

‘IMAGINING MOSTLY HARMLESS ECOLOGIES’:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY BASED NEW MEDIA PROJECT

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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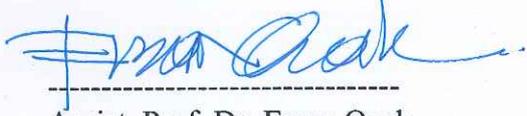
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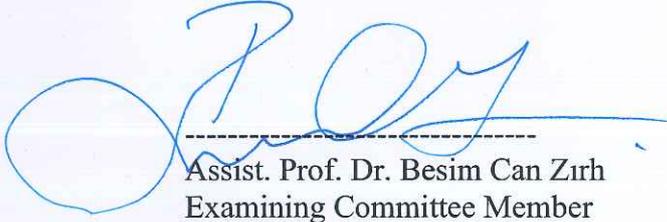
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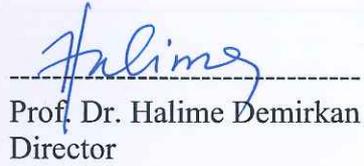
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ABSTRACT

‘IMAGINING MOSTLY HARMLESS ECOLOGIES’:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY BASED NEW MEDIA PROJECT

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This thesis analyzes the possible collaborations between anthropological knowledge generation processes and production of artworks in new media environments. The accompanying new media project titled ‘Imagining Mostly Harmless Ecologies’ attempts to create a cityscape and focuses on a collective garden to explore and present people’s possibly different ways relating with each other and their environments. Through collecting critical visions, practices and relations in the urban context, it aims to open a space for discussion and communication. New media project aims to contribute to and move further the discussions of the thesis with providing a network of critical visions. The main argument that I discuss is that the possibilities that new media environments propose, diversifies the anthropological knowledge generation and dissemination processes. Also, the collaboration of two disciplines contributes to the political and public features and responsibilities of the artwork by a more attentive and detailed background.

Keywords: Essay Film, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Multispecies Entanglements, New Media, Visual Anthropology

ÖZET

‘ÇOĞUNLUKLA ZARARSIZ EKOLOJİLER DÜŞLEMELER’: ETNOGRAFI TABANLI BİR YENİ MEDYA PROJESİ

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Bu tez, antropolojik bilgi üretme süreçleri ve yeni medya alanındaki sanat eserleri arasındaki olası işbirliklerini inceler. Eşlik eden ‘Çoğunlukla Zararsız Ekolojiler Düşlemek’ adlı yeni medya projesi bir şehir manzarası yaratıp içinde bir bostana odaklanarak, insanların birbirleri ve çevreleri ile farklı ilişki kurma ihtimallerini araştırır. Kentteki eleştirel bakış, eylem ve ilişkilerini toplayarak, bir tartışma ve iletişim alanı yaratmayı amaçlar. Yeni medya projesi bu eleştirel bakışlar ağını sağlayarak, tezin tartışmalarına katkı sunmayı ve ileriye taşımayı hedefler.

Tartıştığım ve projede denemeye çalıştığım mesele, yeni medya alanının sunduğu olanaklar, antropolojik bilgi üretim ve yayılım süreçlerini çeşitlendirdiği ve aynı zamanda bu disiplinler arası işbirliğinin, sanat eserinin politik ve kamusal özelliklerine ve sorumluluklarına daha dikkatli ve detaylı bir araştırma arka planı ile katkı sağladığı üzerine.

Anahtar kelimeler: Deneme Film, Disiplinler-arası İşbirliği, Görsel Antropoloji, Türler-arası İlişkilenmeler, Yeni Medya

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PROLOGUE

We all, in our own means, work on issues that we are concerned with. In one way or the other, issues that strain our minds become the things that we keep ourselves occupied with. Whether it is researching, writing, filming or just our daily life practices, we think and act on ‘what concerns us’ in these processes. A professor of mine once told that we should keep pursuing the subjects that are prepossessing our minds. Now I see that only in that way, the desire and ability to continue to concentrate on our works remains. Our approaches, ideas and ways of thinking might be subject to change in the making-process of a research-artwork, however a continuous critical engagement and production process become valuable and crucial practices in life.

Of course, our concerns do not emerge separately from the social and political scene of our times. Therefore the primary question, which settled in my mind at the beginning of this project, was quite general: how people live together? When violence and polarization are quite strong in the geography that one inhabits, turning into such philosophical questions might seem rather abstract. In fact, abstraction, alienation and frustration occur in the absence of that questioning, researching, writing and communicating these processes.

Social Anthropology Graduate Program that I am enrolled in, at the same time with my studies in Media and Design Graduate Program, allowed me to see many different existing ways of living together in and out of capitalist orders. Critical engagements with the issues and critical approaches to the issue of representation were always at the core of my theoretical and methodological courses in Anthropology. So here, I am trying to build my ideas based on the theoretical background of contemporary critical anthropology and media studies. While doing so, I am trying to explore the ways people directly or indirectly realize these critiques in their everyday lives and environments. In order to re-think the dialogue within the research process and the political potential of social research and artwork, I am trying to explore different approaches and methodologies in media and anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

Observing, filming, collecting stories and writing on plant-human relationships in the urban context, emerges primarily as a ‘re-thinking practice’ to challenge existing human (more precisely homo economicus) centered approaches and understandings. City, as the primary site of capital accumulation, accommodates many conflicts as well as struggles. This ethnographic research based art project focuses on the relations, conflicts and struggles of both humans and plants in the process of creating a space for living together in the urban space.

Reasons behind the key words of this thesis, ‘urban’, ‘multispecies’, ‘politically engaged ethnographic practice’ and ‘essay film form’, are all related to each other, and entered into my mind roughly around the same times. I enrolled in the Graduate Program in Media and Design and Social Anthropology in September 2015. The first subject I had in mind was studying eco-communities, where people settle outside of the city and try to formulate alternative social and economic relations in rather small closed groups. Later my interests moved to the urban context because of the variety of encounters, conflicts and constantly in production and changing possibilities. In the spring of 2015, I started to participate in the activities of a collective gardening¹ community of Middle East Technical University. The taste of parsleys, strawberries and the smell of basils, mints made that spring the first term that I felt a strange

¹ Throughout the text I will use the term collective garden for the Turkish Word ‘bostan’.

connection to Ankara, after 5 years. That relationship of care between the herbs, fruits and vegetables and us was effective and most of the participants were stating that as the reason why they were there. For that reason, next to my interest in relations in the community, I also started to read and search about multispecies relations. It was even challenging to understand the existing ethnographies since they are calling for an unusual way of thinking about cosmologies, ontologies yet that particular challenge is valuable for the critical discussions in social and cultural studies. Meanwhile, I was taking a course called ‘Essay Film’ and during that course I had the chance to draw many parallels between the theoretical and methodological turns in the anthropology discipline and critical media studies, particularly essay film form. There are existing discussions on ‘public anthropology’ and how academia can speak to a broader public than the academia alone – and ‘art practice’ is considered as one of the possible ways. Yet in that way, art practice cannot go beyond being an ‘instrument’ of the research. Whereas I think another kind of collaboration is necessary, in which each form of knowledge generation contributes to the other.

At that point, essay film enters into the discussion as a form that intermingles art and ethnography. A contemporary, critical, self-reflexive ethnographic eye in essay film carries the possibility to produce a great collaboration of art and research. In this project, I have tried to place and connect essay film into an interactive, collaborative new media project. A critical and political motivation lies behind these methodological selections and in this written part of the thesis, I will discuss to what extent these thoughts could be realized and shared.

It is possible to argue that recent theoretical and methodological turns in social and cultural studies indicate a struggle for critical engagements in the research processes. Both the issues addressed and the ways that they are taken into consideration bring academic and artistic practice closer to political action. The way I choose to relate theory and political engagement is through researching -in experimental ways- and filming -in an essayistic manner- human-plant relations in the urban context. The literature that I dive into in the first sub-section of the first chapter explains where anthropology and media studies meet for this Project's framework. Second subsection elaborates on how changes in both disciplines and culture lead to an interdisciplinary collaborative research environment. And also describes the changing roles and relations in the research process and proposes new media environments, transmedia projects as suitable sites for representation of ethnographic processes. The brief historical look at visual research methodologies takes the discussions from there to the different forms of filming a research process; namely ethnographic, experimental and essay. That third sub-section explains why essay film is particularly relevant for a critical, politically engaged research construction and representation and refers to the inspirational works that show how in different ways art and anthropology collaborates. After this background on the driving forces of the research methodology and artistic work, the second chapter moves to explain how a multispecies ethnography (or plant-human ethnography) can possibly be studied in aforementioned manners. This chapter refers to the following processes of the project; selection of data sources, different forms of ethnographic practice and configuration of these relations in a new media form and in that way it draws the position of the Project in between different disciplines by applying to exemplary collaborative projects. The analysis section elaborates the making processes of the

new media project by separately explaining its different parts and relates these processes to the arguments of the thesis and refers to the challenges, conflicts, limitations and also possible contributions of the project's outcomes. Lastly, the concluding chapter briefly overviews the research-art process, comments on its difficulties and interdisciplinary condition and refers to the ongoing situation of the Project and the new questions and future plans that this process gives birth to.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

1.1 Cumulative Re-thinking of the Collaboration of Anthropology and Visual Media

Every once in a while debates related to the divisions -and also contact zones- between humanities, positive sciences, social sciences, politics and art and revitalized. Charlie Gere states that the division between the humanities and sciences has become an enduring cliché and same claims might be inversed to the division between the humanities and art (2010: 1-2). Arguments that are placing boundaries and hierarchies in between such disciplines and the ones that are looking into possible collaborations are coming from various mindsets and histories. Therefore here I will try to explain which theoretical and methodological backgrounds that I will elaborate and build my arguments on and the reasons why. In order to do so, firstly I will refer to the contemporary discussions in the discipline of anthropology and then move to the connection of these to the practices in new media studies. So that I will be able to set a dialogue between anthropology and art in general and new media documentaries in particular.

Anthropology, in general, can be defined as a way of critical thinking in order to understand ‘self’ in relation to ‘other’. Social anthropology is the largest sub-discipline, which is concerned with a comparative study of what people do and why they do that (Barnard, 2000: 1-5)? Here I do not refer to a cross-cultural comparison that constitutes the history of mainstream anthropology. Rather, what I am interested in is the contemporary situation of anthropology discipline, which is shaped after the ‘crisis of representation’ in 1980’s and the emerging visual engagements that are taking place ever since. Of course, the use of photography and film or researching visual materials and other senses existed long before². However, the use of visual tools was complementary because the “more sensory and decontextualized form of representation, along with its popular appeal, would have been contrary to the development of the scientific identity of academic anthropology” (Pink, 2006:8).



Figure 1: Bronislaw Malinowski in Trobriand Islands, 1922

² For instance the use of visuals in the works of Bronislaw Malinowski (in Trobriand Islands, 1922), Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson (in Bali, 1930).

“The name visual anthropology was coined by Margaret Mead in the 1960’s” (Pink, 2006: 131) and through 1970’s it is considered as another sub-discipline, mostly but not exclusively attached to social anthropology. It is generally understood in tripartite ways: (1) the study of other visual cultures, (2) the use of visual media in carrying out anthropological research and disseminating the results (Schneider and Wright: 2010:14) and (3) the study of human nonlinguistic forms³ which involves some visual technology for data collecting and analysis (Ruby and Chalfen in Pink, 2006:10). Sarah Pink states that theoretical demands of mainstream anthropology and possibilities offered by digital and hypermedia are leading to the shifts both in the discipline’s objects of study and methods. So the study and use of visuals and other senses becomes acceptable and even popular (2006: 3). Based on these descriptions and mentioned changes in the form of engaging in visual anthropology, it can be argued that visual anthropology constitutes a potential for another form of representation. It is not just a matter of visibility vs. textuality yet, visual anthropology, as Pink proposes, can be formulated as a ‘cumulative re-thinking’ of the anthropology discipline. Then, it can be a good thought exercise to discuss how and towards where visual anthropology has been transforming since the ‘critique of writing’ in anthropology became a hot debate in 1980’s.

³ The third part refers to the anthropology of senses; the study of smell, sound, vision, etc. There is also an increasing interest in the sensory anthropology, which in the words of Sarah Pink means “a ‘re-thought’ anthropology, informed by theories of sensory perception, rather than a sub-discipline exclusively or empirically about the senses. Rather like the cumulative ‘re-thinkings’ of anthropology over the last decades this adds to the discipline having become (albeit unevenly) reflexive, gendered, embodied and visual...”

1.1.1 An Encounter Between Art and Ethnographic Practice

Around 1970's and 80's in the history of social sciences, literature and actually in the whole world, new 'postmodern' ways of seeing are developed. Alan Barnard explains this as a quiet revolution that world had moved beyond modernism and hierarchy of knowledge to a postmodern phase where there is no place for a grand theory of any kind. And he cynically adds, except postmodernism itself (2000: 158). Postmodernism criticizes the assumption of the existence of a certain single truth out there. This understanding targets the truth idea of the dominant power/knowledge. All the critiques to the ways of 'knowledge production' of Westerners emerge within the logic of postmodernism; deconstruction of the already existing knowledge hierarchy in the world. Postmodernist approaches state that everything is a social construction through the language of a certain theoretical paradigm. So there is nothing that cannot be changed or deconstructed. These arguments on knowledge production touch upon to the roots, history of the anthropological, ethnographic practice. The discipline of anthropology emerges as a part of the colonization process and colonizers will to learn and produce knowledge that would legitimize their actions. Because of the discipline's dark history, many anthropologists put a lot of effort and emphasis on de-colonizing knowledge by firstly setting up links between the existing knowledge about the world and Western will to power and changing the methodologies, experimenting new ways of researching and representing cultures. I will focus more on the latter in order to describe the motivations behind this thesis project.

“Westerners had for centuries studied and spoken for the rest of the world; the reverse had not been the case” (Clifford, 1988: 256). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1985) oft-quoted text ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ emerges related to this problem of speaking and being heard of. The new technologies and changing understandings in aesthetics, politics and art opens an interstice in the existing discourse and the field of ‘knowledge generation.’ It is no longer a way of ‘producing’ knowledge but a way of ‘generating’ it together with people who are participating in the research process. The more the research process becomes collaborative, smaller the gap between the researcher/artist/author and the ‘other’ gets.

George Marcus dates the most recent encounter between art and ethnographic practice to the Writing Culture critiques of the 1980’s. He states that under the impact of these critiques the interdisciplinary fermentation of arts, social sciences and humanities, makes it possible to collaboratively produce a critique of the textual production and dominant, authoritative knowledge (2010: 83). Through these inner critiques, the discipline of anthropology, ethnographic practice and artistic production together become more open to new collaborations and ways of knowledge generation and dissemination. The thesis project in question is also one of these attempts of turning research process into a collaborative, reflexive and open form. In the next section, before moving into interdisciplinary visual research methodologies and experimentations, possibilities and contemporary collaborations of anthropology and art, I will briefly refer to the existing critiques to the use of visuals in research and filmic practice that long-existed in anthropology.

1.1.2 Interdisciplinary Visual Research Methodologies: Research Films in a State of Becoming

Inherited ideologies set frameworks of discussions and exclusion of certain voices or subjects are considered inherently normal. Any medium of representation, text or visual, is ideologically loaded. Even when different voices try to speak, the common framework of discussion does not let that person speak outside of the already existing context. So, of course, it is not possible (and also necessary) to argue that research films are free of ideological frameworks. Still, there are constant attempts to achieve that ‘emancipatory’ state with different approaches with an emphasis on keywords such as collaborative, participatory, interactive, and dialogic, etc. Here, I would argue that particular kinds of films might carry the possibility to open up more space for people to think rather than swallow what is imposed as ‘truth’. That can be related to two features of these research films: being dialogical and being in a state of becoming. Schneider and Wright state:

“To treat ethnography as ruin and fragment, possible sites of intended and unintended, past and present destructions and reconstructions from which new meanings can be engendered in a process of bricolage and assemblage is a challenge that anthropology can take up from, and in collaboration with contemporary art (...) For anthropology, to have a debate on incomplete, unfinished and not yet ready is more than timely” (2010: 20).

Marcus argues that, even with critical reflexivity, the anthropological form could not alter the historically embedded features like documentation and naturalist interpretation. Yet, he claims, in order to explore more complex, parallel and fragmented worlds, the researcher should generate new strategies, forms and norms of practice (2010: 84).

Many ethnographers use visuals to enhance the objective characteristics of their work and capabilities of presenting what is ‘there’ as it is. Photographs, drawings, charts and film are used in early works to illustrate and visualize the gathered data. Attitudes towards the visual have changed throughout the history. Yet, even when images are considered as objective data of ethnographer’s witnessing and proposed as such by the ethnographer as well, the subjective character of the photograph stands still. For instance see Margaret Mead and children in Figure 2, even though her claims of using visuals do not carry purposes of being ‘self-reflexive’ or ‘sensory’, the framing of the image shows and tells a lot more than it tends to.



Figure 2: Margaret Mead in Bali, 1958

On the website⁴ which I took Figure 2, information box next to the photography includes a quote from the photographer Ken Heyman. He states, “Village mothers put a white spot on their babies’ heads as a charm to protect them from evil, in accordance with the local form of Hinduism.” Yet that is not what I see when I first look at this photograph and that is not the only ‘knowledge’ that one gets from this frame. The relation of the baby and Mead or the relation between the boy on the right side of the frame who directly looks at the camera (and us) are composing the additional layers of meaning that visuals host. Therefore, critiques directed to the use of visual material in the research process -referred as iconophobia in the anthropology discipline⁵- can be re-thought. As it is described above by Schneider and Wright (2010) visual research methodologies are both ways of understanding the research site and representing it. So the usage of visuals in research process does not always offer ‘a claim of truth in representation’, or an imposition of itself in favor of the suspension of disbelief (Baxter in Taylor, 1996: 72). In some cases, visuals propose another way of understanding the research site that carries the possibility of being multi-vocal (in collaborative forms), open (with dialogic editing) and experimental (through experiencing different methodologies, tools, sites, understandings) rather than serving to provide objectivity. The critiques of being totalizing, comprehensive, one-sided, simplifying (Hastrup in Taylor, 1996:67) towards the ethnographic film practice can be easily directed to the text form as well. So what is perhaps more important than the medium is the way and approach of the methodology of the researcher. And as also the frame above with Margaret Mead and

⁴ Library of Congress – Exhibitions – Margaret Mead: Human Nature of Power of Culture, retrieved from: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/mead/field-bali.html>

⁵ See Lucien Taylor’s discussions (1996) here: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2935240?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

children shows, “the visual often seems uncommunicative and yet somehow insatiable (...) it never says anything, but there is always something more to be said about it. Words, on the other hand, have little more to say once you have written them” (MacDougall, 1997: 283).

The ‘ethnographic film’ in its classical meaning does not have to be the only possible way to combine filmic and ethnographic practice. Works of Jean Rouch are defined by James Clifford as ethnographic surrealism; Clifford refers to them as “a general cultural disposition which cuts through modern anthropological science and which shares with modern art and writing” (Clifford, 1981: 542). Regarding the boundaries between science, politics and art as transitive would contribute to the emancipation to the works in all disciplines. The argued division and hierarchy between humanities and sciences accommodate many long-lasting discussions. Charlie Gere, in an article where he touches upon this subject, claims that science can be considered as only a particular part of a more general experimental culture:

“We still tend to regard science as the privileged domain in which, experimentation takes place, and in which scientific experimental methods are used to find out about the world (...) Yet it can be argued that this presents a false overvaluation of science in relation to the rest of culture (...) for many of us, life is increasingly a kind of experimental process, in which to a lesser or greater extent we have to discover or invent our bodies, ourselves and our communities – culture is the laboratory in which these experiments take place” (2010: 3).

Even though I would not necessarily use the word laboratory, I share the idea that experimentation takes place at every time and space. And as Marcus argues, in order to reinvent the boundaries and functions of fieldwork, we need to use the experience

and techniques of new artistic forms; a new aesthetic of techniques are needed, and the affinity with the craft of ethnography and arts set the ground for that (2010: 87).

1.1.3 The Matter of Dialogue in the Research and Film

David MacDougall states that origins of the ethnographic film, despite certain injections of anthropological ideas, lie in the European documentary cinema: compared to the diversity of human cultures, it stays quite steady and specific in its cultural outlook (1992: 91). Actually, the discursive and visual patterns of classical documentary form fit the approaches of early anthropological work; both have descriptive, objective and authoritarian stances. However, the contemporary point of anthropological filmmaking does not fit both to the form of ethnographic film or documentary.

“Since 1896 ethnographic film-making has undergone a series of revolutions, introducing narrative, observational and participatory approaches. With each a set of assumptions about the positioning of the filmmaker and the audience has crumbled” (MacDougall, 1992: 97). After the words of MacDougall, it becomes possible to argue that changes in the way of making research films create shifts in the roles of all three actors in dialogue: researcher, film/subject, and audience. What anthropologists call dialogic editing⁶, refers to a return to the research site after a

⁶ See Feld, Steven (1987) *Dialogic Editing: Interpreting How Kaluli Read Sound and Sentiment*.

certain time has passed, in order to ask for people's feedback, what they think about the written part of the research. What is aimed at is not a 'native's point of view' but an emphasis on 'any point at all' (Feld, 1987: 199). While dialogic editing (how Steven Feld defines this process of returning to the research site) can be one way to achieve this de-centralized power/knowledge relations and representation; another way might come out of the possible collaborations that can take place between anthropological research and new media projects.

In this sub-section, I have tried to explain why such collaborations between anthropological research and new media projects are in need, theoretically, methodologically, politically and historically. Now, I will explore how such collaborations or ways of communication between disciplines and methods can be elaborated by looking into changes in the cultural forms of making and watching documentary films, digital everyday life practices and relations.

1.2 Open Ways of Communicating Thoughts: Transformations in Media Technologies and Everyday Life

New media tools and spheres continuously and rapidly enter into our everyday lives and soon after (trans)form our ways of thinking, seeing and practicing. Such activities also re-shape these mediums that they are dialogically affected. Expansion of new media technologies to various fields, emerging practices and connectivity of everyday digital life in relation to these, make it possible to talk about a digital culture. People shift more and more to the production side of media in different ways

in their everyday lives next to the existing consumption and reproduction practices. “Instead of clearly defined roles within production or reception, digital forms particularly foster the development of collaborative positions throughout the production, dissemination and reception of media texts” (Hight in Dinmore, 2014:126). The tools and spheres of media provide a medium to produce, form linkages and communicate. Yochai Benkler states that networking increases the capacity of people to be active participants of the public sphere. Commercial or governmental interests mainly maintain the control over the existing on/offline structures. Yet, people’s ability to produce information, raise their voices, finding new ways of communication holds the capacity to alter those existing structures. Benkler claims that the change is as much qualitative as it is quantitative. By that, he stresses out the changing “self-perception of individuals in society and the culture of participation they can adopt”. According to him, when the way people experience and observe their daily lives change -in a mass-mediated fast environment-, the way of participation changes as well (2006: 212-213). The claim on the emancipatory, democratizing role of the networked society is open to discussion. Still, it is possible to argue that our everyday digital practices have changed and these changes affect our roles and relations.

Bill Nichols states that “a standard way of explaining the rise of documentary involves the story of the cinema’s love for the surface of things, its uncanny ability to capture life as it is, (...) its immense catalog of people, places and things (...)” (2001: 83). Then it is not possible to give an exact date to the impulse of documenting if we consider that as one of the formative factors of documentaries. Nichols separates ‘fictional’ and ‘documentary’ films in the perspective of the

audience; he claims that in fictional films it is as if we look into another, unusual world from outside and in documentaries it is as if we look into another part of the same world we live in (2001: 83). Even though Nichols traces documentary's own voice in history and tends to categorize/formulize documentary sub-genres, he repeatedly points the possibility of coexistence of his categories (1991; 2001). His documentary modes (poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative) swing in between 'science and spectacle' with different attributes they hold. They produce a loose framework of affiliation for individuals (2001: 99). What documentary films precisely do, according to Nichols, is bundling shots and scenes into larger categories or gestalts; what is then called concepts. Therefore they become organized (according to a problem, story, mood) sequences instead of straightforward footage (2001: 66). The conceptual framework Nichols draws can be interpreted as political and ethical positioning. That positioning through modes of organization moves to another level in new media documentaries.

Evolving discussions on new media documentaries suggest that it is accepted as a separate genre by now -even though depending on its ways of interaction, subject or platforms it can take different names, such as web-docs, collab-docs, trans-media docs, cross-media docs, database docs and hypertext docs- (Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012: 134). Ersan Ocak states that new forms of documentary filmmaking emerge as a result of documentary cinema's never-ending search for new modes of storytelling and new forms of representation. He points out that documentary filmmakers have been filming with their audio-visual apparatuses in an audiovisual language, and when the reality/zeitgeist of historical periods changes, new modes of storytelling and forms of representation become necessary (2012: 960). According to Arnau

Gifreu Castells, new media documentaries are the convergence of ‘documentary’ and ‘digital media’ genres. The convergence comes from the ‘mutual attraction’ of each other about the two genre’s transforming features: documentary’s modes of representation and digital media’s modes of navigation and interaction (2010: 1).

Aston and Gaudenzi argue interactive media -which they see as a common feature in some way in all forms of new media documentaries- creates a dynamic relationship between authors, users, technology and environment. That dynamism poses relations of interdependence between the user and the reality that they portray (2012: 135).

What Aston and Gaudenzi describe as ‘feed-back loops’ that emerge with the interactive media can be viewed in a similar manner with the attempts of dialogic editing in anthropology. In both, the medium of the research – text or new media platform – becomes a site for communication. New media documentaries do that by opening their processes and linkage/network maps. Persuasive argumentation model of classical documentaries leaves its place to a site of encounters. Encounters of images, thoughts, and different actors in the society as well as in the filmic process form a debate in various processes of new media documentaries. Then, ‘the ways of approaching to these conceptual frameworks (described earlier by Bill Nichols)’ constitute the fundamental question when thinking about the shifts from classical documentary to new media documentaries. In other words, the traces of shifts in the ways of media production lay in the transformations in cultural and political mindsets.

“The ‘camcorder cultures’ of the 1990s (Dovey, 2000), the culture of ‘vernacular video’ (Burgess & Green, 2009:25) and the avant-garde dreams for an open video language (Sorensen, 2008) are seen by media theorists Dovey and Rose as the main influences of a situated documentary aesthetic

that seems to say ‘I was here’, ‘I experienced this’, ‘I saw that’ (Dovey and Rose, forthcoming) rather than ‘this is how it is’. Collaborative sites such as YouTube, Flickr and Wikipedia, are flourishing because they channel a cultural need that was ready to be expressed, and not because they have engendered such a need.” (Gaudenzi, 2013: 180)

Above Sandra Gaudenzi explains how what she (borrowing from Jenkins, 2006) terms ‘participatory culture’ calls for a change in the ways of producing and experiencing media. All discussions in this section refer to a dynamic, dialogical relationship between media technologies and cultures that eventually transforms both. Then exploring, defining and questioning the aforementioned ‘participatory culture’ becomes a critical task.

1.2.1 User-Player-Participant Audience and the Communication Process

The process of change in the environment and attitudes of the researcher, audience, participant, documentary maker and (documentary) film itself, bring an important question along, how to re-consider a shared process of meaning making under these conditions? Thinking around this question, one can directly recall Stuart Hall’s analyses on ‘meaning production’. To put it briefly, he explains how the process of communication takes place in a more complex way than a simple loop consisting sender, message and receiver. Instead, Hall claims, communication can and should be thought as a ‘linked but distinctive’ moments of production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction. The relatively autonomous moments of ‘encoding and decoding’ carry different ‘means’ and ‘social relations’. The lack of equivalence between two sides of communication creates asymmetries in the

meaning at different ‘moments’ of the process (Hall, 1992: 128-131) Hall’s arguments on politics of signification are quite familiar to many in critical media studies and show how the meaning production is always a shared, complex, negotiated and fluid process. Yet, when practices, environments and relations transform, new questions on roles, mediums and participation emerge. “Theory and cultural analysis are always in ongoing conversation, and a tenet of Hall’s thinking is the acknowledgment that nothing stands still. Culture, technology, and politics are always in flux, and theory needs to keep up” (Sender & Decherney, 2016).

What I would like to emphasize by referring to Stuart Hall’s arguments above, is that the dialogue between researcher/filmmaker and participant or audience in new media documentaries are not only emerging out of technological enablement (such as being able to ‘interact’, ‘participate’, ‘navigate’ or so...) One of the distinguishing features of new media documentaries, Alkarimeh and Boutin argue, comes from their non-linear regimes of communication. They state that technological features change linear documentaries’ aspects such as two-way communication in real time and those changes in features also reformulate the relationship between the viewer, the author and the narrative (2016: 2). Yet, theories so far mentioned on new media documentaries emphasize, the shift from linear to web-documentaries cannot be explained only as a natural evolution of documentaries in the digital age. (Gaudenzi, 2013; Ocak, 2012) So rather than solely discussing ‘navigation and interaction modalities’ (Gifreu, 2010) I would like to explore how these modalities enable or limit the communication process in film and research.

There are different ways that every media piece, its producers and receivers communicate. Processes of production, roles people hold in these processes and the film itself create positions and meanings in the end. I would just argue, aforementioned features of new media documentaries are carrying the possibility of holding a political positioning and therefore they can be critical practices. Yet, the title documentary does not adequately fit the position of this project. Therefore I would like to continue with exploring different genres of political and critical films and discuss how they can be thought as a part of the research process in new media forms.

1.3 On Ethnographic, Experimental and Essay Film

It is difficult to make clear separations between contemporary forms of ethnographic, experimental and essay film forms because each carries the possibility of including features of another. Especially when researcher/film-maker is trying to ‘write thoughts on film’, usage of variety of media forms and experimentation of different techniques and aesthetics becomes somehow inevitable. Here, I will very briefly look into how these three film forms interplay and come to hold a critical position in global film culture. Later, I will explain essay film in more detail to set a background for my decision to take an essayistic attitude in this project.

Critiques that are directed to documentary film can be, and already are, directed to the classical ethnographic film or uses of visual in anthropological research as well. Colonial – Western - scientific ideology and its approach to film subjects, geographies and people only add more dimensions to the critiques. Dan Marks states

that one of the earliest ethnographic film footage⁷ belongs to Felix Regnault; depicting and freezing the tribal people's motion for a scientific analysis in a later date. He adds, despite the date of the footage coincides with Lumiere's cinematograph films Regnault's footage is unlikely to be publicly projected since it is only seen as a scientific tool (Marks, 1995: 339; Macdougall, 1978: 406).



Figure 3: Felix Regnault, Chronophotograph: Hommes negres – Marche, 1870

Regnault's chronophotographs (Figure 3) "are a fair visual counterpart to many of the ideas current in anthropology around the turn of the century" (Marks, 1995: 340). In time, as anthropology discipline moves towards humanities, anthropological film footage as well distances from being a tool for a natural sciences discipline. Firstly, Robert Flatherty's, who defines himself first as an explorer than an artist (but not an

⁷ See more examples of Felix Reganault's chronophotographies (1895) here: <https://vimeo.com/45543291>

ethnographer)⁸ *Nanook of the North* and then Timothy Asch's *The Ax Fight*, constitute the earliest examples of experimentations in ethnographic filmmaking. Even from these times experimentations on (some forms of) collaborative film production processes exist due to the concerns with the issue of representation. So it is possible to see in 1980's, visual ethnographers take a "stance of eclectic experimentation" (Harper in Marks, 1995: 346).

Sarah Pink uses the word 'serendipitous moments' to talk about the process of ethnographic practice and states "ethnographers would always be advised to expect the unexpected, and this includes the possibility of new visual ethnographic innovations" and interdisciplinary collaborations (2013: 13). 80's onwards (after Clifford and Marcus' *Writing Culture, 1986*) a more favorable environment for visual representation of ethnography emerges (Pink, 2013: 20; Pasqualino & Schneider, 2014: 2). During this time a more reflexive ethnographic style (like David and Judith MacDougall's) develops (Loizos in Pink, 2013: 21). So as it is stated earlier, together with a 'cumulative re-thinking' of the discipline of anthropology, interest in thinking and experimenting in and through visual tools and mediums increases. Critical approaches and both academic and social/digital environment changes the paths that ethnographic practice takes: video, hypermedia, database projects, multimedia installations or other art forms join into discussion as mediums of ethnographic research experimentation and representation⁹. A curatorial collective named as Ethnographic Terminalia organizes interdisciplinary exhibitions in order to

⁸ See Don Marks, 340

⁹ See Figure 4.1, 4.2 and more examples taken from curatorial collective Ethnographic Terminalia's exhibitions:

Jayasinhji Jhala's mobile sculptures: <http://www.metafactory.ca/terminalia/2009/jhala.html>

Christopher Fletcher's sound installation: <http://www.metafactory.ca/terminalia/2009/fletcher.html>

push the boundaries of anthropological scholarship and contemporary art since 2009¹⁰.



Figure 4.1: Trudi Lynn Smith, camra's The Ward: Dubois and Oral Histories installation, 2014

Figure 4 captures a moment of interaction in the exhibition space with an installation, which is made by a community organization named camra. In their own terms, the installation provides an interactive space for users to 'play' board games as they watch and hear about the life of civil rights activists and religious leaders. By thinking outside of the book and even film, they seek to think about ways of learning, such as kinesthetic, audiovisual, etc. and different possibilities that tactile interaction might provide 'active engagement' with 'lived histories'. In that way, they attempt to move archives beyond acts of inscription and search for different

¹⁰ See collective's prospectus here: <http://ethnographicterminalia.org/about>

possibilities (Brodie & Hillier & Laughlin, 2014). In other words, ongoing theoretical and methodological debates in and around the discipline provide a ground of experimentation with different art forms.



Figure 4.2: Xinyuan Wang , Bottled Factory Workers, 2014.

Here, I discuss essay film can be thought as one of the ways of experimentation in anthropology by collaborating with art. Especially when the anthropologist is trying to create a public dialogue, just like Agnes Varda does in her films. Varda states (2013) that she makes films that would make people think and feel something; processes of thinking and feeling, she argues, are closely linked. The performative aspect in her films makes it possible to give them as examples to that could explain what I am trying to mean by essay film.

While experimental or ethnographic films hold an acknowledged place or at least resemble a familiarity in global film culture, even though its long literary and photographic background, essay film does not. One of the reasons for that comes from the oft-mentioned ‘indefinability’ of the essay film, as a separate genre. Every piece written on the notion of the essay film at first refers to its blurred boundaries, fluid, hybrid and open form. Laura Rascaroli in an introductory text brings together some of these different approaches:

“(…) (Paul) Arthur’s framing of such in-betweenness is particularly instructive: “one way to think about the essay film is as a meeting ground for documentary, avant-garde, and art film impulses.” Nora Alter insists that the essay film is “*not* a genre, as it strives to be beyond formal, conceptual, and social constraint. Like ‘heresy’ in the Adornean literary essay, the essay film disrespects traditional boundaries, is transgressive both structurally and conceptually, it is self-reflective and self-reflexive” (2008: 24).

Then, she states that “Of all the features that are most frequently identified in the essay form, both literary and filmic, two stand out as specific, essential and characterizing: reflectivity and subjectivity” (2008: 25). Rascaroli argues, the ‘subjectivity’ in the essay form is rather a ‘social’ one, as Bill Nichols uses the term for documentaries (2008: 26). These terms that are floating around when one tries to describe essay film can be solidly observed in prominent essay film examples. Andre Bazin characterizes Chris Marker’s *Letter from Siberia* as an essay film in 1958 and according to Timothy Corrigan, this becomes an important marking point in the history. In general, Corrigan states, changes in film aesthetics, technology and post WWII culture and epistemology compose the essay film form (2014: 51). It is possible to sense the characteristics of essay film in the playful experiments, which

belong to names such as Chris Marker, Agnes Varda and Alain Resnais. In films like *Night and Fog*, *Gleaners and I*, *Letters from Siberia*, we see a “‘thinking aloud’, not within the narrative or documentary coherence of a film but as ‘an attempt at a film’” (Milne in Corrigan, 2014: 55). As Corrigan explains, there emerges a public nature of that subjective experience and that sets a dialogue of ideas between film and its audience, readers and viewers. In that way, even most personal toned essays turn into forms of public experience (2014: 55): A public experience that can only be enacted with the participation of the audience in the process of imagining the meaning of the film. In figure 5 we see a frame from Chris Marker’s *Letter from Siberia*. Marker both tells and shows how the process of film needs imagination rather than objectivity, as follows: “While recording these images of the Yakutsk capital as objectively as possible, I frankly wondered whom they would satisfy... because of course you can’t describe Soviet Union as anything but the worker’s paradise, or, as hell on earth...” (Marker, 1957)



Figure 5: Chris Marker, Letter from Siberia, 1957

After this introduction, he plays with the same footage by repeating it with commentaries loaded with different ideologies and creates completely different clips in all three: (1) "...happy Soviet workers, among them this picturesque denizen of the Arctic reaches... (2) ...The miserable Soviet workers, among them this sinister looking Asiatic... (3) ...Soviet workers, among them this Yakut, afflicted with an eye disorder..." And concludes by claiming, "objectivity isn't the answer either. It may not distort Siberian reality, but it fixes it and consequently distorts it all the same. What counts is the drive and the variety..." (Marker, 1957) So essay films communicate in a way that documentary form can and would not. In Nora Alter's terms, the process of essay film does not proceed like the documentary film, presenting facts and information it rather produces a complex thought that can be contradictory, irrational and fantastic (Alter in Rascaroli, 2008: 27).

So, if we think films as spheres of visual and audial communication, essay film produces a space for communication of thoughts. Its aesthetics, heterogeneity of materials and its offer for critical engagement compose an open mode of research filming a process. “Essay films do not create new forms of experimentation, realism or narrative; they rethink existing ones in a dialogue of ideas” (Corrigan, 2011: 51). That re-thinking of different forms is very much related to the purpose and position of the essay film, which brings us closer to the question of why to choose an essayistic attitude. In the end, all films have their words to say but essay films hold a critical position both with the questions they ask, concerns they raise and also with the way they ask and raise those questions and concerns. Setting a dialogue of negotiation between filmmaker, film and audience is one of the most important features of the essay film. Constant dialogues of horizontally dispersed thoughts¹¹ reveals on screen and affect the thinking process of the audience. Rascaroli states that when essay film places itself in in-between spaces (in terms of genre, technologies it uses, etc.) it also creates interstices that people can negotiate the meaning and set a dialogue of thoughts:

“The ‘essay film’ is an experimental, hybrid, self-reflexive form, which crosses generic boundaries and systematically employs the enunciator’s direct address to the audience. (...) Essayistic cinema, along with montage is the most evident site of negotiation between film-maker and film, audience and film, film and meaning.” (Rascaroli, 2008: 49)

These interstices, gaps might be considered as one of the most important features that turn essay films to open forms. Rascaroli, referring to Jean-Luc Godard, explains how in essay films the figure of the Author, leaves the total control over the making

¹¹ See more in Laura Rascaroli’s discussions on horizontal montage (2008: 29)

of the film and shares it with actors and audience who are collectively co-responsible for the production of meaning (2009: 52). That collective meaning production process, its openness, critical attitude, fragmental essence and authors/researcher's self-reflexivity are the modes of essay film that makes it a rich method for experimentation in filming politically engaged research processes.

CHAPTER 2

DATA GENERATION AND METHODOLOGY

The sites and subjects of the anthropology discipline have moved from a comparative study of what people do and why they do that to a study of what people are becoming. In that manner, geographies, as well as ways and tools of knowledge generation processes, are transforming. As it is discussed earlier, under the impacts of ‘critique of writing’ debates, the fermentation of arts, social sciences and humanities collaboratively produce a critique of the textual production and dominant, authoritative knowledge. The importance of inseparability of form and content, this chapter explores the relationship between experimental and multispecies ethnographies. Both, methodologically and theoretically challenge the long-existing forms and ways of conducting anthropological research. By looking at human plant interactions in the urban sphere and process of thinking and turning such ethnographic practices as/into essay film forms, this chapter discusses the methodological and artistic possibilities and limitations of collaborative visual research in ethnographic practice.

In our “interconnected world in which people, objects and ideas are rapidly shifting and refuse to stay in place” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 4) forms of anthropological research, data generation and methodology transform as well as the concerns and

subjects that are addressed. These two tendencies feed, shape and transform each other. Sarah Pink indicates the importance of a visual anthropology, which is “informed by recent theoretical turns to theories of place and space, practice, movements and the senses” (2013: 17). Interestingly enough, understanding the place we inhabit (in this case the city) has been one of the most important concerns of essay filmmakers. Possibly, the inherent self-reflexivity directs essayists to the urban sphere since it is the fundamental place of the capital accumulation and the source, space and also the outcome of our struggles in everyday life. A film critic, Michael Pattison describes the urban space as both objective and physical and also subjective and psychological. He finds it painterly - diagrammatic, recordable – interpretable and by necessity under constant change. And states (2016):

“Essay films seem especially suited to the urban, precisely because they encompass a mode of cinematic expression inclined toward the wandering philosopher (the meandering flâneur), a subjective polemic and a feisty oppositional politics.”

He directs us to *Sans Soleil* (Chris Marker, 1982), *News From Home* (Chantal Akkerman, 1976), *Videograms of a Revolution* (Harun Farocki & Ujica, 1992) and *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (Thom Andersen, 2003/2014) as sites that one can observe the role that the urban plays in essay films. What is important to take from his piece is the link he sets with the political character of essay film and the self-reflexive turn of the film-research maker. For those reasons urban or simply the ‘lived space’ of the wanderer -in the form of an author, researcher or filmmaker- becomes a common, critical point of departure to discuss other issues related to political, social or economic life. In this thesis project, one of my driving motives was to explore how

social theory and direct action might come together in the creation-research process of a work of art. Since the urban space accommodates different kinds of conflicts and also makes them visible, I have decided to locate my research in the urban context in Turkey. Also, due to the changes in the digital materiality of our everyday lives, next to classical participant observation practice and its physical materiality, I have tried to extend the research into online ethnographic spaces. I will explain the on/offline locations and fragmentary nature of this research's ethnographic practice in the next subsection. Before that, I would like to explain where multispecies ethnography meets with essay film and critical urbanism.

2.1 Ethnographic and Essayistic Ways of Seeing

In simplest terms, ethnographic practice might be explained as being in a place and observing relations. Based on that, questions like 'what exactly makes a research ethnographic' or 'what does it mean to make an ethnography based art practice' becomes important for this project. Carole McGranahan raises the same question and answers by stating that ethnography is not only about a method. It is a method, a theory, a material object¹² and *a position* (2012). Tim Ingold further problematizes seeing ethnography as a method or a data collection process when it is seen and used in terms of closed case studies of people that are "designed as procedural means to satisfy the ends of anthropological inquiry" (2007: 88). Rather, they see an attitude or a position that researcher holds while making the craft of ethnography. Ingold enters into a discussion on differences of ethnography and anthropology and criticizes perspectives that reduce ethnography into 'data collection' and

¹² By material object she refers to the form of book but various kinds can be imagined here.

anthropology to ‘comparative theory’ (2007: 81). He argues that anthropological education does more than teaching us ‘about the world, people and societies’; it changes our ‘perception of the world’ and opens our eyes and minds to other possibilities of being (2007: 82). When the research sites move closer to the environment where artist-researcher lives, the boundaries between the space and time of the ‘research period’ and ‘rest of the life’ gets blurred, which is not the case in early, classical ethnographic studies. The notion of ‘going out into an other place’ to conduct research increasingly shows a tendency to disappear. Yet at the same time, the features of ethnographic practice remain, exactly because ‘features’ of ethnography are not determined, given or ‘designed procedural means’¹³.

The phenomenon, which is referred as ‘anthropology at home’, brings certain issues along itself that can be considered both challenging and enriching. The geographical, cultural and political familiarity makes the matter of balance important. Out of that challenge, ethnography based art production necessarily turns into a reflexive process. The arguments that are shaped around the literature of essay film opens a space to think about ‘a politically engaged’, ‘positioned’ and ‘self-reflexive’ research art process. In this sub-section, through data selection and research process of this thesis project, I will discuss how a politically engaged ethnographic research can be imagined, practiced and be thought as an art form. After arguing essay film as a way of experimenting with the conduction and representation processes, stages of ethnographic research, I will move to discuss how plant-human relations constitutes a critical point of departure in this process for the particular research art project of this thesis.

¹³ See Ingold’s claims on page 31.

Nora Alter uses “‘vision’ to mean ‘sight as a physical operation’ and ‘visuality’ to mean ‘sight as a social fact’”. Later she adds, by quoting Hal Foster, “however, both sets of distinction are relative: vision is social and historical too, and visuality involves the body and the psyche” (1996: 166). According to Alter, “visibility, or seeingness, is the ontological precondition that anything can be seen, or that anything, can be revealed and/or concealed, can be visible and/or invisible” (1996: 167). ‘Vision’ lies at the heart of the ethnographic practice; what is meant by observation is firstly attached to the practice of seeing. Anna Grimshaw states that her contention with Anthropology is its ocular-centric bias. But at the same time, she recognizes the shifting forms and emphasises in ethnographers’ ways of seeing (2001: 7). The vision of the ethnographer changes throughout the history in line with the paradigm shifts in the discipline of anthropology. These paradigm shifts and the ways of seeing they bring along can be explained through Alter’s arguments on ‘political im/perceptibility’. She states that like art, essay film “hides something while at the same time showing it. What is perceptible in some respects remains simultaneously imperceptible in others, and this very imperceptibility has specific political causes and consequences for production and reception” (1996: 169). What is visible or observable to ethnographer’s or artist’s eye, obviously, is very much related to the political position that person holds. Harun Farocki’s *Images of the World and Inscription of War* ‘shows that people can look without really seeing’ (Alter, 1996: 169).

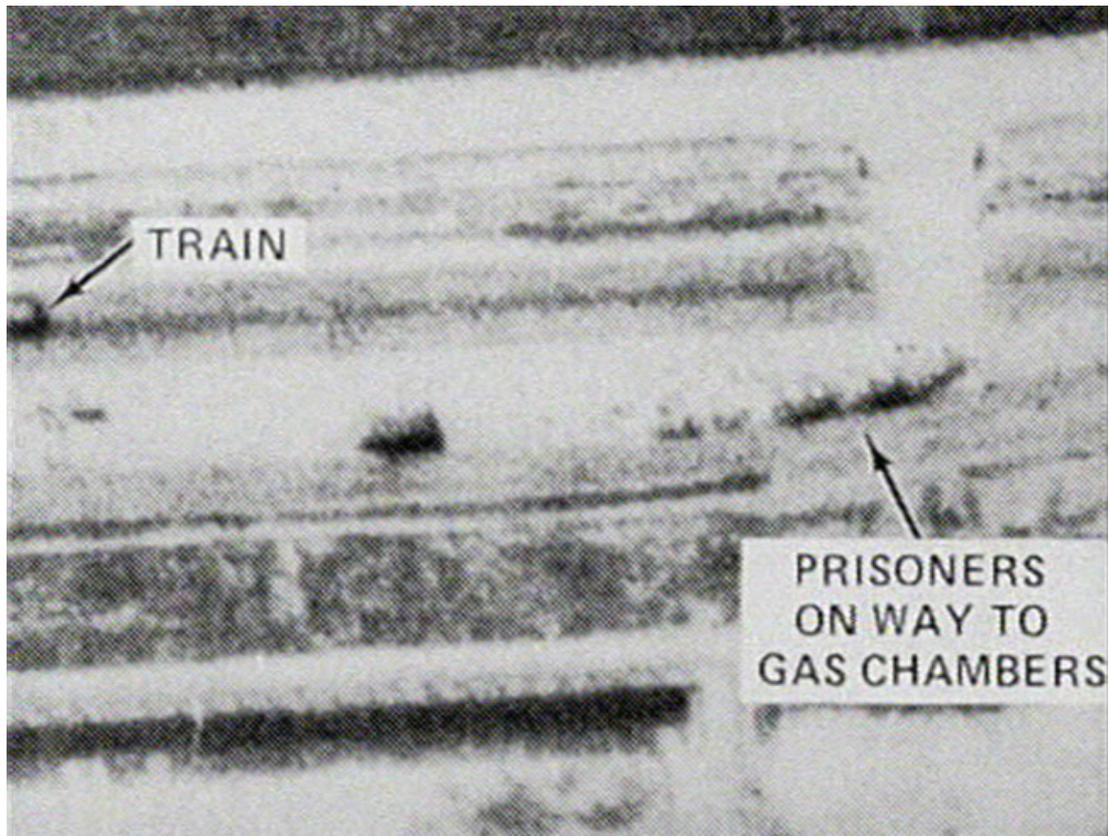


Figure 6: Harun Farocki, *Images of the World and Inscription of the War*, 1989

Figure 6 is a part from *Images of the World and Inscription of War* where Farocki defines the 'invisible' and 'imperceptible' through the situation of war pilot's bird-views -or bomb's eye views-. This is a critical part to relate with Farocki's argument on politically imperceptible. Alter finds this as one of the most striking examples of the film: Allied photorecon aircraft covers death camps several times between 4 April 1944 and 14 January 1945 however 'Auschwitz was shown and yet had not been seen until 1977' (1996: 174). Farocki's sharp example and the political economy of landscapes clearly demonstrate that 'visuality' or 'visibility' is not just an aesthetic phenomenon but also related to political and cultural contexts and relations. Therefore researching a subject or creating an artwork ethnographically, necessarily refers to an 'attentive look' to political im/perceptibility of things our

everyday lives. And through essay film form, it becomes possible to question and think –on film- the above-mentioned political im/perceptibility of things.

2.2 An Essayistic Approach to Multispecies Ethnography

Turning our ‘look’ into ‘our ways of seeing other species’ that we co-inhabit the urban sphere, might formulate a ground to make a critique of our existing ways of seeing the world. In an introductory text where hows and whys of the emergence of multispecies ethnography are explained, S. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich state:

“Creatures previously appearing on the margins of anthropology—as part of the landscape, as food for humans, as symbols—have been pressed into the foreground in recent ethnographies (...) Amid apocalyptic tales about environmental destruction (Harding 2010), anthropologists are beginning to find modest examples of biocultural hope” (2010: 545).

The word ‘Anthropocene’, explains Sophie Chao, has Greek origins: anthropo meaning human and cene meaning new (2017: 16). And it is, in an increasingly frequent way, used to define the current geological period (Morton, 2014) in which humans’ impact on Earth is considered as a biosocial destruction (Dooren, Kinsky and Münster, 2016), influencing and changing everything forever and for everyone (Haraway, 2014). Presumably, for that reason, people both in academia and also in their everyday lives, in their production and consumption processes, are looking for alternative ways of engagements with the world. Thom Van Dooren, Eben Kirksley and Ursula Münster state, life cannot be sustained in isolation and all species-relationships have their entangled histories beyond a mere ecological exchange. They refer to these histories of relationships as processes of becoming: “exchange and emergence of meanings, immersion in webs of signification that might be linguistic,

gestural, biochemical and more”. In that way, they highlight that “becoming is always becoming-with” (2016: 2). The term ‘multiplicity’ lies at the heart of discussions. The ‘multiple’ ways of seeing the world in ‘multiplicity’, proposed by multispecies ethnographers leads us to highly political questions raised again by Dooren, Kinsky and Münster: “How do colonialism, capitalism, and their associated unequal power relations play out within a broader web of life” and “What are the forms of responsibilities required” (2016: 3)?

It might be challenging to think *how forests think*¹⁴. Even the sentence itself might sound strange -and at same time inspiring- since it seem to imply such things like; plants feel, forests think or trees socialize... Dooren, Kinsky and Münster refer to this issue as the danger of projecting human norms and sensibilities onto others and taking from Val Plumwood, claim that anthropomorphism gives an end to the discussion rather than opening up a critical inquiry about such features might or not be shared by non-humans (2016: 8). The chance of encountering topics like that in popular science journals is increasing, though still highly unexplored, how ‘thinking and communicating plants’ in positive sciences can relate to and share with social sciences or particularly ethnographic practice? Ethnographic practice’s history, development, and even etymology might be related to human. In addition to that, as John Hartigan states, it does not sound really feasible, or at least it’s rare, to take plants as ‘ethnographic subjects’ in the classical sense, while there is a ‘cultural history of plants’, which can be referred as ethno-botany (2015). However, there are two prominent points in the newly emerging literature of multispecies ethnography that I would like to put forward, which are relevant for this project. Firstly, the

¹⁴ Kohn, Eduardo (2013) *How Forests Think*, University of California Press.

struggle *to think beyond human*¹⁵ opens a space for re-consideration of our human centered ways of thinking. Lewis Daly states while explaining the methodological and philosophical difficulties he faced while studying human-plant relations in Amazonian Guyana, the emergent complex picture of the variety of ‘selfhoods’, ‘subjectivities’ led him to a ‘cosmos of selves’ (2015). Thinking through a ‘complex ecology of selves’ calls for ““an anthropology that is not just confined to the human but is concerned with the effects of our entanglements with other kinds of living selves’ (Kohn, 2007: 4) - multispecies ethnography centers on how a multitude of organisms’ livelihoods shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces” (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010: 545).

“All of us craft shared lives in multispecies communities, but we do so in diverse ways and more or less attentively (...) Multiplying perspectives, these approaches unsettle the hegemony of knowing, valuing and living that are always unavoidably at play and at stake in the shaping of worlds” (Dooren, Kinsky and Münster, 2016: 8-9)

The task of multiplying knowledges, values is, in a way, a political imagining.

“Rather than simply describe what life is like at particular times and places, or what it once was like, scholars in the field of multispecies studies are engaging with people in their speculations about what life might or could be” (Dooren, Kinsky and Münster, 2016: 9.) This sentence itself can be attributed to an artist’s perspective on public issues if we bring to our minds the long history of the -various kinds of- relationships between art and politics.

¹⁵ Tim Ingold (2013) *Anthropology beyond Humanity*, can be found on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqMCytCAqUQ>

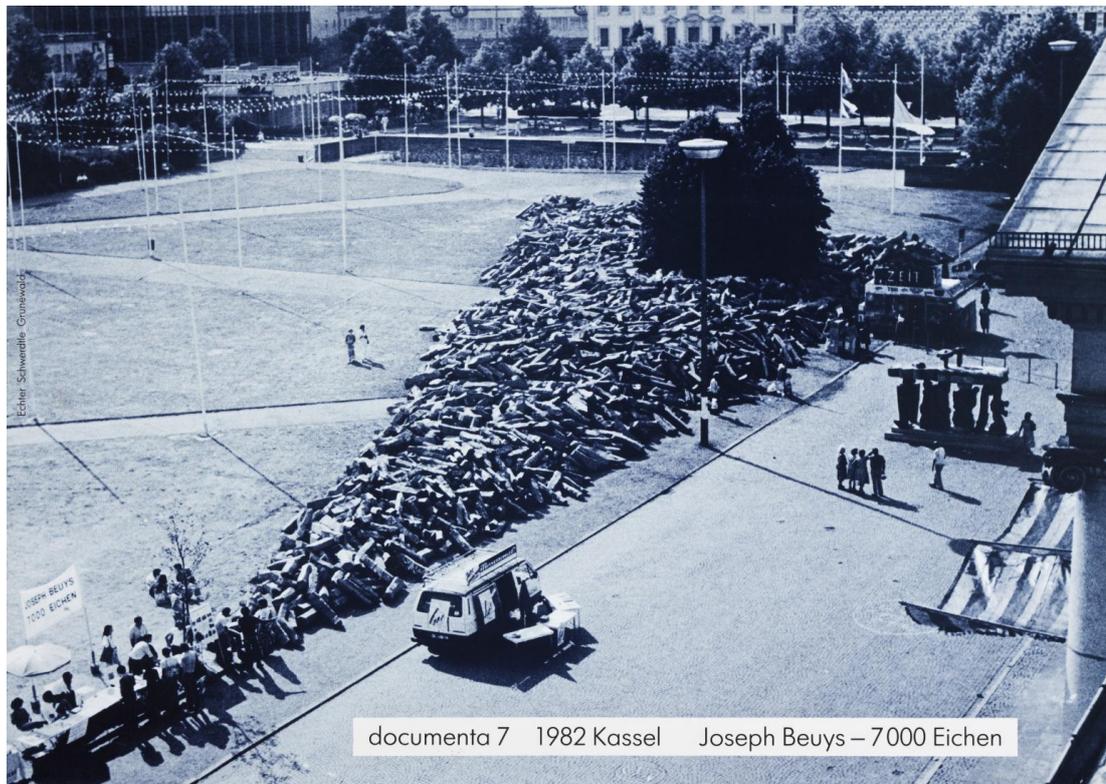


Figure 7: Joseph Beuys, 7000 Oaks, Kassel, 1982.

In Figure 7, we see a work of Joseph Beuys, who is defined on TATE's artists page as "a German Fluxus, happening and performance artist as well as a sculptor, installation artist, graphic artist, art theorist and pedagogue". What makes Beuys seen as a 'pedagogue' might be related to the 'public nature' of his work of art that makes a statement and aims people to participate in that artistic, social and political statement and practice. In 7000 Oaks, in his own terms, he makes a social sculpture that refers to people's life, to their everyday work (Beuys in Bowden, 2012). The project involves planting seven thousand oaks, each paired with basalt columns. The idea is to disseminate the basalt pile, which is seen in Figure 7, by planting an oak around city¹⁶.

¹⁶ A photograph from New York city, one of the places that Project expanded later on, can be seen in Figure 8, Retrieved from: <http://www.diaart.org/program/calendar/hans-haacke-on-joseph-beuys-lecture-2003-12-04/period/html>



Figure 8: Bill Jacobson, 7000 Oaks in New York, 2003

Kylie Bowden in her blog on the environment, art and social change, explains Beuys' work at Kassel as the first stage of an ongoing scheme of tree planting extended throughout the world, as a part of a global mission to effect environmental and social change, an action towards urban renewal (Bowden, 2012). Dooren, Kirksey and Münster see Beuys as a critical point in the history of 'ecological art'. They state since then "contemporary artists are facilitating alternative ways of speaking and thinking about how our own survival is contingent on entanglements within multispecies assemblages" (2016: 9).

There is a strong emphasis on the matter of attentively seeing and observing the world, both in multispecies ethnographies and ecological art practice. In this subsection, I wanted to stress out the prominent connection of these different fields of

study through existing research and art works. Next, I will explain my process of coming to realize my ‘inattentive’ ways of being, walking and seeing in the city and the transformation of those during the research-art process.

2.3 Imagining Mostly Harmless Ecologies

In early May, I met with a friend who was in Ankara to attend a conference. It was *hidrellez*¹⁷ and she was looking for a rose tree to bury her wish in the ground. It was already late in the evening so we haven’t had much time left and I couldn’t think of a single rose tree in our neighborhood. Then I remembered -just another- recently opened new wave coffee shop had rose bushes as decoration in front of it. I took her there, she buried her wish and I thought ‘how strange there aren’t any rose trees in Ankara’. Exactly a month later, at the end of May red, pink, white and peachy roses started to blossom everywhere. Around the same time, the strong fragrance of *Elaeagnus* trees appeared on my pathways and honeysuckles followed the others blossoming around apartment entrances. Attentively following the calendar of these smells changed what is ‘visible’ and ‘sensible’ in my urban environment. Until this year that I started to attentively observe the place-making strategies of plants in the urban sphere, a motive emerged related to my experiences in urban gardening, I have not had a ‘calendar of smells’. June was just June, not the month that honeysuckles blossom. The affective relation that I have observed and felt in the urban garden that I am participating led me to think more about our ways of relating to our

¹⁷ Hidrellez refers to a traditional celebration of spring in Middle Eastern, Asian, Anatolian and Balkan countries. ‘In pre-islamic calendar, the year divides into two; Days of Hızır (summer) and Days of Kasım (winter). In May, two friends/lovers Hızır (representing the land) and Ilyas (representing the sea) meets under a rose tree and the joy of their coming together brings the spring.’ My interpretation of the story, based on these two sources: Orhan Acıpayamlı (1973) Türkiye’de Bahar Bayramı Hidrellez and Turkey’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism webpage, Retrieved from: <http://www.kultur.gov.tr/EN,98558/hidrellez-traditions.html>

environments and think on improvisational ways of researching and representing these processes. I will elaborate on this subject further in the ‘Project Analysis’ chapter.

A plant ecologist¹⁸ that I have met in a permaculture course explained that steppes, which look like empty spaces in between buildings or roads, are one of the rare places that are possible to find the natural plant pattern and observe wild animal species that belong to that particular geography. Figure 9 was one of the examples of ‘empty spaces in Ankara’ he gave:



Figure 9: Yağmur Koçak, an example for ‘empty spaces’, 2017

What do we see when we look at Figure 9? A car park, an empty space, roadside or a place yet to be zoned for construction? Neoliberalization of urban space is a constant

¹⁸ Gökhan Ergan, in a phone interview. Parts from the interview can be found in the ‘Plants’ section of the Project.

process of creative destruction¹⁹. These ecologically rich ‘empty spaces’ rarely remain as they are. Under the logic of the capital, they need to be instrumentalized, regulated and somehow exploited. “Different types of cities across the world system are being repositioned within increasingly volatile, financialized circuits of capital accumulation” (Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer, 2009: 176) but at the same time “how this crisis has provoked or constrained alternative visions of urban life that point beyond capitalism as a structuring principle of political-economic and spatial organization” becomes an equally important question (ibid.: 176). So, urban space becomes a site that different beings encounter, conflict, imagine, envision and produce living spaces together. Neoliberal re-structuring of the ‘urban space and meaning’ also leads to a ‘restructuring of the actions’ to fight with the strategies of capital accumulation. In that way, due to the increasing neoliberalization of space, it becomes possible to think acts such as collective gardening as forms of critical urban protest, activism in certain geographies.

Last two sub-sections, including this, aim to introduce the sites and subjects of the research art project and my approach to the research process. Therefore the first one begins with a discussion on ethnographic and essayistic ways of seeing the research site and continues with a discussion on critical urbanism by briefly relating these issues to the project. Next sub-section ties these pieces together and makes an introduction to the data generation and configuration processes of the project. It aims to explain how I gathered the stories of *plants, people and places* in a new media project to imagine alternative visions, co-becomings and relations in the urban context.

¹⁹ See David Harvey (2010) *The Enigma of Capital: Crises of Capitalism*, London: Profile.

2.4 Data Sources and Generation Processes: Relations of Plants, People and Places

Places

‘A different look’ is what I am after, both of myself as an artist-researcher and in people that the research-art process is going together with. Project maps the attempts of creating a living space in the city by collecting particular imaginings of people together with plants in the urban sphere. Since one of the fundamental conflicts I have in mind is the way that cities “are sculpted and continually reorganized in order to enhance the profit making capacities of capital” (Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer, 2009: 178), I explore the possibly different ways of organization of space in the cities. In order to seek these different possibilities or divergences, to immerse in plant-worlds and to reach to people from different backgrounds I searched for various events, courses, projects and places in the city. And participated in collective urban gardening activities, a project titled ‘Art in Sweetgum Forests²⁰’, a permaculture course and a plant identification-collection walk²¹.

²⁰ Art in Sweetgum Forests Project is about observing and drawing Sweetgum forests in order to raise ecological consciousness and awareness about the condition of Sweetgum trees. More information can be found here: Özkil, A., Ürker, O., Zeydanlı U. (2017) Sığla Ormanlarında Sanat, Doğa Koruma Merkezi, Ankara. Url: dkm.org.tr

²¹ A walk organized by Ceyhan Temurcu in Middle East Technical University.



Figure 10: Yağmur Koçak, Drawing from Sweetgum Forests Series, 2016

In the project titled ‘Art in Sweetgum’ forests, our task as artists was to spend our days in the forest for a week and produce our artworks out of our impressions, feelings and observations in the forest. Observing the forest ‘attentively’, being immersed in it and turning those processes into a form of drawing was an influential experience that surely affected my ways of seeing and perceiving. However, it also provided a chance to once more realize, the conflicts that I was after are more to be found in the context of the city. Since urban context is the site that we feel the imposed time, vision and relations of capitalism most, therefore it seems more critical to re-think our perception of time, vision and relations at the heart of the conflict. So among these activities, I found collective urban gardening closest to my concerns and the meaning I attribute to critical urbanism. I was already participating in collective gardening activities in the Middle East Technical University but I have realized that the collective garden of 100. Yıl neighborhood, which is named after

Berkin Elvan²², has stronger political motivations next to the ecological ones. Even though two urban gardens that I have participated in are physically very close, going out of the university campus and entering the city, opens a space for multiple encounters and political possibilities. I found the expensive and closed world of permaculture, even though the philosophy it claims on is completely different, distant from the ‘alternative urban meaning’ that I am seeking to explore deeper. Plant identification-collection walk, on the other hand, was interesting yet it was more related to ethnobotany and instrumental, functional uses of plants. And urban collective gardening is the longer lasting practice that I was and still am motivated to participate in. Therefore I concentrated on collective urban gardening in the Places section of the new media project and made essayistic video fragments on practices, relations and emotions-affects of collective urban gardening.

People

As I have discussed in the second sub-section of the first chapter, due to the changing practices of digital everyday life and increased ‘online-web presence’, both the modes of access, distribution and representation of an art-research practice might be due to changes. In this section, in order to explore ‘critical visions on urban landscape’ I have applied to different forms of online ethnographic experimentation. Firstly I have tried to open a blog²³ and ask from people to contribute with a photograph, short text or video on their relations with plants in the urban sphere, in their houses, gardens or neighborhoods. However, it was not really tempting for people to contribute and produce something additional for ‘a researcher’s art

²² A 15 year old boy who was shot by his head with a tear-gas canister by a police officer during Gezi protests in 2013.

²³ bitkihavuzu.tumblr.com

project'. Shortly after I realized that assuming what I am expecting from people – uploading content online- is not any different than posting on Instagram or Facebook, is not the fact. That process made me re-realize that on social media people are creating their own private hubs of exhibiting themselves, their lives, relations and environments. Then, I have decided to ask to use directly their shared material by referencing their own accounts in order to reach people's own ways of seeing and representing the cities. The reason why I was after these 'visions' on social media was to multiply the critical practices that I was observing in the collective garden. In the same way, this section of the project is composed of two parts. The first page opens with photographs from the collective garden that are tried to be organized in a similar model to *Capturing Reality*²⁴ in order to indicate that the number of people in the garden, or outside, is expected to grow. Photographs are chosen to capture people while they are doing their regular practices in the garden, instead of portrait modes and their assemblage in the garden aims to refer to their collectivity. Second part extends these 'critical visions' outside of the garden and traces people's interpretations of the 'green space' in the urban context. "Beyond the immediacy of our own encounters, viral videos on Youtube and social media outlets now deliver a nonstop stream of footage and commentary on interspecies relations" (Dooren, Kirksey and Münster, 2016: 10). So in that way, I become able to reach beyond my own encounters, which I give place in the Plants section of the Project. I choose materials especially related to the nature-culture divide or plant-human relations and collage those images in the People section of the new media project in order to discuss the politics of a 'separated nature idea'.

²⁴ Pepita Ferrari's (2008) film from NFB Canada on the art of documentary, interactive and DVD forms are available.

Plants

The section that I have reserved for Plants is the most difficult yet experimental one. For this part of the project I entered into different fields that I am not familiar but eager to learn and interviewed a plant ecologist to get –at least scientifically- closest to a ‘plant perspective’, a flower seller to learn the ‘economics’ of plants and gardeners to be able to draw on cultural practices. As I have discussed in the part titled ‘Essayistic Approach to Multispecies Ethnography’, multiplying knowledges from different perspectives was my initial aim during this process. And it is indeed an ongoing attempt since there are always more people that we can learn from their fields of expertise, interests and skills, like artists who work closely with plants, herbalists, philosophers, biologists, municipality workers, plant collectors- conservationists, activists, etc. Also, as John Hartigan argues “the value of ethnography lies principally in its attention to place-making dynamics, and many nonhumans make place” (2015). So I observed the paths that plants re-shape in the urban sphere to montage with commentaries from later-selected parts from above-mentioned groups of people with different backgrounds.

2.5 Configurations of Encounters in a New Media Project

Experimentation has always been an integral part of cultures²⁵. Gere states, artists in mid-twentieth century saw themselves as experimental researchers or even, in Hal Foster’s term artist(s) as ethnographer(s)’, which is something that Gere finds mostly lacking in contemporary mainstream art found in galleries. He claims, experimentalism can be found more in so-called new media art (2010: 4). In the next

²⁵ See Charlie Gere’s quote on general experimental culture we live in, back on page 14.

chapter of the same book on art practice in digital culture²⁶ Stephen Scrivener and Wayne Clements look at different art-worlds²⁷ of academia, gallery and new media. Scrivener and Clements argue that new media art-world presently poses challenges to the established gallery art-world (2010: 9). There are long discussions on the differences between the possibilities and meanings of the environment of the white cube and other spaces that exhibition of art is possible. There are particularly “considerable uncertainties about what –and how- new media should be managed, conserved and circulated” (Scrivener and Wayne, 2010: 13).

The strong connection between academia art-world and new media art-world that Scrivener and Clements draw, is fundamentally related to the practice of research. The strong connection between academia art-world and new media art-world that Scrivener and Clements draw is fundamentally related to the practice of research. There are two prominent new media works that I am inspired and find exciting because of the possibilities and narrative forms they offer: 'Refugee Republic'²⁸ by a visual artist Jan Rothuizen, journalist Martijn van Tol, and photographer Dirk Jan Visser. The interactive documentary, as Submarine Channel calls it²⁹, explores Camp Domiz, a Syrian refugee camp in northern Iraq. They use sound, drawings, photography, and film, like all the old-tools of ethnographic research into the new media platform, to be able to transfer the everyday life in the campsite in new narrative forms rather than just text. Another powerful example is 'Out My

²⁶ Charlie Gere, Hazel Gardiner (Ed.) (2010) *Art Practice in a Digital Culture*, Ashgate.

²⁷ The term 'art-world' refers to the co-operative process of production of a work of art: “The creating artist works with a network of suppliers of materials, distributors of art works, fellow' artists, and with critics, theorists, and audiences. These contributing individuals and organizations together constitute an *art world*” (Becker, 1982)

²⁸ A link to the Project: <http://refugeerepublic.submarinechannel.com/>

²⁹ A link to the info page of the Project in Submarine Channel's website: <http://www.submarinechannel.com/refugee-republic-camp-domiz/>

Window³⁰ ' by Katerina Cizek. An interactive documentary on the variety of life accounts from the global highrise models, 360-degree photo collages of apartments from 13 different cities are linked to the main screen. On the main screen, there is a collage of apartment buildings that bring these different apartments all around the world into one frame. This emerges as a suitable and meaningful way to connect a multi-sited research into one place.

Scrivener and Wayne, following Howard S. Becker, point out to the co-operative, collective processes of academic artistic production in new media (2010: 21). Above examples show how these processes necessitate great collaborations among different specialties. Sarah Pink (2006; 2013) engages extensively with the question of how a visual anthropology of 21st century is going to be and possible interdisciplinary collaborations and explorations. She gives an important role to hypermedia because of the interplay of words, images, video and various media forms it allows. One of the most important points Pink notes is that even though there are some commonalities between different hypermedia projects, they largely develop independently from each other to represent their particular research process (2006: 127). Depending on their purpose of conduction, the research frames and ways of representation changes. This is also why the research-art project of this thesis is framed in a new media environment. Moving the attempts of essayistic, attentive ethnographic practice on multispecies relations in the urban sphere to a new media project is also an attempt to re-think established ways of doing research or art projects; a try to move these processes into more politically engaged, public spheres

³⁰ A link to the Project: outmywindow.nfb.ca/

of life so that they can always be in a state of becoming; a state of becoming which opens to structure of the Project into other participants and their narratives.

CHAPTER 3

PROJECT ANALYSIS

It is possible to come up with several definitions of ethnography, which all would be, in a sense acceptable. Besim Can Zirh states, the comprehensiveness of ethnography's definition -which almost attributes an ambiguity to it- actually leads to ethnography's most important secret as a method: an ethnographic method cannot be thought independent from its research problem and particular case (2017: 54). This chapter concentrates on the inter-related processes of research and representation of this thesis project.



Figure 11: Yağmur Koçak, Main Page of the Project, 2017

The new media project uses the interactive storytelling software designed by Klynt to be able to create a multi-layered platform that accommodates various paths that are connected to each other. In that way, the new media sphere works as a metaphor for the act of ‘imagining different possible ecologies’. The Project takes a collective urban garden in 100. Y11 Neighborhood as its primary site to explore relations and cultural-political dynamics since collective gardens compose sites where different multispecies relations are cultivated. At the same time, it attempts to extend the act of imagining different meanings, practices and relations in the urban by attentively observing and collecting plant-human entanglements.

In each section -people, places and plants- a form of an assemblage of diverse ways of seeing, being together and taking action are presented in different media forms according to the conduction process of the research. The project opens with a short introductory video, which works as a prelude and briefly explains the motivation behind this research-art project. The participant enters into the project through that introductory video and moves to the main interface –see in Figure 11-, which opens three paths to the participant³¹. Each path takes the participant to a different part of the research with a different actor at its center: people, places or plants. Titles indicate the focus and perspective of the sections that I am going to explain further below in detail.

³¹ I will use the term participant for the people who in other cases can also be referred as audience, interactor or user because they are also going to participate in the Project through reading, watching and deciding which paths they will take. Seeing the Project itself as a continuation of the research process leads me to the term ‘participant’.

‘People’ section has two parts. Firstly it opens with photographs of people from 100. Yıl Berkin Elvan Collective Garden and a click moves the participant to the video fragments made with that person’s narrated relation to the collective garden.



Figure 12: Yağmur Koçak, Screenshot of the People Section in Klynt, 2017

Second part leads to an assemblage of people’s visions of ‘nature’ by collecting their encounters and relationships with plants in the urban sphere. It collects public and private encounters both from social media accounts and has a link to the Project’s blog that I have opened in early March to call for participation. One of the participants of the garden, during an interview³² said that these changes in everyday life change the notion, culture of living together. And reflected on her wish that more people engage in such collective acts of ‘changing their lives’. The reason I have added the second part is to bring together people’s contestations with the existing meaning and relations of ‘nature and culture’ in the urban context next to each other. Through collecting people’s own snapshots, angles, compositions and comments on

³² Can be found in video fragment titled “On 100. Yıl Neighborhood” in the garden part of the Places section

their relationships with and approaches to plants, I wanted to compose an assemblage of different visions that carry the possibility to imagine and create another city. John Postill and Sarah Pink, in *Social Media Ethnography, Digital Researcher in a Messy Web*, discuss how ethnographers as well as other qualitative researchers may use social media and its user generated content in order to reach different internet-related³³ knowledges and places (2012: 1). Together with emerging digital practices and platforms, ethnographic research possibilities change as I have discussed back in the first chapter (Background). Online spheres, evidently, become important parts of our socialization processes and routines in our everyday lives. In that manner, gathering visual form of information on the question of “how people relate to plants in their environments?” also becomes possible through visual content analysis in social media. Visuals, accompanied with comments or not, speak for themselves and provide a multiplicity of perspectives, visions and forms of knowledges. And that, in a way, gives a collaborative form to the Project at the beginning - in its production process.

³³ Postill and Pink uses ‘internet-related ethnography’ rather than ‘internet ethnography’ to indicate that they engage with internet practices and contents directly but not *exclusively* (2012: 3).



Figure 13: Screenshot of elifdegil’s Instagram page, 2017

Sarah Pink suggests to conduct new experimentations with ethnographic methods, to develop new technologies for new situations –or vice versa- and at the same time to retain a reflexive awareness of the nature of knowledge produced: its limits and strengths (Postill and Pink, 2012: 4). In Figure 12, we see one example of the kinds of photographs that I have collected; in which people document a particular piece in time; a moment of conflict. Through these moments - photographs that they capture, how they relate to ‘nature’ becomes visible - observable. Can Küçük describes these instances as ‘*şehir işleri*’ –which can be translated as the city (art)works- and argues, these works hold different features than the works in a gallery space or also from the ones that are in public space (2017). Küçük stresses out the temporality and relationality of these instances; he states that they exist because people ‘see’, ‘get affected’ and ‘attribute a meaning’ to those frames, city-works. The ethnographic value and relevance I find in these snapshots exactly lie at those relations. Through social media shares, ‘an ethnographic place’ emerges. Such ethnographic places in a

digital world, as Pink states, are not bounded localities but collections of things that become intertwined (in Postill and Pink, 2012: 6). Transformations in digital everyday life practices and increased online web-presence necessarily turn the online sphere an important part of ethnographic place(s). If we would like to locate multiple different visions and relations in the cityscape, then social media accounts provide a sphere to experiment another way of knowledge generation in ethnographic research.

For this section, I have used first and second –the ones that are taken by gardeners-hand photographs and traced the related-content about the subject matter on Instagram on a daily basis since March 2017 through searches with tags and interpersonal networks. John Postill and Sarah Pink draw five overlapping sub-practices for a social media researcher: catching up, sharing, exploring, interacting and archiving (2012: 6). I got into contact with 8 people next to the fewer number of people that sent material directly to me as a response to Project's call on its blog titled '*bitki havuzu*', 'plant pool'. And achieved their shares on their long-short relationships with plants. I could not reach to a great number of people but the new media environment itself is already in a 'state of becoming' and is open to change and grow. This part of the research-art project aims to contribute to the discussion on the potential that our increased online presence adds to ethnographic research and also aims to create a sphere where physically separate different visions are connected. The way people walk in the city with the mode of a researcher, observer or an artist, ready to immediately share their encounters from their social media accounts opens a rich area of debate from various perspectives. Here, by experimenting an Internet-related method I explore its possibility to connect a multiplicity of visions and relations in the urban context.

‘Places in between’ focuses on the spatial dimension of multispecies relations in the urban context. At first, a drawing of a cityscape emerges -see Figure 14-. There are three main parts of the drawing, which are highlighted with hotspots: roads, houses and gardens. In this part, in a plainly illustrated way, I am trying to compose a dialogical cityscape: a space that emerges out of the encounter and conflict of different forces and ideas. Roads tend to give a contextual approach by referring to Turkey’s constant state of being ‘under construction’. Urban gardens play an important role since they, to a degree, socially, politically and economically diverge from how state-market duo plans and designs cities. 100. Yıl Berkin Elvan Collective Garden comes to the forefront as it is the starting point of the project because of the feelings and thoughts it brought to my life. Observations from the everyday life of the garden throughout three seasons, winter, spring and summer and giving an important place to the collective garden in my calendar created an affective relationship. After my experience in the collective garden, I have started to have a critical look at our relationships with plants elsewhere in the city. And tried to emphasize those sites of conflict as well in section Plants.

This part provides a space for the participant to move between different possibilities in the city by my observations with-through camera during the research process and secondary found footage materials. Video fragments show both the places where the crisis of capitalism hides, reveals and also the emerging new spaces of hope³⁴. As I have discussed earlier, the urban space can be considered both as the primary site of conflicts as well as struggles. Urban re-generation, neoliberalization processes are closely related to the discussions on nature-culture dichotomy. The so-called division

³⁴ See David Harvey (2000) Spaces of Hope, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

between nature and culture is commonly discussed but still remains as an important issue. What does it mean and serve to create a ‘separate nature’ idea; thinking ‘nature’ as a site to ‘go for a weekend holiday’ or as a product to ‘buy from market in the form of hobby gardening materials’ but not as a ‘broader ecology’ that human beings are a part of as well as other species and how Turkey is invaded by construction sector are some questions that this part attempts to raise.



Figure 14: Yağmur Koçak, Drawing for Project's Places Section, 2017

There are many forms of urban gardening throughout the history and all around the world due to the variety of social, political, economic and ecological motivations and factors. Urban gardening scholarship around the world mostly concentrates on issues such as urban poverty, community building, gentrification and resistance to the urban capitalist growth (Marche, 2015: 2). So exploring the activities of collective gardening carries the possibility to lead us to people's stories of discontent, conflict

and struggle with today's existing meaning of urban, which they attempt to change their everyday life practices and environments. In this part, I have tried to look at, participate in and represent collective urban gardening with anthropological and essayistic lenses. Tim Ingold's arguments on differentiating anthropology from ethnography³⁵ or changing what we straightforwardly understand by them correspond to what I have tried to experiment in this section. I have observed the interactions between people and land and attempted to connect these relations into wider contexts of their occurrences.

'Plants' is the part of the project that emerged after I have realized that relations in the garden are not solely taking place among human beings. The effect of the garden itself on the collectivity, motivations, and practices of people is an important point to explore further. I experienced and also listened from other gardeners, how a tiny seed grows into a pertinacious green plant is a hope-inspiring process. The relationship of consistent care and responsibility in the garden gives birth to a different kind of entanglement both with other human beings, species and places that surround us in the urban sphere. At least, the time spent in the garden opens an interstice to re-think our relationships, if not directly changes them. And perhaps, that practice of re-thinking is what is valuable itself.

This part explores the paths plants draw for themselves on sidewalks, with the comments of a plant ecologist on life-strategies of plants in the urban sphere.

Multispecies ethnography literature suggests as I have discussed earlier, while trying to talk about plants or other non-human species, we always need to experiment our

³⁵ Discussed back on page 31.

existing methods of researching. Attempting to multiply the knowledges and perspectives lie at the heart of the video fragments of this section, in line with the nature of the new media project(s) in general. Multiplying possible paths, ways of being, knowing and practicing is the main issue the Project deals with.

Throughout the Project, I had a 'process book' that I have kept to note down thoughts emerging from readings from related literature and meetings with my supervisor Ersan Ocak. See extract pages on figures 15.1-2-3-4-5:

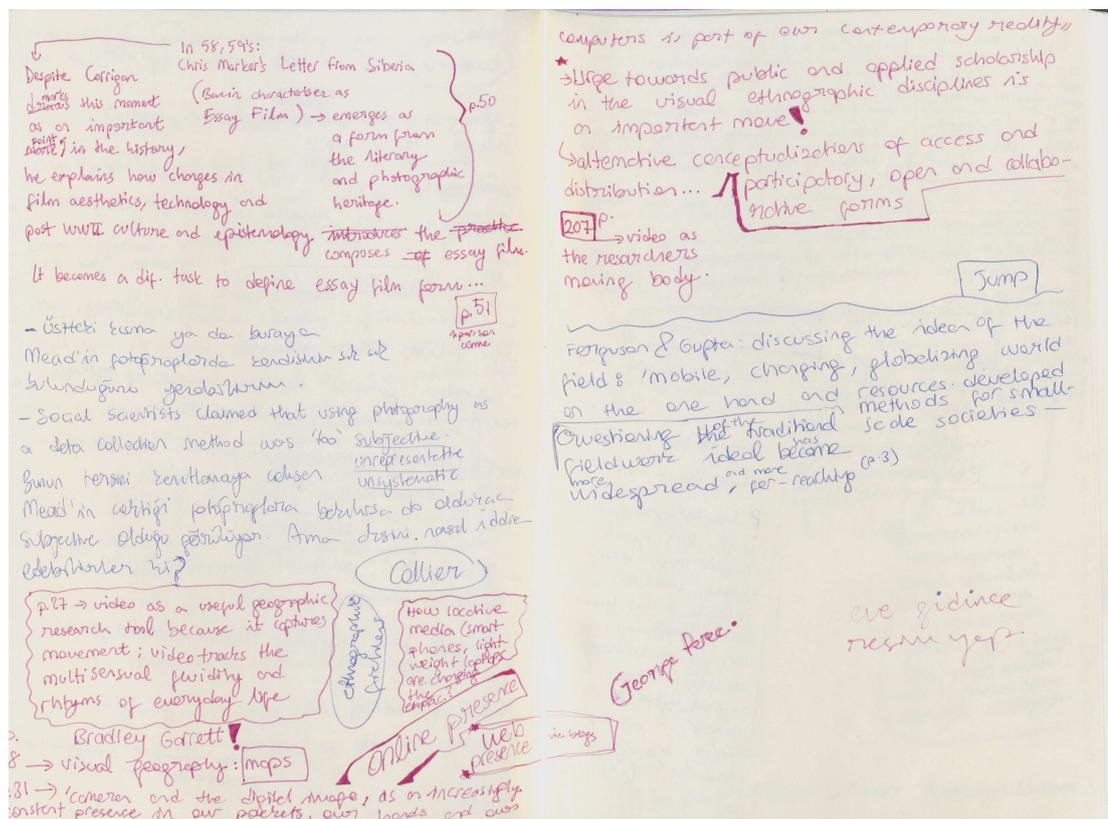


Figure 15.1: Yağmur Koçak, Literature notes on emerging visual research methodologies, Process Book

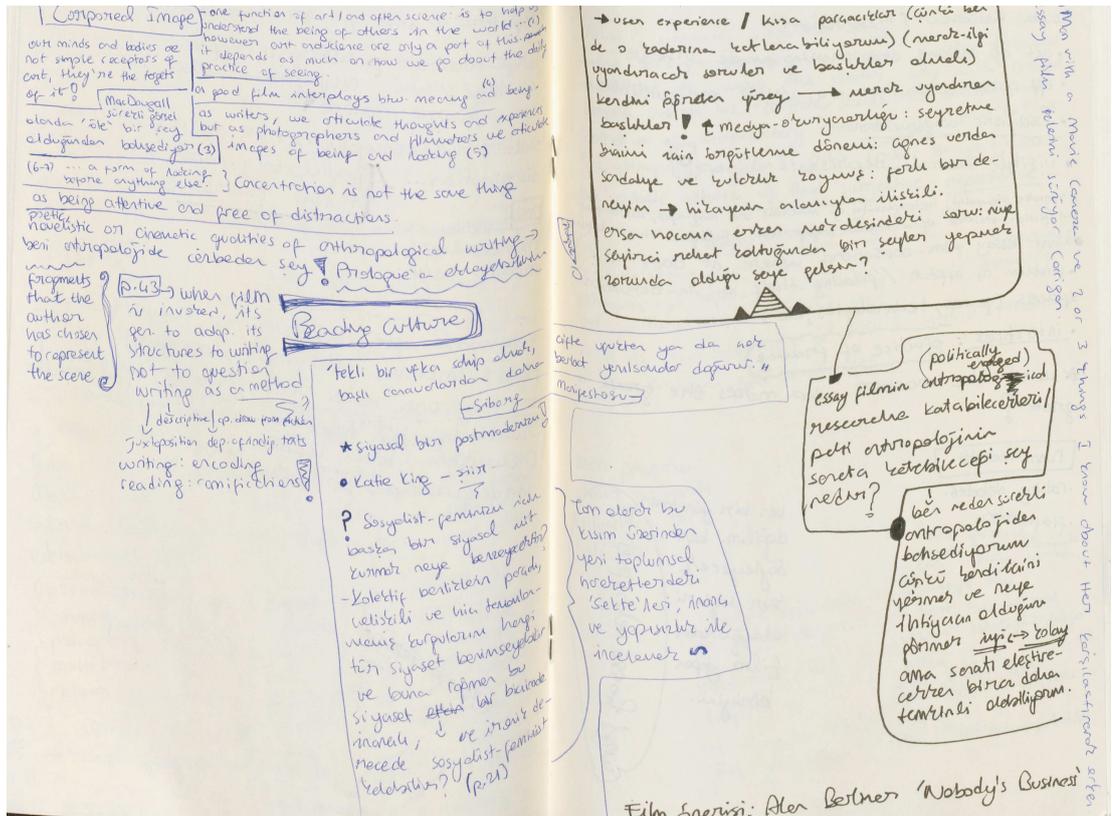
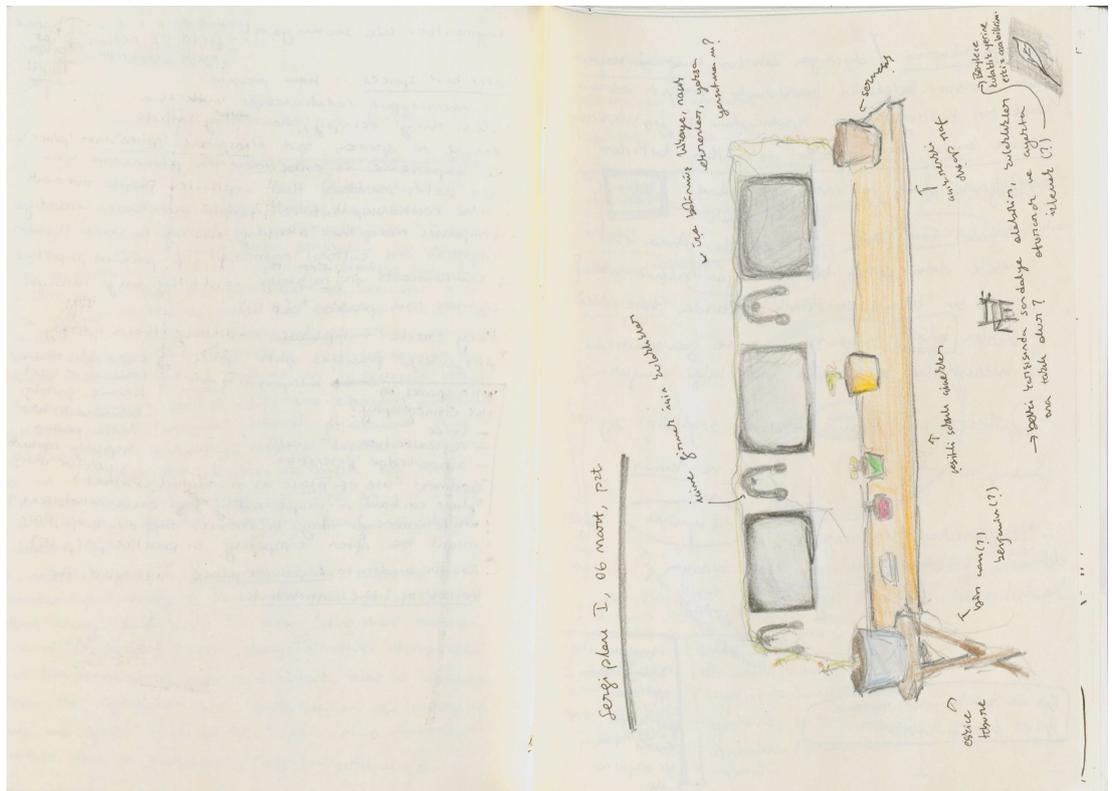


Figure 15.2: Yağmur Koçak, Literature notes on visual anthropology, Process Book



Before the process session on 11th of April 2017, where I had the chance to talk with 7 people and get feedback on the on-going state of the Project (see dispersed notes in Figure 15.5), I had a second interface, which was illustrating a cityscape. Instead, participants suggested that a name-place tag would be more explanatory. For that reason I have decided to place a page at the beginning of each video fragment, which locates them in time and story. Now, there is only one main interface³⁶ where each section –people, places and plants- are connected to each other and each represents a dimension, an angle of the Project. In order to achieve a more clear navigation, I have added options to move forward and backward to each video fragment and part and made it possible to start-over and come back to the main interface from wherever they are, with the menu button. Before the process session, introductory video was a part of the main interface but when I have realized that right arrow is not necessarily the first thing people are attracted to click on, I have added another page at the beginning that directly leads to an opening with the short introductory video in order to make a prelude to the Project.

³⁶ See Figure 16.2

> Human nature interactions through a multispecies lens.
 - intersection between social and ecological! ● ●
 ↳ to re-imagine the world in the Anthropocene.
 ↳ conservation is rooted in (human, non-human, more-than-human) senses of place.
 ↳ landscapes as units of analysis: 'multispecies assemblages' that are easily overlooked in other spatial and historical scales.
 ↳ contact zones: where humans and other species biologically, culturally and politically intersect!

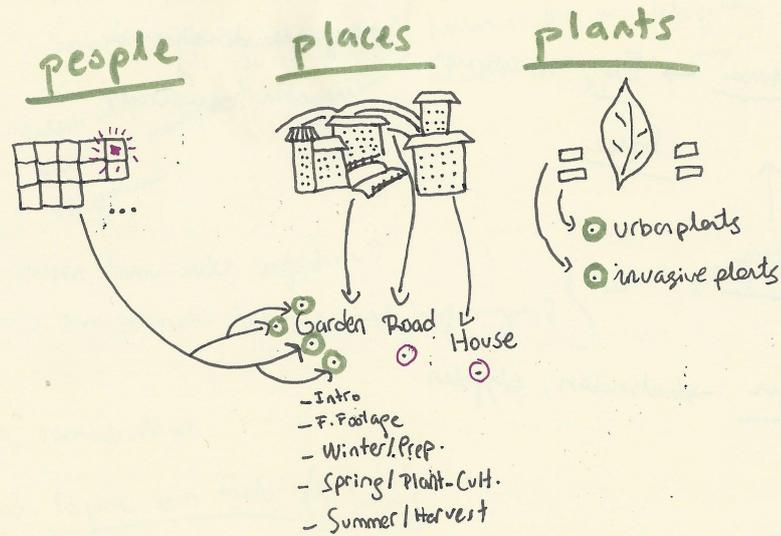


Figure 16.1: Mind-map for the storyboard of the Project, Process Book

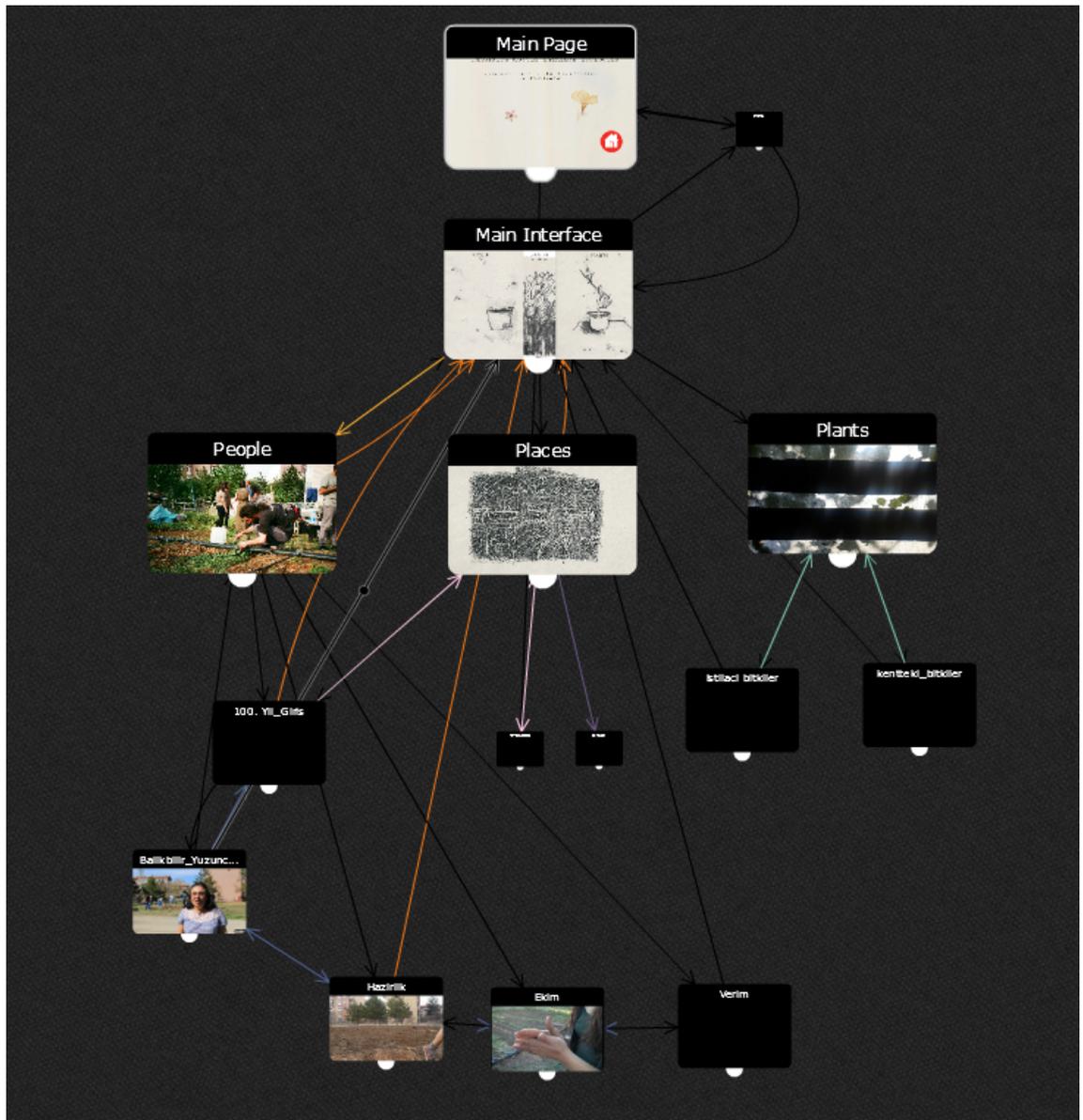


Figure 16.2: Screenshot of the Storyboard in Klynt

CONCLUSION

The main reason that I have applied to a new media environment was to find a way to set a dialogue between anthropological research and art practice based on my in-line motivations that led me to study and practice both. It is possible to find traces throughout history that could lead us to state that relations between art and anthropological research are quite old. Both apply to and gain from each other in certain circumstances. An artwork is always an outcome of the art-world it belongs to and the interactions, relations that art-world accommodates, as Harold S. Becker (1982) argues. Ethnography as well, cannot be thought solely as a method, set of designed rules that can be applied at any time for any location. Then both, ethnographic and artistic practice transform according to the context they emerge. What I have fundamentally tried to do in this Project was to find a subject that I am concerned with and try to find experimental ways to approach to it that would fit the subject matter. I was looking for a way to create maps of my thoughts and attempts and decided that new media environments provide multi-dimensional frameworks that offer such possibilities. However, I have come to realize that in order to represent the affective relationship between the garden and its participants -or plants and human beings in general- might necessitate a more sensorial approach rather than a purely visual one. In order to transfer the emotions, relations of care and responsibility other artistic means might need to have experimented. Still, what I have focused until now provides a conceptual introduction to the context that

indicates why a deeper exploration of human-plant relations in the urban context might be an important act.

Usage of hypermedia to experiment the changing ways of anthropological research dates back to 1990's (2006: 105). Sarah Pink states that visual anthropology has a history, "its own foundation stories, personalities, methodologies, filmmaking and photographic practices, theories and a whole conglomeration of events, activities and institutions that have developed" and it has impacts on "how we understand the visual, the question of vision, and the methods of research and representation we engage in" (2006: 132). Some of these impacts, Pink argues, challenge visual anthropology's own concepts and these constitute the new experimental paths that lead to an 'anthropology of the twenty-first century'. Three central roles that Pink attributes to visual anthropology today are; renewed forms of comparative anthropology, being a conduit for the public responsibility of anthropologists and being a unique player in an interdisciplinary social science (2006: 132). This Project subject to the thesis fits the second and third roles and tries to experiment a form of public, responsible, interdisciplinary research-art practice. As I have indicated earlier, in the Project I do not try to instrumentalize one field of study for the other. Yet my longer background in social sciences might be adding an anthropological filter to the artistic approach. For instance, the desire to include accounts of people, which can be seen in the video fragments that opens by clicking on the garden part of the cityscape, might be the reason that I could not apply to a more sensorial approach that could convey the relations among people and the garden in a better way. Sarah Pink states, new visual technologies imply new forms of visual practice, new modes of visual production, content, dissemination and interpretation, perhaps combined

with new interrelationships with other elements of sensory experience (2006: 141).

So another way of exploring the impacts of the garden itself on people's struggle might lead this Project to another sphere, additional to the new media environment.

Seeing and discussing such collaborations between media and anthropology throughout the history demonstrates the importance of the position, which the researcher or the artist holds in her attempts. Of course, the collaborations between disciplines do not solely emerge out of technological developments and possibilities but they are related to the transformations in the political paradigm that disciplines attached to in their historical-political contexts. This research-art project aims to hold a critical position to the existing separated nature idea in the urban sphere, through cases from Turkish context. Environmental problems might not be the first issue that comes to mind when thinking about the difficulties that Turkey goes through. However I think, they carry the possibility to create a common ground for discussion and their outcomes and the people's reactions can be traced in the everyday politics of urban sphere.

“The modern state promotes and imposes itself as the stable centre - definitively - of (national) societies and spaces. As both the end and the meaning of history - just as Hegel had forecast - it flattens the social and ‘cultural’ spheres. It enforces a logic that puts an end to conflicts and contradictions. It neutralizes whatever resists it by castration or crushing. Is this social entropy? Or is it a monstrous excrescence transformed into normality? Whatever the answer, the results lay before us” (Lefebvre, 1996: 23).

Murat Güney argues that creating a sense of ‘there is no other alternative’ strongly feeds -and actually lies at the heart of- the main strategies of the government in Turkey (2009: 362). Increased social, political, ecological and economic injustices

lead to a great political hopelessness and despair. Social movements that gained a ground in our collective memories do not disappear completely but become a multiplicity of different projects. They broke into a whole range of attempts and people continue to ‘give responses’ to the ongoing repressions at different spheres of life. David Graeber argues that in times when everyone is brooding on great catastrophes, the revolutionary Future in its old-fashioned sense appears increasingly implausible but cannot be really abolished at the same time. With that duality, he claims, we reach to two different senses of futures and one lies at our present ‘imagination time’: “The Future has become a kind of hidden dimension of reality, an immanent present lying behind the mundane surface of the world, with a constant potential to break out but only in tiny, imperfect flashes” (2014:103). Everyday life practices of seeking, imagining and creating different possibilities and re-thinking existing activities and relations become more and more important and meaningful in times as such. This thesis project as well is an outcome of the responsibility I felt, to contribute to the practice of producing ‘counter knowledges’.

This thesis discusses issues of imagining possibly different relations in and with our environments on the basis of, in broadest terms, visual anthropology, essay film and multispecies ethnography literatures. I argue that certain features of essay film make essay films more ‘ethnographic’ than classical ethnographic films. Ethnography cannot be limited just to the direct observations of the everyday life practices in the research site but what to do with those accounts from the site composes an important part of ethnographic knowledge generation. How to interpret and how to represent these processes becomes a critical point in research and necessitate a constant negotiation of the boundaries of different disciplines such as art and anthropology.

The Project subject to this thesis right now stands in between. And it needs to develop itself by engaging more with what both the answers that art and anthropology provide for the questions of the Project.

In this new media project titled *Imagining Mostly Harmless Ecologies*, I try to trace ‘different visions’ to and ‘re-thinkings’ of our political, social and ecological conditions. In order to do that I apply to different ways of seeing in the processes of researching and producing an artwork. During the process, I have realized that anthropological research needs to formulate even more experimental ways to explore its changing subject matters. The same attempts of ‘imagining, experimenting and writing ideas’ continued in the written part of the thesis and the thesis part as well became a fragmented piece of writing. In the first chapter, ‘Background’, I review the literature and try to establish a ground where anthropology and art practice meets and how their relationship changes throughout the history. In the second chapter, ‘Data Generation and Methodology’, firstly I explain the ways I experiment with the existing ethnographic observations in order to describe the ways I gathered pieces, fragments that constitute the new media project. Secondly, I move directly to the processes of data generation and state the reasons I have decided to use the new media environment. The third chapter, ‘Project Analysis’ is the analysis part that I point out the details of the parts of the Project and also mention other processes such as ‘Process Book’, ‘Process Session’ and links among sections in new media project’s mind map. Overall, I have tried to practice thinking in ‘multiplicities’ in every stage of *Imagining Mostly Harmless Ecologies*, from Project to the written part of the thesis.

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