

On hybridisation.

Three exercises in the crossbreeding of anthropology and photography.

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Short bio:

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English summary

Drawing reflections from the author's experience of close collaboration with photographers, this piece presents three projects representative of different but complementary ways of putting anthropology and photography into dialogue. The first one is the work *Delta* (2014-2022) that Camilla de Maffei developed through in-depth field research in the Danube delta in Romania; the second project is Lorenzo Vitturi's *Caminantes* (2017-ongoing), an exploration through images and matter of the artist's mixed heritage connecting apparently unrelated places such as Venice and Peru; the third example is *Dialect* (2020-2023), by Felipe Romero Beltrán, both a photographic series and a performative act exploring the indefinite state of suspension that migrant bodies are subjected to while waiting to be admitted into the receiving society. Through an analysis of these artistic practices, some common threads emerge, ways of thinking and making that bring the work of the photographer closer and closer to that of the anthropologist. In this piece, we ask ourselves what can be gained from such a disciplinary juxtaposition, especially regarding a possible renewal of anthropology.

Keywords: anthropology, photography, hybridisation, fieldwork, methodology, theory.

Résumé français

Tirant des réflexions de l'expérience de l'auteur en matière de collaboration étroite avec des photographes, cette pièce présente trois projets représentatifs de manières différentes mais complémentaires de mettre en dialogue l'anthropologie et la photographie. Le premier est l'œuvre Delta (2014-2022) que Camilla de Maffei a développée à travers une recherche de terrain approfondie dans le delta du Danube en Roumanie ; le deuxième projet est Caminantes (2017-en cours) de Lorenzo Vitturi, une exploration par l'image et la matière de l'héritage mixte de l'artiste reliant des lieux apparemment sans rapport tels que Venise et le Pérou ; le troisième exemple est Dialect (2020-2023), de Felipe Romero Beltrán, à la fois une série photographique et un acte performatif explorant l'état indéfini de suspension auquel sont soumis les corps des migrants en attendant d'être admis dans la société d'accueil. L'analyse de ces pratiques artistiques fait apparaître des points communs, des façons de penser et de faire qui rapprochent de plus en plus le travail du photographe de celui de l'anthropologue. Dans cet article, nous nous demandons ce que peut apporter une telle juxtaposition disciplinaire, en particulier en ce qui concerne un éventuel renouvellement de l'anthropologie.

Mots clés: anthropologie, photographie, hybridation, travail de terrain, méthodologie, théorie.

H1. Introduction

The more or less direct influx that humanities and social sciences have had on art production over the last decades is well known at this point, at least for those who have the habit of hanging out at art shows and biennials. In particular, after what Hal Forster (1995) baptised the “ethnographic turn” or the “quasi-anthropological paradigm”, contemporary art practices have opened up to theories and approaches borrowed from anthropology. We have subsequently witnessed an increasing merging of the two disciplines' respective ways of working (Schneider & Wright, 2013). The free adoption of field research methods, commitment to long-term projects focusing on socially- or politically-engaged themes, collaborations of various kinds with local actors, the stress put on the relationships generated by these encounters more than on the final artwork: without entering now into a review of the critical voices that this recent drift has risen, that research is not a prerogative of science anymore, but has entered the art world through the main door, is now an undeniable fact (Rikou & Yalouri, 2018).

If anthropological thinking and ethnographic doing have served well as a source of inspiration for artists, what art can offer anthropology in terms of disciplinary renewal is more complex. In this piece, I concentrate on the specific contribution of photography beyond its more obvious - and a bit hackneyed too - function as *aide-memoire* of the ethnographer and accessory documenting tool to illustrate fieldwork results (Mjaaland, 2013). Is there a margin to visually experiment in anthropology? And if so, can such experimentation pave the way for a renovation of the very practice of anthropology, both in the field and afterwards? Can the “subversive potential of photography” (Wolbert, 2000, p.338) provide anthropology with new ways of thinking, making and narrating?

In order to reflect on these open questions, this piece presents the work of three photographers with whom I have collaborated in various roles. Notably, I analyse three projects that are fitting examples of different ways of putting anthropology and photography into dialogue. Before describing them in detail, it is essential to specify that none of these works has been conceived explicitly intended to produce anthropological knowledge, nor have any of the artists expressed overt ethnographic ambitions. I chose to write about them because each one, in its specific fashion, highlights ways the two disciplines can meet and collaborate at different stages of the research project, identifying areas of

contact and crossbreeding where something new might emerge. Perhaps this “something new” characterises for being not merely photographic nor fully anthropologic, or ideally for exceeding the limits of both disciplines - if we ever felt the need to stick to them, given that, as James Clifford showed long ago, “the boundaries of art and science (especially the human sciences) are ideological and shifting” (Clifford, 1988, p. 118). The common threads that emerge by dissecting the practices of the involved artists allow for a reading of the resulting artworks through an anthropological lens. However, more importantly, they hint at how photography can contribute to anthropology, helping answer the question of “what can be gained from such a juxtaposition” (Schneider & Wright, 2013, p. 2).

H1. Three photographic projects

*H2. Delta (2014-2022)*¹

Camilla de Maffei’s exploration of the easternmost corner of the European Union, the Danube Delta in Romania, started with an assignment. After completing that job, nonetheless, she felt attracted by that remote and incredibly vast stretch of canals and wetlands. She wanted to know how life could be in what she initially saw as an impenetrable maze. During her five-year field research, she has experienced the passing of the seasons in a harsh environment, learned to orient herself in an apparently unreadable landscape, and built relationships with its people. Overcoming the initial sense of uprooting, loneliness and lack of communication, she could find the right questions to ask to understand the place: How does one inhabit this labyrinth? How can I represent it? Key to her approach was resuming and expanding the methodological and theoretical framework she and I had previously tested during a collaborative project in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010-2011). Called *The Visible Mountain*², it had been envisioned as a hybrid experiment from the very beginning: a photographer and an anthropologist, working side by side, each one having distinct, specific goals in mind but sharing a common research objective and being willing to make each one’s tools and languages available to the other (Borelli, 2014). In *Delta*, de Maffei reclaimed her interpretation of ethnography – made of random conversations, field notes, and psycho-geographical maps – to build a complementary body to the images that has become an undetachable part of her work. In the resulting book³, the photographs she took and the texts she wrote complement each other in a non-hierarchical manner because “photography arrives to a certain point and can tell certain things, and writing arrives to another point and tells other things”⁴.

¹ https://camillademaffei.com/portfolio_page/delta/

² https://camillademaffei.com/portfolio_page/the-visible-mountain/

³ To virtually leaf through the book, see <https://vimeo.com/733942156>

⁴ All direct and indirect quotes reported in this article have been extracted from unrecorded conversations or email exchanges that the author maintained with the artists unless otherwise indicated.



Figure 1: Camilla de Maffei, *Delta*. All rights reserved.

H2. *Caminantes* (2017-ongoing)⁵

The second project explores Lorenzo Vitturi's mixed heritage through images and matter, connecting apparently unrelated places such as Venice and Peru. In a photographic and sculptural series initiated as a personal journey to reconstruct his family background, glass fragments from the island of Murano, representing his paternal legacy, blend with earth and fabrics from the Peruvian desert and the Andes where his maternal roots lie. Formally, *Caminantes* follows the path marked by the artist's previous work in *Dalston Anatomy* (2014) and *Money Must Be Made* (2017)⁶, both visual readings of two urban spaces undergoing significant transformations – in London and Lagos, respectively – mainly employing sculptural collages product of the assemblage of the most varied and often perishable - hence their inevitable transience - objects. This well-established technique serves a dramatically different purpose in his current process: a profoundly intimate journey into his own history driven by the intention of investigating the complexities of the dynamics of cultural hybridization. Despite the undoubtedly personal character of the project, as the research advanced, multiple links to subject matters of societal significance, such as old and new colonialism, land ownership and property relations, and the cultural weight of human artefacts, have emerged. A fruitful dialogue with anthropological theory has consequently been established – and my role here has been to act as a sort of consultant - providing a prism through which retrospectively analyse and further develop the sociocultural implications of this work. Its narrative component has also been enhanced by including in the creative process interviews with family members and texts of which Vitturi takes care himself: this way, the artistic process merges with autoethnography.

⁵ <http://www.lorenzovitturi.com/caminantes/>

⁶ Browsable at <https://vimeo.com/79300928> and <https://vimeo.com/242239946>



Figure 2: Lorenzo Vitturi, *Caminantes*. All rights reserved.

H2. *Dialect* (2020-2023)⁷

The third example is a photographic series and a performative act through which Felipe Romero Beltrán deepens into the indefinite state of suspension that migrant bodies are subjected to while waiting to be admitted into the receiving society. Notably, the images show former unaccompanied minors from Morocco hosted in a reception centre in the city of Seville as they reenact their movements across external and internal borders, including those represented by the laws and bureaucratic constraints governing Otherness and belonging. The subjects are caught in an administrative and existential limbo, that moment of suspension that follows their coming of age, when they are no longer entitled to the official protection the receiving state grants to minors and are therefore left undocumented, being not yet eligible for what in Spanish immigration bureaucracy is known as a residence permit for *social rootedness*. In this case, my intervention came as a *posteriori* commentary as a migration scholar, contributing to the project's dissemination with my theoretical equipment. The assignment was to produce a text for the book (2023) that spoke in a dry and almost mechanical tone to evoke the rigidity of law and bureaucracy vis-à-vis the performing bodies portrayed in the photographs. What was required therefore was a “knowledge that involves engagement with emotions, materials, the body, and the senses” (Rikou & Yalouri, 2018, par. 2) that could render in writing a sensorial image of the administrative apparatus.

⁷ <https://feliperomerobeltran.com/Dialect>



Figure 3: Felipe Romero Beltrán, *Dialect*. All rights reserved.

H1. Common threads

At first glance, these three projects may share little, as their topics and aesthetics diverge significantly. However, during the multiple conversations I maintained with the three artists, I began to appreciate numerous common points, besides the obvious fact that I, as an anthropologist, have been involved, more or less directly and to different extents, in their development. The more I analysed them, the more some central themes that current literature on art and anthropology has brought to the debate appeared pertinent here. In the following sections, I will review these common threads concerning each of these works.

H2. Defining photographic practices

For a start, it is remarkable that the three photographers unanimously reject a clear-cut definition of their work according to pre-established disciplinary categories. If Romero Beltrán had initially identified his approach as documentary photography, he now admits that the limits of these categorisations are becoming more and more diffuse, making him feel more comfortable with the somehow out-of-fashion but more elastic term of *straight photography*. De Maffei adamantly refuses any definition of photographic work. What moves her is the narrative behind the images, which requires that approaches and techniques adapt and mutate according to the story the photographer wants to tell. Categories only get in the way of photographic expression. Along the same lines, Vitturi considers that it makes no sense to define his practice: he understands photography as a liquid medium morphing into different shapes according to the context, which informs the picture's meaning, intended here as something shifting and not a given. This vision of photography allows for the constant mixing of different

photographic languages – from street photography to still-life and studio portraits – beyond a single register.

H2. Evidence/documentary vs affect/experimentation

Elizabeth Edwards (2015) observed that tension between evidence - incontrovertible data supporting a particular "truth" - and affect - "a matrix of the subjectivities of experience, embodiment and emotion" (Edwards, 2015, p. 236) - in knowledge production has historically characterised the relationship between anthropology and photography. However, the crisis of representation of the 70s and 80s profoundly challenged the authority of anthropology and its presumptions of objectivity. At this point, most anthropologists have given up on the idea that data extracted from ethnographic encounters could serve to build a fully-comprehensive and unbiased scientific description of a given social world, admitting that it is instead the contingent product of their personal experience in the field. Among the many consequences of the collapse of the modern scientific paradigm in anthropology is a critical shift in its relationship with photography, as it "opened the possibility that affect was evidence, and that embodiment, emotion, materiality were culturally dynamic modes of being in the world" (Edwards, 2015, p. 240).

Another way to put it is to speak of a clash between the documentary in opposition to experimentation (Schneider & Wright, 2013). When asked about such a clash, the three photographers provide answers that, in different ways, acknowledge it but simultaneously challenge it. To de Maffei, distinguishing between evidence/documentary and affect/experimentation makes sense only as long as we recognise different phases in the photographic process: in some cases, the production of images is preceded by a thorough work of investigation (as in her most recent work on the memory of the communist regime in Albania, alongside journalist Christian Elia⁸) that can count as evidence and serves as the basis for a photographic narration that draws from it but interprets it in expressive terms. Similarly, Romero Beltrán's projects always stem from what he calls a social vocation, generally associated with documentary photography, but then take on an experimental path that may involve the intervention of other disciplines, as it happens in *Dialect* with performance and choreography. Vitturi takes the conversation to the next level by entirely rejecting such binary: not even documentary photography can be seen as an objective reproduction of reality because behind an image always lies a decision, a limited sight returning only a fragment of that reality. Photography can only aspire to understand it by assembling those fragments in a poetic operation of approaching reality without any ambition of producing evidence.

Here, we find a categorical dismissal of any possible faith in objectivity reflected in the use of staged images, particularly in Vitturi and Romero Beltrán. Sequences of assemblages and sculptures, in the first case, are only seldom interrupted by unaltered "context images", whose function is to simultaneously position and disorient the viewer in a constant play between fiction and reality. Performative acts, in the second, emerge from the participants' past experiences and work as a tool to approach reality, but starting from the assumption of the impossibility of documenting something that has already occurred. Most of his portraits may look like they were not staged, but they are, while with de Maffei, the exact opposite occurs: of all the portraits contained in her book, only one is posed; the rest is the product of a patient work of sitting down and sharing moments with people, mostly doing nothing. Still, her free appropriation of the ethnographic method does not mean that she has been pursuing objectivity: that intention to her is absurd. She just needed a different point of view, a key to

⁸ <https://www.fotografiaeuropa.it/fe2023/mostra/camilla-de-maffei/>

establish a dialogue with a story that, in the beginning, she felt was not speaking to her or, better said, that she could not understand.

H2. Places

All three projects pivot around certain types of places, both in that they originate from specific locales and render such specificity, even if poetically transmuted, in the artwork. *Delta* is overtly dedicated to exploring a geographical region; *Caminantes* is born as a journey through the places where the origins of the artist's family lie; *Dialect* stems from the experience of a group of people living in a particular type of space, an asylum seekers reception centre. In Camilla de Maffei's project, space is a natural landscape, as in Lorenzo Vitturi's; however, in the first case, the open space turns into a claustrophobic labyrinth, transmitting a sense of enclosure and confinement that resembles the one portrayed by Romero Beltrán. In contrast, in the second, broad horizons serve as the backdrop for assemblages of objects of different origins that parallel "the fragmentary aspects of experience in a globalised world" (Schneider & Wright, 2013, p. 4). A predominant technique in his artistic practice, it is based on the gathering of randomly found objects in markets, landfills, and along the road that reminds us of the surrealists in their visits to flea markets in Paris, "where one could rediscover the artifacts of culture, scrambled and rearranged" (Clifford, 1998, p. 121). However, instead of just collecting them, in what he calls "ritual actions" and with *mestizo logics* (Amselle, 1998) as a guiding principle, he obsessively transfers and repositions things from one place to the other (with Murano glass displaced to the Andes and Peruvian fabrics immersed in the water of the Venice lagoon), sending back a distorted reflection of the global circulation of goods in the present world. That is particularly true given the multi-sited nature of Vitturi's project, which stretches not only between two countries on two different continents but also develops as a sort of repeated pilgrimage connecting different places in Peru: from Paracas in the coastal desert, where his father opened a Murano glass factory in the 60s, through the Valle Sagrado in the Andes, where he used to spend the holidays during his childhood, to the Alto Amazonas province. The itinerant nature of this creative process somehow mirrors the hyper-mobility that characterises the work of contemporary artists and anthropologists alike, in contrast with the limited movement within delimited territories, when not the temporary stuckedness (Hage, 2009), of the local subjects involved.



Figure 4: Vitturi at work at his *nomad studio* in the coastal desert in Peru. All rights reserved.

Despite hyper-mobility, these projects embrace site-specificity, traditionally an essential condition of ethnographic fieldwork. They are firmly grounded in "anthropological places" (Augè, 2009), given that they are historical, relational and concerned with identity. In her wandering throughout the Danube Delta, de Maffei got acquainted with a landscape that is historical in that it is composed of several layers of development and abandonment. Relational, because only by earning the trust of the locals she could orientate and understand, although what emerges is not a realistic reproduction of the geographical territory (which would have been entirely uninteresting), nor a faithful translation of local knowledge (which proved impossible), but what the artist could comprehend of both realms. Finally, it is concerned with identity because the landscape, the livelihood it provides, and its specific temporalities profoundly mark the lives of its inhabitants: "There are places where it is more evident that the landscape conditions your way of being, what you can achieve, your fears. It influences the definition of who you are", she says.

In Romero Beltrán, the small reception centre in Seville is undoubtedly historical, as it is the specific product – as an architecture but, most importantly, as a technology of care and control (Malkki, 1992, p.34) – of a geopolitical configuration that has emerged since the 70s in the Global North and has made of border control and the filtering of people its funding principles. It is relational, as it is defined by the interplay of different orders of value: that of immigration law and bureaucracy and that of the people that cross borders pursuing a better life. Consequently, it is also concerned with clashing identities: those imposed by the state through categorisation and labelling processes (Borelli, 2023) and those proudly mobilised by these young men.



Figure 5: At the reception center. All rights reserved.

Through multiple crossings, Lorenzo Vitturi creates in his images a sort of imagined space where Peru and Murano cohabit, an “uncommon ground” defined by “the presence of many worlds being forced into one” (De la Cadena, 2015, par.2). This does not mean, nonetheless, that his artworks exist out of time: places are historical in *Caminantes* as well, imbued as they are with broader dynamics involving processes of globalisation, land exploitation, and political turmoil. They certainly are relational because, on the one hand, in reconstructing a family trajectory through matter and images, they force him to establish difficult dialogues that otherwise would have been avoided, and, on the other, it is through these places that an extended network of collaborations has been established. They are also concerned with identity, not only because of their bond to his family history but also, perhaps more importantly, because, through them, issues regarding power relations and stratified belonging in a context of mixed heritage emerge that put that same history into question.

H2. Journeys

The shared inception of these three works is a journey, that is, the quintessential anthropological experience. Camilla de Maffei moved East, driven by the initial idea of finding Europe at its margin (to lose and then find herself again instead); Lorenzo Vitturi went (back) South to the land of his childhood memories and maternal heritage (to then return home and reconcile with his father figure); Felipe Romero Beltrán travelled North from the South (to meet another South).

A certain tension between distance and proximity, familiarity and unfamiliarity runs along these lines and turns the photographic encounter into something quite similar to an anthropological one. If, in de Maffei's case, the movement is certainly one that goes from total strangeness to increasing intimacy with the place and its inhabitants, in that of Vitturi, the return to the roots is not so straightforward. The more he deepens into the family history, the more he digs out elements that connect it with the history of Peru, tainting the unconflicted memories of his childhood of a new hue. What initially looked so familiar slowly becomes unfamiliar and needs to be comprehended again through multiple journeys in

a potentially never-ending process of reappropriation, stirring and rearrangement that finds expression in his artistic process.

On the other hand, if Romero Beltrán's travelling does not seem to play a significant role in the project, it is only because he already did the big movement: from Colombia to Spain, where he was undocumented for a period. That experience helped him establish a relationship with the boys that appear in *Dialect*. They met at an integration workshop held at a theatre in Seville, where he had been invited to share his experience as a migrant. When the project came up, the basis for a very horizontal collaboration already existed thanks to that past similar experience – despite the current different positionality of the photographer that creates an inevitable alternation of proximity and distance that the title *Dialect* reflects - and has continued that way ever since.

H2. Durability

Long-term commitment is another crucial feature here: all the authors embrace this approach by choosing to devote extended periods to familiarise themselves with the terrain and establish relationships with the people. De Maffei spent five years travelling back and forth to Romania for a total of nine trips, and three more were necessary for the post-production and edition of the book (2022). Such a prolonged presence in the field allowed her to experience life in the Delta through all the seasons, giving a circular rhythm to her work that also informed the book's structure. In her opinion, long duration is particularly relevant when “you go to someone else’s home [where] you look for things and you want to learn”. The chosen visual language draws from this learning process, which is also a way to construct a horizontal relationship with others; otherwise, “what kind of human experience is there behind the work? What comprehension of the space (you get), if you just arrive with your leather jacket to colonise?”⁹. In the artist’s experience, long permanence enabled to tell a shared story between the photographer and her informants “because I stopped believing I was different”¹⁰.



⁹ Excerpt of a conference the artist gave at San Telmo Museum in San Sebastián (Spain), on 18/02/2023, visible at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tfa4NK35ETw>

¹⁰ *Ibidem*

Vitturi has been working on *Caminantes* since 2017, travelling to Peru twice a year. When the Covid pandemic made movements suddenly difficult, he moved back from London to Venice, establishing his studio in Murano to be constantly "in the field". The end of this work is nowhere in sight: publishing a book is certainly a goal, but not the finishing line of a project that has been branching out in many different directions. By researching his family's past, he has unravelled a vast network of connections linking Peru, Italy, Germany, and Spain. Such a network goes generations back, establishing unexpected correspondences between his personal background and Peruvian history, so much so that the following steps could be producing a film and an essay to reconstruct this intricated sequence of events. Another by-product of *Caminantes* is a series of carpets he has designed by overlapping fragments of his pictures, an obsessive graphic creation ritual transferred on a textile surface, produced by local artisans in Jaipur. This way, India has also entered the vast map of the project.

Similarly, long duration has certainly given Romero Beltrán's project depth and width. Each of his works takes an average of three to five years. *Dialect*, in particular, took three and has now given life to another project, *Instruction*, a choreographic piece by Lucia You (dancer) and Bilal Siasse (one of the boys) about the movements executed to cross the border¹¹. Again, we see how duration stimulates the ramification of creative processes in unforeseen directions beyond strict disciplinary boundaries. This aspect echoes back to accounts stressing the fragmentation and open-endedness of contemporary art projects, where "the process of working with people and materials in ethnographic situations becomes as, or even more, important than the finished product" (Schneider & Wright, 2013, p.4). That seems particularly pertinent here since, in all three projects analysed, relationships and collaborations established in the field are central to their developments over time.

We already referred to how de Maffei considers that her knowledge of the Danube Delta is the product of an experience she had shared with the inhabitants, a learning process that only a horizontal relationship could have made possible. In Romero Beltrán, all the choreographic aspects of his work have been co-designed with the participants, who also take the stage during reading acts¹², or as authors of some of the texts in the book. Vitturi has established a dense network of collaborations with local artisans in every node of the project's map: an entire family of weavers in the Valle Sagrado, glass-blowers and particularly the keeper of a sort of cemetery of glass remnants in Murano, the textile workers in Jaipur. These are not fortuitous encounters but continuative relationships playing a leading role in his process and whose starting point is a fair economic exchange that avoids exploitative production processes and balances the partnership. These collaborators have in-depth knowledge of what he is creating because they, too, are directly involved from the moment the artist commissions certain artefacts that he would later *graft* in the sculptures. During production, the exchange of different techniques stimulates moments of mutual discovery derived from the amazement of the artisans in front of "improper" use of their usual technique: "This way, the story of each object and each place (unfolds). *Caminantes* is a collection of short stories".

H2. The body

Another common feature of these three works is the centrality of the body, either as a physical presence in the artwork or as a research tool that made its realisation possible. In *Dialect*, the Moroccan boys'

¹¹ Teaser available at: <https://vimeo.com/799173946>

¹² Here is an excerpt: <https://vimeo.com/664854244>

half-naked bodies are the absolute protagonists. Brown bodies against the white backdrop of bare walls, training, performing, and growing stronger in a space of confinement where they are held, awaiting to express themselves as adults fully. Through movement and performance, they show their refusal to adjust to the stereotypical image of the passive migrant, defy this bureaucratic regime of immobility and, in doing so, show agency. Making their own decisions about poses, with the photographer only managing the technical aspects of the process, these boys reenact their journeys across the Strait to Spain in a composed and proud way, as to say through their resolute gestures: "We are here, we made it, and we own it".



Figure 7: Stills of Youssef from *Dialect*. All rights reserved.

In *Caminantes*, the artist includes his own body in the images. By literally and symbolically placing himself in the landscape, he operates a de-exoticisation of the gaze that overturns the relationship between observer and observed. Camouflaged underneath layers of various materials, he wears a sort of mask that hides his identity and "constitute an existential play with alterity for its wearer" (Schneider, 2020, ch.1). However, unlike in most exoticising iconography of native people and their costumes, the wearer here is the photographer, who has turned himself into the Other. These are not self-portraits, which are indeed a way for an artist to be exposed but also to give oneself relevance. Getting rid of any remnants of narcissism, Vitturi transforms his own body into an object among other objects, to the point that it cannot be recognised as a body anymore: it becomes a vector, another bridge-object establishing a connection between different localities, times and cultures. What is important here is not him, but the things he carries: "The costume has its own truth. A truth that cannot fully reveal itself, as it also has its other side; it depends in part, on its concealment" (Ticio Escobar quoted in Schneider, 2020, ch.1)



Figure 8: Self-portrait from *Caminantes*. All rights reserved.

In Camilla de Maffei's research, the body is that of the pathfinder: a hermeneutical tool of exploration that knows and comprehends by wandering, walking, crossing, cutting through, getting lost. A learning process that, nonetheless, has not gone without difficulties. The harshness of the weather, the vastness of the territory, and its apparent sameness and opacity initially made its reading and, consequently, the photographic work impossible. "My vision is flattened, I can't see anything", and even when she did see something, "everything I explain when showing my photos cannot be seen by the viewer". The question of how to represent a labyrinth arose, but she discarded the possibility of using a drone. "Revealing its secret from above through a panopticon vision of dominion would be like playing God, holding a power over the space that people who live there do not have, as they can only inhabit it and cross it". In these words, we unavoidably find an echo of de Certeau observing Manhattan from the top of the World Trade Center and asking himself: "To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong? Having taken a voluptuous pleasure in it, I wonder what is the source of this pleasure in 'seeking the whole', of looking down on, totalising the most immoderate of human texts" (De Certeau, 2002, pp.91-92). Instead, she decided to open up her process to local hermeneutics. Maps did the trick: the first attempts were hers to see how she was getting increasingly "empowered with the landscape". Then, she proposed the same exercise to her local interlocutors as "a way of understanding and learning from the Other that does not occupy its semantic territory" (Schneider, 2018, par.4). Photographically, the impossibility of representing the Delta as a whole was solved by verticalising the camera: "If the problem is that one can't see anything, well that's the thing then! And

it is this way for everybody". In opposing the local, corporeal standpoint to the totalising view of the non-human coloniser (the drone), research becomes *knowing-in-being*: "If truth lies beyond objectivity, then there comes a point in its pursuit when, in our observations, the things we study begin to tell us how to observe" (Ingold, 2018, par.V).



Figure 9: Gheorghe's map. All rights reserved.

H2. Words

To conclude the projects' review, it is crucial to highlight one last element of comparison: the relevance of the text in their architecture. Texts intervene in two main ways: on the one hand, as research tools supporting the geographical and/or conceptual explorations that precede the images, on the other, as autonomous products that maintain with the photographs a non-hierarchical relationship.

If de Maffei and I had already experimented with the interplay of images and ethnographic text in *The Visible Mountain*, with *Delta*, she took the duty of writing on herself. First born as fieldnotes, her texts fill the book's final section and play an essential part in the general narrative. Intended as complementary and not illustrative, these notes fill in the gaps the photographic language leaves and generate productive feedback. "Everything I couldn't explain with photos is completed by the text. The book without the texts would not accomplish its goal, as well as the text without images. Notes follow the same path as the photos from a different point of view. In turn, they have partly influenced the order of the photos."

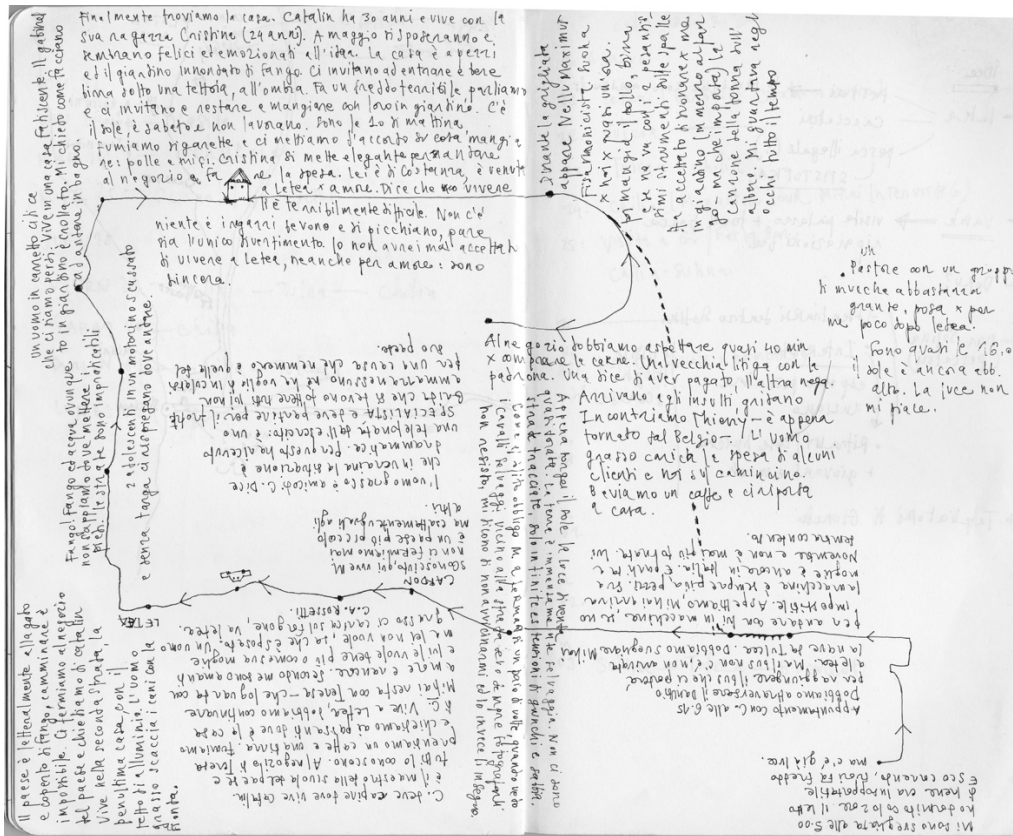


Figure 10: Camilla de Maffei's fieldnotes. All rights reserved.

In *Dialect*, the visual part is complemented by two texts written by Youssef Elhafidi and Zakaria Mourachid, project participants, and four more commissioned by Romero Beltrán to experts in different fields related to the project: Ricardo Quesada, theoretical physicist, introduces us to the maximum weight and density that a boat like the one Youssef describes can carry; Albert Corbí, a philosopher, writes about dialect and interlude; Juan Bockamp, choreologist, translates into Stepanov notation the steps of the *Instruction* project; finally, there is the text in which I, as a migration scholar, describe the ritual of access to membership and rights in migration regimes. To the photographer, these writings constitute an undetachable part of the project since, in his opinion, images convey very little information, being not descriptive of specific situations. They do not intend to communicate anything; they evoke. In this sense, texts are essential to confer context to such an evocation.

Vitturi also usually commissions texts – intended as side commentaries to his photos, but also as objects in their own right converted into flags, carpets, and tapestries and exhibited among the sculptures - to someone else. Not this time, though: being *Caminantes* such a personal exploration, like de Maffei, he is now responsible for writing himself. He started by interviewing his closest relatives, driven by the need to rediscover the family history. That operation has unexpectedly opened up significant developments: on the one hand, the version offered by his mother traced a sort of sentimental history of the family, intertwined nonetheless with the general history of Peru; on the other, the more “entrepreneurial version” provided by his father – who used to work in a glass factory in Murano and was invited to Peru in the 60s to open another factory in the desert – has ended up defining the whole evolution of the project. Therefore, interviews have provided structure, marked trails to follow and inspired many artistic choices. Diaries are another verbal component of the project: notes he takes on the side of the dialogues he maintains with the artisans, which constitute another source of inspiration

for his sculptural work. Whether and how these writings will be published is still unclear, but they play a crucial role as the narrative backbone of the whole process.

H1. Conclusions

The aspects analysed so far – the site-specificness, the distance/proximity dialectic, open-endedness, long-term commitment, and relational nature - bring these photographic works close to the ways of anthropological research. At the same time, some key features they share, such as the predominance of affect/experimentation over evidence/documentation and the centrality given to the body and the senses over rational analysis, keep them firmly anchored in a non-scientific realm. Nonetheless, could anthropology learn something from that non-scientific way of doing things? Maybe the point of establishing this kind of dialogue is to remind ourselves – anthropologists - of the most spontaneous, almost sensuous core of our discipline. Since artists do not have to respect disciplinary boundaries and academic protocols, their appropriation of methods, techniques and themes is much more unrestricted. This way, they take us back to what anthropological research should be about when we are not too busy coding data sets, filing informed consent sheets, filling applications, drafting reports or desperately seeking creative ways to respond to Reviewer 2.

Tim Ingold boldly affirms that research – in its original meaning of *searching again* - never ends because it is basically a search for truth, and truth can never be conquered: "truth is inexhaustible. Wherever or whenever we may be, we can still go further. Thus, research affords no final release into the light. Remaining ever in the shadows, we stumble along with no end in sight, doggedly following whatever clues afford a passage" (Ingold, 2018, par.III). His metaphor of the researcher as a hiker travelling a path that, as Heraclitus's river, cannot be walked twice, is somehow liberating: it soothes us from the anxiety of reaching definitive, incontrovertible results, as we could always continue, or walk back, choose another path, and find something else. Acknowledging that is also to be reminded that research is learning from the humble standpoint of someone who is aware of her ignorance and makes herself available to listen, to open herself up to the Other to produce new knowledge. The starting assumption should be that our curiosity is moved by ignorance, not wisdom. In this sense, observing the ways of conducting research of artists without any academic constraint, with no aspiration of breaking ground with some novel concept or finding, with no presumption of searching for "the truth", can be a very refreshing exercise.

The title of this piece contains two words of botanical derivation, *hybridisation* and *crossbreeding*, which I use as an invitation to overcome disciplinary compartmentalization and pursue mutual fertilisation. That is not to imply that disciplines are pure in origin. They are not, just like cultural and social systems are not: if they look that way, it is because we have operated an analytical closing, but, as Gluckman made clear long ago (1964), we should not confuse the order of being with the order of knowing. And, since "pure products go crazy" (Clifford, 1988, p.1), we should also embrace impurity as a working principle, regardless of our aim: producing art, science, or anything in between.

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