems to us a promising starting point for creating together. An ambivalent multimodality embraces the production of work that begins with knowing there are limits to what we can ask and expect from our collaborators, limits to how and in what capacity we can make together, and limits to what we will ask and represent. An ambivalent multimodality recognizes that our collaborations and processes of making together don’t cease to be vertical as we work to make them as horizontal as possible. An ambivalent multimodality rejects producing work that represents our interlocutors and collaborators—and their knowledge—as legible in a bid to move away from the extractive history that our discipline is built on and the hubris that assumes information, data, access, and knowledge are there for us to obtain. Moments of refusal when we seek to create together can lead us to other frames of representation as we move past the typical collaborative or participatory genres dominant in our discipline that are used to render our interlocutors and collaborators knowable. Reaching an ethnographic limit and staying there, as Simpson reminds us, allows our

collaborators to exert dominion over representations that can cause them harm. “Rather than stops, or impediments to knowing, those limits may be expansive in what they do not tell us,” and these refusals “tell us something about the way we cradle or embed our representations ... they critique and move us away from statist forms of recognition” (Simpson 2007, 78). In turn, they allow us to think otherwise about what collaboration and co-creating can become.

### SENSORIAL POTENTIALS AND PITFALLS

We envision a multimodal anthropology that recognizes and engages with sensoria and its mediations as a site of domination, struggle, and resistance. Rather than taking up a multimodal exploration of the senses that centers relativism as its *de facto* Boasian approach or that imagines diversity as a key vector by which to think with and through the senses, we are interested in the ways that power mediates sight, touch, hearing, and taste—or any other sensorial configuration therein—and offers space to dwell on the potential to disrupt its workings. Here, we are marking the sensory in its mutually constitutive meanings as “the senses” (sight, sound, etc.), “to sense” (to feel and experience desire), and “to make sense” (to understand/make meaning), which acknowledges that our senses are never unmediated but are linked to long histories of imperial production and circulation that situate what counts as curious, creative, and desirable and quite literally changes what and how we see. An ambivalent anthropology relies on our dedication to learning to sense (with others) anew. It requires us, in the words of Tina Campt (2017, 8), to attune ourselves to the counterintuitive “haptic frequency of vibration” that moves and connects us to those who may have been silenced and submerged in colonial histories of visual making and archiving. It requires a process of retraining that forces us to seriously ask and re-ask ourselves: through what practices can I begin recognizing my colonized sensory perceptions, what am I unable to perceive, and how do I work with my own body in order to perceive my surroundings differently? What emerges out of these exploratory processes is not necessarily an end product but rather the start of an iterative exploration that continues to uncover new sensorial pitfalls and potentials. Instead of shying away from the politics of aesthetics and pleasure that are part of the work of doing sensory ethnography, an ambivalent multimodality dwells in this tension. An ambivalent multimodality encourages us to not just re-attune our sensoria and take seriously multisensorial knowledge but forces us to recognize in ourselves and our audiences the deep and ongoing colonization of our senses that may actually be doubled by the fact that we might accrue excess capital if we just leave these sensory pitfalls uncritiqued.

In centering a critical and ambivalent approach, we advocate against a crude engagement with the senses. While we join in the important Anthropocenic call to re-attune our senses to the landscapes and worlds we inhabit—or, in other words, to start looking around rather than ahead (Ingold 2011; Tsing 2015)—we recognize that the work of

sensorial re-attunement or sensorial engagement is not a self-evident process. As the successful circulation of sensorial media work in film and art worlds and the promise of sensorially immersive virtual reality show—which was initially (and ironically) defined as an empathy or compassion machine—merely mobilizing the sensorial does not in and of itself produce a political or decolonial intervention. In fact, the reinvestment in sensory approaches may more than likely reproduce the colonizing gaze by holding fast to the binary power asymmetries symbolized by the demarcation between those in front of and behind the camera. Ginsburg (2018), for instance, has argued that the sensory turn has actually stymied the slow, painful process by which ethnographers have finally understood that part of what ethnographic film and multimodal scholarship must do is reveal its “aesthetics of accountability” by making visible relationships, vulnerabilities, and, indeed, the ambivalences of being part of ethnographic projects that are, however ethically considered, sensorially fraught.

An ambivalent anthropology requires us to recognize the sensorial as a rich form of historically situated knowledge. Sensory anthropologists have critiqued the “ocularcentrism” of Euro-Western epistemologies, which has placed both literal and figurative primacy on the eye over all other senses. David Howes (2004), for example, offers a way to break out of ocularcentrism by recognizing the relatedness of the senses in other historical/cultural contexts. That is to say, while each of the senses provides their own kind of information, they are also entangled and together influence how we can know the world. Even our sense of sight, as Christopher Pinney (2004) reminds us, is part of embodied practices of “corporetics,” given that all of our culturally situated senses work together to help us make sense of that which hits our corneas. But even here, a recognition of bodily knowledge and sensory co-mingling within cultural contexts might serve as a fetishized colonial reinscription without recognizing that the senses are embedded in relations of knowledge-power. For instance, in Pinney’s (2004) work on *darshan* (the vision of the divine associated with Hindu ritual practice), his understanding of the corporetics of seeing and being seen are rooted in a fundamentally Euro-Western curiosity around savarna (upper-caste) Hindu practices that emerged in the nineteenth century as part of an Orientalist project in Europe. Cultural difference, in this framework, always takes as a starting position a Euro-Western way of feeling and sensing and then incorporates knowledge forms that are not Euro-Western but are still tethered to its historically situated curiosities (Zurn and Shankar 2020). For the Western observer, savarna caste sensibility is an acceptable curiosity that becomes a stand-in for all South Asian ways of seeing/being, following in the age-old need to understand the cultural system of the bounded, typological Other. Here, the very act of theorizing the senses is predicated on the powerful asymmetries tethered to our particular cabinets of curiosity and requires re-excavation if we truly want to push forward the process of decolonizing and recognizing

the value of multisensorial knowledge forms that go beyond the primacy of the Western eye.

These sensorial pitfalls mushroom as our projects circulate ever further afield from the moment in which they were produced, reaching audiences who are likely to attach “attenuated meanings” to our participants in ways that can slot them into historically constituted racialized colonial positionings of “Third World,” “underdeveloped,” “impoverished,” “helpless,” and so on (Shankar 2019). In fact, when the sensorial is left uncritiqued and is allowed to function as if our sensory experiences are somehow universal or that the work of sensorial re-attunement is easily achieved—especially if aided with particular technologies—it is almost inevitable that multimodal ethnographers will traffic in new forms of “imperial pleasure” as we produce, circulate, and consume on digital platforms. The work of Deborah Poole (1997) is especially instructive towards this end, in her reminder that the kinds of images that continue to accrue value in the West are linked to long histories of racist production and circulation that make the possibility of deriving new kinds of sensory pleasure extremely difficult. This is why an ambivalent approach to the senses requires a constant vigilance and challenge against the primacy of the Western eye, which has served to subdue other sensorial forms of knowledge so integral to communities outside of Empire and that has cast other forms of knowledge (think of touch, smell, or taste) as sites of mere pleasure. In this very act of ambivalence, we might harness the political impetus the sensorial affords and successfully convey sensory knowledge that can help develop its decolonial potential on a diverse array of platforms and gallery spaces.

If sensory knowledge is refracted by the power differentials embedded in questions of curiosity and pleasure, it is also refracted by the powerful determinants of training/education. Here, the question of what and how we sense can never be separated from the questions of who is making the multimodal projects we consume and how we make sense of the creative potentials associated with these projects we consume (with our senses). Hamid Dabashi (2015) argues in “Can the Non-European Think” that the history of colonization required that colonizers position everyone outside of Europe as without intellectual histories and without the capacity for higher-order thinking. Part of this process was justified by devaluing forms of knowledge that emerged out of different sensorial practices. The same might be said for creative practice as well. If Euro-Western praxis allowed for a perception of “abstract” creativity as somehow transcending history (in, for example, work like that of Jackson Pollock), the colonized were tethered to culture, perceived as unable to produce “high” art precisely because they could not transcend their cultural, regional, ethnic, or racial positioning. Even today, the previously colonized are conscripted into this politics of creativity that almost always requires that their sensorial imaginaries “reveal” something about their cultural worlds or provide a safe experience of difference to an elite neocolonial audience still eager to derive plea-

sure from a voyeuristic gaze into their lives (if they would like their art to sell, that is). An ambivalent anthropology, therefore, pushes us to recognize the sensorial pitfalls linked to questions of who can be creative, in what way, and why, and to really consider what it truly entails for an outsider to a sensorial regime to attempt to represent knowledge that they themselves will always have a limited or partial experience of. An ambivalent multimodality can force us to pause when we start to derive too much pleasure or too little pleasure from particular multimodal projects in order to reflect on how we are implicitly understanding or interpreting the creative practice/approach/style of those who create. Following Mirzoeff (2011), we might begin by asking, “Who has the right to look?” and continue by asking, “Who has the right to sense?”

In sum, we are interested in thinking through how a multimodal approach might offer an opportunity to explore the senses and the sensate as knowledge-matter that is not only a part of a localized ecology but become materialized traces that are mobilized, contained, or suppressed within neocolonial state-supported structures of feeling and circulated through the transnational networked media publics that we, along with our interlocutors, traverse—digital divides notwithstanding. The multimodal anthropology we advocate for aligns with our interlocutors’ sensorially grounded struggles. It finds ways to support and share their projects or, at the very least, uses their presence to rethink what our projects might entail, as Faye Ginsburg (1995) argued over two decades ago in her discussions of the parallax effect. The spirit of ambivalence also allows us to find fruitful our reckoning with the incommensurability that occurs in the sensorial encounter between us as ethnographer-makers and our interlocutors. After all, while re-attuning or training our sensoria towards “stories told in otherwise muted registers” (Hustak and Myers 2012) is indeed an important endeavor, we must also recognize there will be limits to these processes. Dwelling in this incommensurability, embracing “not knowing” (de la Cadena, 2021) when engaging with our interlocutors’ sensorially grounded struggles, and taking seriously the fact that something will exceed our own acculturated—maybe even our re-attuned or retrained—sensoria can be a productive line of flight that could lead us into spaces of resistance-in-place, or, as de la Cadena states, “it would continue and yield unexpected possibilities and the unexpected as possibility.”

For de la Cadena (2021), “not knowing” is a way to think together in the presence (physical or not) of our interlocutors. Embracing “not knowing” can ground our praxis on a new terrain that encourages us to recognize forms of knowledge and experience that exist at the limits of our usual representational practices. In other words, to take multisensory forms of knowledge seriously, we can’t be afraid to explore beyond processes of translation, interpretation, and representation (Alvarez Astacio 2021). We must find ways to resist our urge to make sense of sensory worlds by placing them in facile stories of curiosity, pleasure, and creativity. What

does it entail to bring forth in our multimodal endeavors that which we know we can't experience and that which we don't have the tools to access even as we acknowledge these phenomena are real and felt by our interlocutors? How does one bring forth that gap, that excess and incommensurability that are part of these sensorial encounters? How can we move past the impulse for the need interpret and thus represent that which escapes our sensoria? What new openings can this approach allow? How do we visualize, hear, and feel a sensorial limit?

### AN AMBIVALENT INVITATION

Multimodality offers the potential for rethinking method and form, ways of connecting, relating, and creating with others. It is, in Collins, Durlington, and Gill's (2018) words, an invitation to step into the worlds of digital (and analog) making and the proliferation of content in online (and offline) spaces and carve opportunities to make with others, those who could be imagined as para-ethnographers (Marcus 2016), whose projects run parallel to our own. Taking this one step further, multimodality produces a way to participate in and support the efforts of various justice movements—as politically engaged makers and scholars.

Yet, as we have argued in this manifesto, an ambivalent multimodality pushes us to question techno-aesthetic approaches to doing ethnography as an unexamined and overly celebrated "good." In this manifesto, we underscore the imperative to engage with a broader capitalist "digitalogy" in which myriad potentials emerge but from which only some profit and where disinformation of all sorts proliferates in support of regressive agendas. Moreover, we suggest an anthropological mobilization of multimodality that doesn't contend with its own "bad habitus" when it comes to gendered, racialized, and classed complicity risks reinscribing a liberal anthropology that simply retreads extractive and imperial ways of seeing in shiny new ways. With all of this in mind, we extend an *ambivalent* invitation for you to join us in producing meaningful interventions in S@!#t times.

We are in the process of assembling a short playlist on the *American Anthropologist* website to give you a sense of the kind of multimodal work that is attuned to the register of ambivalence. We invite you to engage and think with these pieces and propose something novel to us that you would like to explore. Finally, we are experimenting with an open peer-review system modeled after art-world "crits" that begins with an openness to dialogue at the early conceptual stages of a project and holds, at its core, what Elizabeth Chin (2021) has described as an ethos of radical generosity. We hope this model, which draws from previous work to reimagine the peer-review process that centers feedback as a reciprocal process (Nolas and Varvantakis 2019), will actively shift how we imagine the process of peer review in the future, calling for a more processual, humane form of knowledge production that eschews the elitism from which many of our academic tools, protocols, institutions, and distribution channels have emerged. As you consider joining us in engaging

ambivalently, feel free to email us. We'd be happy to think through your projects with you.

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