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Special Theme

Ethno-graphic Collaborations: Crossing Borders with Multimodal Illustration

Discussion

Collaborating through Illustration: Motivations, Methods, and Meanderings

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Part 1 Motivations for Graphic Ethnography



Laura Haapio-Kirk: (00:02)

Great. Thank you so much to Charlie Rumsby, and José Sherwood González for being here today. I'm Laura. I'm the person who's curating this special issue. I just thought we could start this first session just with very brief introductions from you both, why you're drawn to graphic anthropology and what is your experience with that. Maybe, Charlie, do you want to start?

Charlie Rumsby: (00:38)

Sure. I'm Charlie, as Laura said, and currently I'm The Sociological Review fellow. I was drawn to graphic anthropology, I think, out of a desire to communicate my research findings back to the participants who had given me such beautiful and rich data. For me, it was a journey of trying to enable access. As a starter that was basically what I – those are the hallmarks and the catalysts for me to think about using graphics.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (01:14)

Thanks, Charlie. And José?

José Sherwood González: (01:16)

I'm José. My camera went funny there. I'm José. I came into graphic anthropology really as a way to make sense of my own research. I am a transdisciplinary artist. I was doing work into my family's story,

as you people have read and seen already. What I love about graphic anthropology is the way in which you can start to access and express things that you wouldn't be able to do through text, or you wouldn't be able to do from film. What I love, specifically, especially the reason why we're here today is to talk about how you can enter into dialogue and collaboration with your participants – in my case, my family. It was a way of entering into the world, the visual world and the different – I really like the word that you use actually, Charlie, which was about the ineffability, like ineffable realities, the things, the ephemera that are out there that we want to try. We can see. We can feel but we don't really know how to – that they can't be captured necessarily using what we might consider traditional methods in ethnography.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (02:32)

I think you've basically opened up the session really nicely because I really wanted to explore what can these graphic forms of representation bring to anthropology. Charlie, you mentioned this, the really important work of giving work back to the research participants themselves in a format that might be interesting to them or accessible, and more digestible, perhaps than a thesis or journal article. Then José, what you were just saying, again, I think it's really, really exciting and interesting about what the particularities of the graphic form can do for different kinds of storytelling, really. On that note, what do you think, is really one of the kind of key things that graphics do what is the work that they're doing that texts perhaps cannot do, or what is different to what can be done with film or photography as it has been done a lot within anthropology?

José Sherwood González: (03:48)

I studied visual anthropology in the University of Manchester. We learned about all these different methods that we could use. It is mostly focused on filmmaking. The focus within visual anthropology on the moving image, really, for me, created a way in which I could engage in a conversation around what it means to use these images, to use the visual or the sensory in order to look at research and look at work and life in different ways.

I really love comics. That's kind of why I love what comics can do. There's been some incredible work around comic studies that look specifically at what comics do. I think there's a lot of really cool and exciting work to be done around how to link comics studies with anthropology. We've talked a lot about this in the past. How do we link? How do we talk about graphic anthropology as a sub-discipline within itself? It fascinates me to think about what we could do and where it's going.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (05:05)

I think it's really interesting to see the work that's been done in the graphic medicine community, which is sort of – there must be anthropologists within that community as well. But that has really taken off. But it'd be really wonderful to see. I mean, it is growing, but to see that level of engagement within the anthropological community. I don't know if you've heard of graphic medicine, Charlie?

Charlie Rumsby: (05:34)

Yes, I mean, only through the Twitter community. That's basically why I catch new things as they're coming out. I love this. For me what is it that graphic can do. I think it can build empathy really quickly.

Film can also do that; don't get me wrong. But for instance, I'm also making an ethnographic film at the moment. I'm collaborating as well on that project. But they're totally different.

When I give the film to the community, the representation is literally a mirror image, isn't it? They see themselves exactly on the screen. I think it's just a totally different experience for the participants to see themselves because they're not just seeing what they say. They're seeing their mannerisms. They're seeing the people that surrounded the context.

Also, ethically, do you really – I don't want to show this film to any old person with the graphic novel that Ben and I are collaborating on. Actually, you're giving people something back in a form that doesn't explicitly mirror the circumstances. It's like a really great opportunity to create a sort of spectrum of representation. Within that spectrum, I think, you can draw people into a narrative that highlights issues.

I love researching livelihoods, what's your everyday reality. But embedded within everyday realities, there are key issues that actually need to be spoken about.

Now, the thing is, with graphics I've found is that you don't have to let these key issues – in my research status is a big key issue. Racism is another one. Those key issues don't have to squash the narrative. That's what I love about the graphic that you can just allow just an ordinary scene where young people are discussing something that's important to them, and you can let that play out. For a moment, the reality that could otherwise sort of suffocate this beautiful moment – these everyday moments are given space to breathe. When people then see that – I've shown, for instance, my niece and nephew who are 10 and 12, some of the stuff that Ben and I have done. As children viewing children, they've been able to engage with them so quickly in their stories, and really complex issues that those stories are embedded within.

For me, empathy is such a beautiful and unique thing about graphics and how you can play with representation. It's not exact – and I think with film, often it is quite exact. Of course, you can use that really – you can use different footage of landscapes and things like that. But often it's the talking heads, and it's people processing their lives in a very real time moment.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (08:26)

I think that's really, really interesting. It reminds me of something that I think I read an article by Benjamin Dix, which was comparing this kind of space that the graphic representation gives, especially to difficult subjects. It makes them almost easier to look at or more comprehensible because there isn't that kind of overwhelmingness of the reality of that situation. But it's kind of like a distilled version. I think that's really, really interesting that it kind of allows us to look at difficult subjects, perhaps more closely than if we were faced with a confronting image or a photograph or piece of footage, perhaps.

Charlie Rumsby: (09:15)

How's that played out in your research then, Laura? What's your sort of feelings? What's the graphic done for you?

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (09:21)

Well, I'm really interested in various forms of graphic experimentation in methods like drawing myself, and then drawing stories that people have told me. But in this particular issue of *TRAJECTORIA*, I'm kind of highlighting one other form of collaboration which was with an artist that I know in Japan, in one of my field sites. She very beautifully painted her life story and important moments in her life. I was using that form of collaboration as a way to kind of understand her life story better and how she comprehended it.

I think that the graphic form in this case was really good for really understanding kind of the non-linearity of how she comprehends her life and the interconnections that are inherent between different moments in her life and the things that are important to her. I think that would have come across quite differently if she would have just narrated her life story to me, I'd recorded it, because it would have been necessarily quite linear. Through the painting, it was much more of a free-flowing way to explore her life.

We had a really good chat based on the painting. You can hear some of the clips from that chat that we had. You can actually hear the rustling of the paper. She holds up the painting to the screen because there was this remote ethnography method as well, like getting her to do the painting. I'm at home in Oxford. She's at home in Japan. We're communicating online. But then using this very analog medium of her paintings focus the discussion. It was really just an experimentation in that kind of remote ethnography through graphic methods, which was really interesting for me.

Charlie Rumsby: (11:30)

Super inspiring just to hear that as a method. I hadn't really taken in fully that process.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (11:38)

I think it really helped. But she's a really great artist as well. But I think that if you do have that kind of relationship, ongoing relationship with your participants, and you are still in contact with them, online, whatever, I do think that visual methods can still be used in that remote way with really interesting effects.

José Sherwood González: (12:03)

Yes, it's true. We were speaking just before we recorded this. I was able to speak with my family because the whole reason why I went into using comics as a method was because of anonymizing content, and wanting to anonymize the participants, certain members of my family that didn't want to be involved. But they've now read the comic. My mom was able to show them the work. She went over and translated it to them. She translated from Spanish to English. They did actually resonate, and they appreciated what the work was, which was not the case when it was film, which goes back to what you were saying before because I think the potential to anonymize everyone and make it more hypothetical, or to make them more relatable through the use of cartoons is quite an exciting thing. Because you might think – I thought at the beginning that the cartoons can create that distance, but the distillation as you're saying was, it's almost about making it stronger. It makes it stronger. You might have thought that it

might make it more palatable, but it's kind of the punches. It's quite a strong punch.

It makes me think of things like Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, where you can start to talk about these experiences in that way. Now, I'm only starting to reflect upon this in terms of – but mostly because – sorry, I'm getting lost. I get very excited by these things. I'm finding that this is a very exciting method to be able to share with my family, my experiences. My granddad was able to – after he saw the work, he was then able to say, I now see what you were trying to do. I was very interested in seeing the work of different people's perspectives, different ways in which people remember the story. My family tells very different versions of the same story, almost technically they just change. It's the Rashomon effect or 'teléfono descompuesto'. What's it called in English when you tell someone, you whisper something and they tell...?

Charlie Rumsby: (14:35)

Chinese whispers.

José Sherwood González: (14:38)

Chinese whispers!

Charlie Rumsby: (14:39)

It's called telephone in America, apparently.

José Sherwood González: (14:42)

Yes. They say broken telephone in Spanish. That process – I'm trying to capture that process in comics. It was a very interesting and a difficult process, but I think what it captured – it just goes towards what we were saying in terms of establishing a dialogue.

Charlie Rumsby: (15:00)

Yes, actually with your piece it was – I don't know. Did you intend it to have such a satirical edge? Because I thought maybe because my family are the same people who tell the same story differently. Automatically, I could just feel like I was in this. I was in the presence of the storyteller and how two different people say something different. I thought, was that meant to be satirical because I find it quite satirical? I was laughing, not in a bad way, but just like this is hilarious, because this is really true. People do it all the time.

José Sherwood González: (15:32)

I guess so not, not explicitly, but I think that reflects the way in which the stories are told within my family. It's always – we're laughing all the time. It can be really quite disastrous, awful subjects. We still kind of remember it fondly. It's about the exchange. I hadn't thought about being satirical, but it does link back to José Guadalupe Posada's work in the 19th century. I learned a bit. This is what Dimitrios also talks about in his piece, how art can be very specific to the work of the comic, can also reflect the people that are reading it.

I really wanted to reflect the wood engravings of Posada's work, which are these very kind of satirical newspaper comics. It's very gunslinging kind of *calaveras*. It's just so fun and iconic, and this kind of the iconicity of comics is what Scott McCloud says that makes comics relatable. Maybe, but it wasn't intentional.

Charlie Rumsby: (16:52)

It was so cool. I was reading it, like, this is so funny.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (16:55)

The way that you've drawn the characters and kind of their expressions and the body language and everything, it is that kind of iconic formula in comics which really works very well. But I think what was really powerful for me with your piece, José, was how this sense of the oral storytelling is an inherently collaborative process that gets adapted and changes throughout the generations, and depending on who you're hearing the story from. You really highlight that stories are this collaborative kind of shape shifting form, which was really, really nice.

José Sherwood González: (17:43)

Thank you. Thank you very much. I guess, it's something that's ongoing with my research as well. That's very cool.

Charlie Rumsby: (17:51)

It just goes to show that when people look at a comic or a drawing, they tend to make their own meaning – don't know. I guess there's an interesting chat there about where you go with that meaning and how much of it is inaccurate or not because for me it was sort of very subjective, me reading it, thinking I've got – my dad's one of six men. Whenever it is party, they're real big storytellers. Someone tries to tell a story or something. No, no. That wasn't how it went. Then they'll chime in. For me, I was involved immediately because it felt so familiar.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (18:31)

Again, that's a form of empathic exchange, Charlie, that you were kind of talking about at the beginning that this medium has really the potential for highlighting within anthropology. It's what the viewer brings to that story as well that makes it such a powerful medium for empathy, I think, because it is a form of collaboration between the viewer and the researcher or the person who's created it. It's what happens then in the viewers' mind. They're collaborating a lot in that, I think, in that process.

José Sherwood González: (19:07)

That the need to rely on the reader to make sense of the work is interesting because all storytellers have a sense of the shape shifting thing, but how do you capture this? How can we – in what ways have textual ethnography has done this in different ways? I think a lot about how text and just writing things down completely changes the processes of work when it comes to oral storytelling, which can change. It changes over time. It's a very efficient way of passing down information, teachings, ways of life, ways of being. When we write it down, it kind of captures it. It gives the impression that that's the only way

that it could be.

What I tried to do with my drawings is – I mean, it's intentionally confusing. That's only because I'm confused. It doesn't mean – I'm trying to work with the different ways in which the stories are combating and contesting each other. It's in that struggle that the work is produced, if that makes sense.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (20:26)

Yes, definitely. There's one point in your comic where I had to get really close to my screen to read the words. They get really, really small. But it's a very kind of embodied way of experiencing a story as well. You have to kind of do the same sort of work and get in the same headspace as you, the author, researcher.

José Sherwood González: (20:49)

Yes, because you can reflect that work, that process as a reader, because a lot of the time the fieldwork processes can be quite lonely. I think it's the only way in which that can be shared or provoked in the work itself, in the ethnography. That can be quite a powerful tool.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (21:13)

Yes, that's so true. Charlie, in your work I feel those stories of people's, their children's dreams and their fears and their memories, those things work so well in the graphic form. I really loved the narrative sequence which didn't have any voiceover, but it was just – it was the kind of memories of one research participant, I think, called Gu, and about him losing his sister and just seeing those images in combination with some quite effective music as well. It was really, really powerful, I think.

Charlie Rumsby: (21:55)

Yes, I actually like that story. It almost had – it's been on several journeys, that story, because just as shown in the field living in the village, I mean, I've been working with my participants since 2012, and got really long-term relationships. That was the first time I ever heard this story. It was the first time the participant ever shared it outside of the family context. It was one of those things where it broke me basically as a researcher. It really broke me. I took a weekend off to unpack it and process it.

This is just the thing of working with children anyway. You go through so much ethical clearance that you're not going to damage a child, and you're not going to basically bring up stuff that's going to evoke trauma, or allow trauma to be relived. Often I found that I wasn't quite prepared for how open children were going to be, and how they were going to enable me and allow me to live in their stories with them. They would share some very – sometimes very tragic, sometimes very fun, sometimes things that you can't quite grab hold on to like ghosts and things like that. But with this particular story, it really did break me. It took me a long time to process it.

Children died when I was doing the research as well. They were falling in the river and dying – I think, three at least when I was there. When I used to try and tell the story in a presentation at a conference, I would just weep. I've never been able to tell that story without crying in any public presentation. That's

what really – I started to say to Ben. As someone who knows this person, and knows that reality, and had become friends with people whose stories these are, they want me to share these stories.

I'm finding it very hard to share them because they're just heartbreaking, even with things like river ghosts. The participants live on the Tonle Sap River in Cambodia, and river ghosts are something that basically not just haunt them, but also start to interfere with things like sleep. It's not just a moment where we're all afraid of ghosts or this is where the ghosts are. We're going to go and terrify ourselves by going there. It's like, now I can't sleep. Children trying to operate in a way where they're tired; they're trying to go to school, but they're tired because they haven't slept and all these sorts of things.

What I found with drawing is that we were able to explore things that were either emotionally very hard to talk about in person. I mean, I've obviously written about it in my thesis, but when you can communicate such emotive experiences or you can draw and illustrate things that you can't quite grab hold on to, I think that you just open the floodgates to some really important connection.

Whilst these comics – Ben has done an incredible job of drawing, and I look forward to our conversation with Ben. I've been able to present this research at embassies, to policymakers. I do applied research. I always show these things, now, whenever I'm talking to people because I need – not I need, but I would like to leave an audience with me not just saying, here's statelessness; this is how it impacts people. These are the sort of limitations on mobility. But then I can say, and here's children's realities. I think when you're working in context where racism was a really big thing as well, I'm not living in the context, so I don't have that longevity to make real change. But if I can inspire people who live in Cambodia, to start to humanize marginalized populations – and graphics have been an incredible way to do that, then I think that when you think of long-term change, it will be those people who've been impacted who were doing the great work on the ground. I've seen this literally, within the last 2 years. Local people who work for INGOs, they're now starting to include the Vietnamese into their policy briefings when they're looking at the Sustainable Development Goals.

I'm not saying that graphics have been the sole reason they're doing that. But I know when you tell a story, and people like, well, actually, that's hit me in a new way, it's so versatile, what we're doing for the classroom is amazing. For those who are participants and can't read English, it's amazing. When you're really trying to bring people in to making better decisions about people's lives, if you can actually give them something that humanizes them, I think, we're on to a great thing here.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (26:43)

That's so true, actually. It's not just in advancing anthropological forms of representation. It's also in the wider good that we can do in the world, which I think is an ambition shared by a lot of anthropologists. You don't get to know people for many years, and then not be affected by their stories. You want your research to have some sort of positive effect. If graphics can be one way of helping to achieve that, or to achieve some kind of empathetic understanding of other people's virus, then I think it's really, really exciting. It really does feel like this moment is building within anthropology right now.

Part 2 Why Collaboration



Laura Haapio-Kirk: (00:01)

Okay. For this next section, I thought that we could perhaps talk about the collaborative potential of graphic anthropology. I'm really focused on teasing out, what does it mean? What does collaboration mean? What are the processes of collaboration? I'm also really, really interested in what these collaborative forms of graphic anthropology can do for the relationship between research participant and researcher, and also between the consumers of what we produce and our readers, our audience, and as researchers, and whether these graphic forms can do something to equal the playing field or to reduce the sort of hierarchical relationships that are inherent in a lot of anthropological research just by the nature of the researcher participant relationship – whether graphic anthropology can do something to address that imbalance.

I think, Charlie, in your work, you do that really beautifully in terms of putting at the center this desire to want to give back your research in an accessible way to the participants of your research. You've mentioned before that you went there, and you explained this idea of making a comic; and they were very sort of excited by that. They were, like, of course. Of course, we want you to do that. Could you tell us a little bit more about that process of how you had the idea to do that, and then how you decided to do it in a very collaborative way?

Charlie Rumsby: (01:56)

I think when I was doing the ethnography, actually, even the words doing the ethnography, I don't really like those phrase. I don't know why I say them.

But when I was having the absolute pleasure of learning about people's lives and hearing their stories to then we tell them, I could sense when I was in that process that words aren't going to suffice here because they're going to be directed towards a particular audience – a sort of northern hemisphere, Western academic audience. Because I was using visual methodologies when I was doing the research, I used photography, I used drawing, bits and bobs of poetry, these mediums were where all the amazing things came about. Sometimes you just felt you understood something, and then a young person would draw something. Then I started interviews – tell me what you've drawn. All of a sudden, you get this completely different layer of meaning. That really inspired me.

When I was going back to England, I started to think about – I can't just give them the thesis. It's a huge document. I met Ben at SOAS. We were undergrads together. I've always really admired his illustrative work. He is an absolutely incredible artist. I know what my skillsets are. Drawing is definitely not one of them. But I thought, actually, this could be a really great opportunity to take this text-heavy document, which I appreciate and love, but actually change it so that I can then give it back to the community so that young people can basically have their own stories back in a way which is understandable for them.

I went back to the village that I was living in. I basically took the thesis. I took some early drawings that Ben had done and then we did focus group discussions. People did love the thesis, like, they were leafing through it and finding their own drawings. When I said, this section is about you, and this, they were very excited. But it was like a few minutes. Once they'd seen the few pages where they were referenced with their drawings, that was it. Whereas with the comic, they were basically like – very limited text anyway. But also translating that text is not going to be a very difficult task like translating a huge thesis into Khmer can be very challenging.

I was pretty hyped about that. I'm relieved because it's a really exciting project. It's a project that Ben and I do in our spare time. I don't have any accounted for work that has to do with the comic, which has been a shame because it basically means that I'm having to do extra hours and things like that. But the kind of thing that has democratized this process, if you like, is I know that I've gone away and I've gained a job from my PhD. I'm benefiting hugely. I think at the very least I could do is stay true to my word when people said to me, we want the story, our stories known as widely as possible. Also, they didn't ask me this, but I think I ought to be given them back. I think that as anthropologists, people who spend huge amounts of time in people's houses, in their families, in their stories, I think it's almost criminal that people don't always get to see the research. I don't think that's anyone's fault. I think the way that the structures of professionalism and career trajectories are basically set up as you barely have time to think about getting something back in a manageable and digestible form.

That was basically how I got into it. I don't draw. Ben's amazing. The kids were really up for it. I could really trust Ben. And I think that's also quite important. I wanted the work to be ascetically excellent. But

I also wanted someone who was not going to – who I could have an honest conversation with if I felt like their own biases were creeping in as well. We'll probably get onto that. But there's a whole architecture of meaning that's created when you're the researcher, and then you're basically giving over parts of the story. This is like third-hand in a way to a collaborative artist, in this case Ben. But that's a whole different – that's all. I'm going to stop there.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (06:27)

We'll have a chat about that, also with Ben, which would be really, really exciting. Because I think that's really important how these forms of collaboration, then do challenge you to see your research perhaps in different ways to evaluate what forms a narrative that is digestible, and what has to be removed, or what has to be highlighted. It can be different things that you've perhaps focused on before. That's really interesting, that process, that will be the subject of the next...

José Sherwood González: (07:04)

I was just really curious with the comics. How did you share it with your participants? Was it a physical comic?

Charlie Rumsby: (07:11)

I printed them out. Yes.

José Sherwood González: (07:14)

What paper did you use?

Charlie Rumsby: (07:16)

The printer paper. It was not fancy at all. I had to make sure they didn't get wet because it's quite humid in Cambodia. I basically just printed them out in color. They actually looked quite good. Just said what do you think. I showed some on the screen as well, on my laptop. I did both laptop and paper.

José Sherwood González: (07:38)

That fascinates me.

Charlie Rumsby: (07:39)

It was all very casual.

José Sherwood González: (07:41)

It's great. It's great. I mean, there's something to be said about comics at this length and their disposable nature. I've read somewhere else that so many million tons of comics thrown away that nowhere for them to go. I think that there's a metaphor somewhere for research, maybe. But I think that – actually, what you're saying there, Charlie, really made me reflect on my own practice and what I do, the work that I've done with Letizia Bonanno on drawing workshops. The drawing is anthropology, and making workshops.

Typically, we've been working with researchers and to find different ways in which they can translate their own research into drawing. When you say that you don't draw – you don't draw it yet, but you do. It made me also think about Jean Rouch's *Chronicle of a Summer*, kind of reflective practices where you share the work back with your participants, and to then have the conversation and that feed into the ethnography itself.

I would actually love to do the workshop that we've been doing. It's typically drawing six panels when we tell the participants what to draw without them knowing what to draw. It's a very short amount of time to do it, to explore that with my family, who are actually artists, and some draw something but we'll work out a way in which they could tell that story in their own different way. That would actually be quite an interesting way to collaborate with everyone further, because my comic – I see it as a collaboration. But, I guess, it's in dialogue in the way that a lot of people are in dialogue with writers that are no longer alive. Is it a dialogue, or are we talking to or talking at?

My way of collaborating with the different voices was finding the way in which we could blend and play with the idea of the multiplicity of voices that were present, and as I previously mentioned, finding the way in which to represent that before, but then to have different perspective, so to allow that research almost to be disrupted by participants and to have the work, I guess, be interpreted in different ways. It might be the case with absolutely no response. That could be quite interesting as well. There could be audio response. I think the diversity of the work that has been in this entire issue says a lot about how much the graphic anthropology has to do in terms of accessing and collaborating with people.

Charlie Rumsby: (10:46)

I think what's interesting is that the process or your starting point was very different. In essence, I'm taking a thesis that's already been written. It's already been signed off. I'm saying this can't be read in its current form by many people. I'm taking that and then converting it. I call it retrospective representation. I'm almost going backwards and saying, how can this take on a new form? I think that just happened per chance. But you know, for someone like you, Laura, you're live working with an artist. You yourself are someone who can create and curate meaning with your own hand. It's very different.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (11:32)

It's also directly contributing to the research as it evolves.

Charlie Rumsby: (11:37)

Exactly.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (11:38)

Exactly. I am trying to finish writing up my Ph.D. Having these continued conversations and continuing these kinds of visual methods is continually shaping my thesis. I've probably got to get to a point where I stop gathering information but I feel like that can never be enough. I'm constantly learning and getting deeper and have broader understandings of these people's lives.

I think, for me what was important because I've known Megumi for several years now. All the way through knowing her, her art has always been sort of very important to her, and a central thing in her life, and something that she, I know, wants to expand, make more a central part of her life. For me having this kind of platform with this issue in TRAJECTORIA, I kind of thought, well, this is a perfect opportunity to also give someone else a platform, who I know is looking for one as well. That I see is a responsibility of, if you do have a platform to share it and to make this process more egalitarian and to put up at the forefront her images, because in my research I'm writing about her life along with the lives of all the other people that I got to know.

If there is the opportunity, and it presents itself to you, and sometimes it is opportunistic. If you meet the right people, if they have the similar desires as you, if they have matching ambitions, it's going to work in those situations. It might not work in other situations, with other kinds of people who maybe aren't interested in this kind of form of collaboration. I think that it's really important to just take the opportunities when they present themselves to you as well.

Charlie Rumsby: (13:43)

Definitely. I often say to people, especially early-career researchers who are trying to get out of just producing text, heavy journal articles, don't see the skills that you lack as a threat. They can provide a great opportunity for collaboration. We will, at some stage, hopefully, as researchers want to write research bids. For me, now, I would never write a bid without a ton of collaborators who brought to the table everything I don't bring to the table, because I know then that that research is going to have a really great reach and impact.

Obviously, impact can be interpreted in different ways. But it makes my job as a researcher so much more interesting as well, because I find – unless you're working in a team, it's a very solitary space to be writing a thesis to be doing your postdoc or whatever it is, to do your Ph.D., where you can collaborate. For me, it's been a lifeline in some cases. I think it's just really good all round to work with people.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (14:57)

Especially you touched on there, like, the interdisciplinary nature of collaborations and what that can bring. We were talking about this before we started recording that that's where the really exciting things can happen. It's like at the boundaries or the borders of things, using whatever tools are necessary to do the research that you need to do in a specific context, and using tools that might come from a variety of disciplines in collaborating with a variety of people to really reach that kind of level of understanding.

José Sherwood González: (15:36)

Definitely. I think this is why it's been so hard to try and define what graphic anthropology or the use of visual methods in anthropology ... to define that as a sub-discipline.... This is quite tricky to define it, I think, precisely because of the way in which it does work at the fringes. But that's not the stop us. This what we were saying before the call. This just means that we've got to keep doing more work about this to keep having the conversation, to keep redefining and defining, what it is that it can do.

I really do think that this has the potential to work on the same level or in a different way, and I guess, work adjacently to ethnographic film in the representation. It's just always something that feels so new and something going along, but it's been going on for centuries. The collaborative element, I think, Ben also brings something that just wouldn't – I don't know. I mean, the archetype of the comic book artist is the desk, kind of hunched by themselves. It's like an interesting parallel. There is an interesting parallel to be made with the researchers, especially once you return from the field and you're there writing your thesis, but it's a very lonely experience.

It might be a bit 'woo-woo' to say it, but you know that I really do feel that I am in conversation and lost within that space that is very much about – I can hear my grandfather's voice, my great aunt, my auntie and uncle. They're having conversations with me through what they say. In that sense, it's about interpreting and translating that – whatever that is.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (17:40)

That's really interesting. It really makes me – it really resonates with my own experience right now of being this isolated, especially during COVID times, researcher, or just trying to write up this huge a year and a half's worth of material, getting to know people and really intimately and being involved in their lives, and then suddenly being so removed from that. I think that's probably why I have been more and more drawn to kind of graphic forms because obviously I also miss them and miss the experience of being there, and having the embodied experience of doing field work. I think definitely the graphic re-embodies you or re-roots you in that experience in a way that – I mean, writing does as well. But it's a very different kind of form, a very different experience, I think.

Charlie Rumsby: (18:37)

It's actually quite striking how different it is because, I think, when you're writing you're also trying to think of your argument, and you're trying to think of the prose that you need to articulate it in a certain way so that your examiner or the reviewer or whoever it is that's going to consume that work basically takes it through their checklist to say whether or not it's going to be acceptable. I don't draw. But when Ben and I've been working together, having been able to take that hat off and say, this is not good to go through, and I think peer review is amazing, but that particular type of peer review, of course, I enabled – I bring people in and say, what do you think of the image? How did make you feel? Was it clear? This is what I'm trying to get across. But you have a complete – it's just you can take that jacket off. It's like, this is not being assessed in the same way. That's so freeing to be creative, I find.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (19:37)

Absolutely. It also allows you to focus on stories, whereas – I really want to do that in my writing, but then I'm always having to curtail that and be like, oh, I need to have more theory in here. It can't just all be stories, which is why I'm doing a Ph.D. in anthropology. But for me, it's the stories that are really powerful and interesting things. I want to preserve that. I think through academic writing, there is the danger of distilling these stories so much that even to yourself they then become these archetypes so very removed from the actual reality of the experience as you lived it, or as the people told it to you.

José Sherwood González: (20:22)

What do you all think about the peer review process when it comes to comics? Is that something that maybe that's a time for different conversation? But it's interesting. I've had two comics that – different journal articles that take the form of comics. It's very interesting, the kind of feedback that I'm getting where it's sometimes very focused on the aesthetic aspects of the work, and then at other times it's much more – but perhaps that is a different conversation but I'd love to know what you think.

Charlie Rumsby: (21:02)

I mean, I think journals – go ahead, Laura.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (21:06)

No, no. You go ahead.

Charlie Rumsby: (21:07)

I think journals, like this one for instance, that enable different forms of expression, analysis and discussion are really important, especially for peer review “entanglements”. I've had an amazing experience, submitting an article there. What we were saying earlier about this democratizing of the process, sometimes you don't need to know exactly who was your peer reviewer. But if you can be in conversation with them, that can be really helpful. With “entanglements”, that's what happened with me. I knew who they were actually, the peer reviewers. It then meant that I was able to say, okay, can we just talk about this a bit more? It wasn't like, you're an expert giving an opinion and I'm now trying to mold whatever I've done to fit that form so it's acceptable. It was like a creative process. It enabled me to think of things in a completely different way. It was just really exciting and free and fun.

Similar to TRAJECTORIA, we're here, we're having a discussion. We're live. We're not hidden behind the paywall. Even if it's open access, we're not hidden beyond our names. There's face to the name. People get to see what you're about. They get to meet the collaborator. What an amazing opportunity! I think we need to – I think this conversation about peer review is quite important.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (22:30)

I guess it's only going to develop as people become more literate in assessing these and digesting these kinds of alternative forms of publication because I can imagine, actually, that the peer reviewer pool might be quite narrow or limited in terms of who might be open to these forms, or who might give constructive feedback. That's just my impression. But I think that the pool is growing. That's really exciting to see.

As you mentioned, Charlie, Entanglements is a really great example. I think that here with TRAJECTORIA, they're also trying to really push the boundaries of academic publishing and storytelling within anthropological venues and platforms. It's really exciting to...

Charlie Rumsby: (23:23)

It is exciting.

Part 3 Analytical Gifts of Graphic Ethnography



Laura Haapio-Kirk: (00:02)

Okay. For this section we have with us, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos. He is going to be talking a little bit about his process of collaboration with this young playwright that we saw in his graphic piece. First, just giving a very brief introduction to himself before we dive into some of the questions that I have for him. Dimitrios, over to you.

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (00:31)

Yes, wonderful. Thank you for inviting me, Laura. It's always a great sense of responsibility, but a very pleasant responsibility, talking about graphic ethnography. I used to refer to the term "graphic ethnography" to all those exciting developments. Since you want to locate myself, I would say that I was a very boring conventional anthropologist for many, many years. I was trained in anthropology in a period when many exciting things were happening in the late 80s, and early-90s, representationally. But the exciting things were happening mostly in the United States. My generation of British-trained anthropologists, we were kind of rather conservative, I would say, in the way we carried the flag of good ethnography, yes, a very empirical project.

For years and years, I buried my pencils and my colors, and my pens in a box. I never felt that I had the right to open that box, yes, until recently – until, let's say, 5 years ago. It coincided with many other people opening their own boxes. I don't know how it happened. Maybe there was a kind of invisible

power telling us all, yes, it's time; it's time to do it. But for me, it was like rediscovering an art, something I was doing before. I was an anthropologist as a young person. I could draw and do comics. I put it into use to solve problems and difficulties I had with my writing.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (02:19)

That's really interesting. It does sound very mysterious that suddenly 5 years ago...

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (02:26)

I just happened 5 years ago, yes.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (02:30)

But it definitely feels that now there is quite a lot of momentum around graphic anthropology – graphic ethnography. It's really exciting to see the diversity of ways that people are approaching that. In this special issue of *TRAJECTORIA*, we're exploring the collaborative potential of graphic ethnography. I think that you showed that really well in your piece. Quite clearly and deliberately, you show the sort of processes that you've been involved in. You situate yourself there as the ethnographer. You make yourself visible, literally.

I think it's really interesting to see how all of these kinds of different protagonists then are involved in all of these narratives and shaping your understanding of your research. Could you maybe just explain just how this process of collaboration started with the playwright and showing them your drawings? What did that entail?

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (03:34)

Yes. Obviously, and as you said, I was doing the drawings before the collaboration. The real reason I started drawing again was in order to solve problems, as I said, primarily regarding my authorship and reflexivity, my authorial reflexivity, usually relating to my worry about telling one story, providing one linear narrative. Even with my work in Panama with an indigenous group – I studied there – I didn't want to be the anthropologist who tells about them. I started making many caricatures of myself as different Dimitrioses, more empiricist, more deconstructive.

Later with my project in Greece, which was about austerity, rather sad and pessimistic topic, again, I started drawing various – breaking my authorship into smaller parts, which is very easy to do with a graphic medium, and showing that there was not one answer. There was not one question. There were many fragments and many thoughts in my head, in the heads of my respondents, and I was like them.

As I was drawing, I was solving those difficult puzzles. Vice versa, the difficult puzzles were encouraging me to draw and draw more. I had in my bag, and not work always without lines and pencils and colors. I would draw. Sometimes, I would show them my drawings. That helped because people laughed and relaxed, even the more serious respondents. Yes, you could call them respondents. They had to say more after that. I was using it as a tool at the beginning, well, at least for that project, which I refer in my contribution in *TRAJECTORIA* to somehow strengthen a relationship with people I knew, and

encourage them to say more. It became quite a customary thing to take that notebook out of my bag, and draw with them, sometimes draw what they were saying.

This is how it happened. One of these people was an unemployed actress, and she had studied; had the power to write theater plays. She had lots of ambitions and she wanted to write her own play. Somehow her play was very similar to my ethnography. We're both concerned with austerity and the problems in the last generation – her generation, the difficulty with unemployment and all that, the past, the present. As I was drawing, my thoughts, I felt that I could help her do a storyboard for her play. And that's how it started.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (06:30)

Interesting. Because it truly was a collaborative endeavor, and that she was also getting something out of this, and scripting something for her own work. It was this kind of very interdisciplinary engagement. It's really interesting that you're saying that people relaxed more when you brought out your drawings. They would prompt them to say more. Do you know why? I mean, what is it about the graphic elements that engage people or make them get more into the topics that you're talking about?

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (07:06)

I feel it's something I mentioned before. I think people relax because drawing shows them that there is not one singular unilineal, let's say, narrative about events. I mean, very often, when they talk to an anthropologist or when they talk with each other, they have an argument. They have a view. They fight for the view. Somehow, they exaggerate the singularity of that view as they argue with each other, or they present the views to the anthropologist. But when they see ideas on a paper, illustrated, as you would say – illustration is your magic term – they relax. They probably see that it doesn't have to be only one view. It doesn't have to be only one argument.

Then, they offer you something else because my feeling is, in my experience, even the most argumentative respondents, the more politically inclined, let's say, it's not only that main political argument, they have counter arguments that they suppress. When they see the drawing, or when they see the playfulness of it, and the irony, and the self-sarcasm, they become reflexive. They become self-reflexive and self-critical. They reveal that other side of theirs that may contradict the main argument, actually, and make everything more complex and more interesting and more nuance.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (08:36)

It's really interesting because this really resonates with José's contribution. I don't know if you...?

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (08:42)

Yes.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (08:46)

Exactly that showing that there's this kind of multiplicity of voices, that these oral histories are formed through very contradictory stories, and they somehow merge and get passed down through the gener-

ations, I think. He was saying in one of our other videos that in showing his family, this graphic, they were much more appreciative of it because it presented all at once these very contradictory views. Whereas the film that he'd made, which was much more linear, they had a lot more issues with. There's that kind of the power of the graphic to be able to convey that.

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (09:25)

The incompleteness of it. You see, the film like a book has a beginning and an end. The viewer feels that they cannot intervene. But with a drawing, they can put the finger on it. They can stretch the lines in a way. They can become part of it.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (09:44)

Exactly. It is continually changing depending on who is actually looking at it, who is experiencing, because a lot of the work is going on then in the minds of the viewer as well. They bring a lot to the image as well.

What do you think that the impact of all of these kinds of experimentations with graphics and these new forms and the interdisciplinary collaborations that we can do through graphics? What do you have a sense for how this can shape anthropology as a discipline? Do you have any idea of where this is going?

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (10:27)

It will definitely say anthropology. This is happening already. I hope it will provide a less textual way to do ethnography. I use here politically the word ethnography because I see many sociology colleagues, and even geographers, even practice ethnography being very interested – urban sociologists, urban ethnographers. It's really difficult to draw a disciplinary boundary and say this is just anthropology. Graphic ethnography is for all ethnographers. Ethnography is not just ownership. It's not just the privilege of anthropologists.

It clearly is helping all those disciplines in providing a less textual way to think about other people's lives. It's already helping with popularizing – that's a greater impact. It's already helping analytically, although this is not really clear in our heads, yet we need to theorize it and develop it. It's not only illustrating; it's also having a different perspective for analysis. It's too early to say more about it, but we will. There is a final benefit, I think, which is the whole subversion. I feel all that irony, all that playfulness, subverts. It provides politically a more critical lens, and representationally it helps us escape from intellectualism, the more philosophical anthropology that is dominating this century. In this respect, we get a more political, more critical, more subversive narrative, potentially, that brings us closer to the people we studied, and we're supposed to represent. Maybe, it will make our writing more interesting, and more inspiring for us too. Why not?

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (12:27)

Let's hope so. Let's hope so. Let's hope that the venues such as this kind of experimental journal, those kinds of platforms continue to increase and will thrive as well.

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (12:38)

Yes. Yes, it's happening. There're many projects at the moment, like the one in TRAJECTORIA. I think, if all that started becoming very popular 5, 6 years ago, magically, as we said before, I think now really, it's happening. 2022, 21-22 is like a great time for graphic representation.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (13:05)

Yes, it really feels like that. I mean, you touched on it briefly the need to develop a more nuanced or advanced way to approach this analytically, which you've done with your RAI journal paper. Do you have any sort of tips for where to look for other sources of a guiding light?

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (13:38)

I think this new dimension, the analytical dimension, has to develop collaboratively. I say, that is not a diplomatic answer. The issue here is that – that's another point which I have a strong opinion. Graphic ethnography is not one thing. I had been trying to define it and I failed. That's a good thing, I realized that I failed, because there're many different kinds of engagements. If we try to define it too narrowly – oops, something happened. Sorry. Are you still with me?

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (14:15)

Yes, I can still see you.

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (14:17)

Yes. I said that if we try to define graphic ethnography too narrowly, we lose. We lose all these new opportunities and possibilities. Similarly, the analytical gifts of graphic ethnography vary because of the different types of theoretical engagement and different types of research. We have to put our minds together and try to think analytically in a very interdisciplinary way and beyond our own very narrow theoretical perspective.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (14:51)

I mean, one other form of collaboration which really comes through strongly in your piece is using the style of this historical Greek cartoonist. It's almost like in mimicking that style and extending it to your work you're forming a kind of collaboration through history and showing also this, the repeating ideas of austerity never go away.

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (15:24)

Let's say it can work as an allegory. It's metaphorical. But it also, at least in the particular case, it helped me link with different generations of people who remember the work of this artist. His work, his art made them think, make them be political. They had the memory of laughing. They had the memory of thinking politically with that, now dead cartoonists. By somehow tapping into this and appropriating, kind of emulating his style, and somehow using his protagonist from the 1950s, another time of poverty, to push messages about poverty in the present. It works so well. It somehow united the old memories. It united different areas of austerity in one very critical narrative which had different levels. It was multi-linear.

It worked very well not only for me, for my analysis, by urging me to go deeper and deeper, acknowledging temporality, for example. But it worked well for them. The people, my respondents, the people who are seeing those cartoons, they really enjoyed that type of thinking that united the childhood memories for the oldest, or the memories of the youngest looking at old magazines with cartoons of a different period that they had only experienced through humor, and political cartooning. It brought all those different, let's say, conjectures together. That was inspiring for them, too.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (17:09)

For you in terms of embodying that particular style, did it also make you think differently? Was it a good tool for getting in a particular headspace?

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (17:22)

Definitely, yes. Sometimes, some actors say that they enjoy acting because they can assume different identities and liberate themselves. For me, that was therapeutic. Writing about austerity is difficult. It's a difficult topic. It's a sad topic, the strong political arguments. Being able to get in the shoes of another person, a critical artist, was also political personality, strong political views, it was like therapy because I could really see the world from his point of view, which relaxed me from that sense of heavy responsibility about what I'm doing. Am I superimposing my voice on my interpretation? Somehow, I played with his ghost. I played with his drawing style. I enjoy every aspect of holding my pen and following the track, the path that he had paved for me.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (18:31)

That's really fascinating how this kind of very embodied experience of drawing somehow then connects you with this other person, this other thinker in a way that maybe just looking at their work, it's maybe quite different.

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (18:47)

Yes, it creates a sense of unity. It's much different than, let's say, reading an argument, reading a book, and then trying to be the external observer, agreeing, disagreeing, analyzing from some distance. When you draw as they draw, when you somehow emulate their protagonist, and you make them alive again, then there is a kind of joint ownership, and all those ideas. Joint ownership that in this case went back in time.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (19:19)

Yes, which is really...

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (19:21)

It kind of went against many, many dimensions, space and time. I'd say it was liberating. Yes. It was like therapy, too.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (19:34)

That's really wonderful. To sum up, could you maybe share what you're working on now or sort of your

future ambitions?

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (19:48)

It's at the beginning of drawing, because writing for me is faster. I'm drawing an odyssey, an odyssey of anthropological thinking and mistakes, and all the monsters, the cyclops, and the angry Poseidon – are mistakes of ethnocentrism and reductionism and determinism, and all those many, many mistakes and biases and filters. I'm drawing the filters and the biases as monsters in the journey that will have a happy end, I promise.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (20:32)

Wow! That sounds amazing. It sounds like quite a long project as well.

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos: (20:37)

It is, yes. But you see, it's an odyssey.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (20:41)

Yes, exactly.

Part 4 Artistic Collaborators I



Laura Haapio-Kirk: (00:03)

Okay. Well, thank you so much, Megumi, for agreeing to have this little chat with me. I think it's really nice to be able to hear from you about your process and your thoughts about your artwork and also about the collaboration in general and how you found it. Perhaps, the first question could be: What were your thoughts when I first emailed you and asked you if you wanted to be in this publication to have one of your paintings featured in my book, like what were your first impressions?

Megumi Ito: (00:43)

Yes. When I first read your email, I was so surprised, but I'm really happy about it because I always wanted to express my feelings through art, but everything surrounding me was, I don't know, taking my power away. I always wanted to, and I could have done it by myself, but I couldn't get the chance to start. You gave me a chance to restart my artwork, so you will hear about that.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (01:47)

I'm really glad to hear that because I wasn't sure if you would have time to create a painting especially for this publication or if you would be interested. I was very happy when you responded very positively. It seemed like you already had a very clear idea of what you wanted to create right from the beginning because we had already had quite a few discussions about *ikigai* when I was in Japan, and we had already talked about these things before.

Megumi Ito: (02:22)

Yes, exactly.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (02:23)

Yes. It seemed like you already had in your mind the image of what you wanted to share and what you wanted to create, to tell your story about your experiences.

Megumi Ito: (02:40)

I usually draw my paintings in different ways. I expressed my feeling towards the beauty of the nature or beauty of the everyday life, every day's sunshine or rainy days or some changes of the seasons. I have never expressed my own thoughts through art. This was the very first time for me to do that. Without your suggestion, I don't know if I would draw the same paintings that I drew for this project.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (03:38)

Interesting. Because it's obviously very autobiographical, your image. You have all the different elements to the image, telling a story about moments in your life. It's a very narrative image. You can really understand your story through it. How did you come up with the idea then to have the landscape, but then to also have these illustrations? Was that something that just came immediately to your mind?

Megumi Ito: (04:13)

Not immediately, but when I look back upon my half life, I thought my life has been sequences of dramatic changes. When I express my life so far, this must be good idea to take the idea of *emaki*. Do you know *emaki*? It's a traditional Japanese – it's like a book, the oldest way of book. It's a long, long paper and the story begins from the right, then they roll. It's a long picture or sometimes it's a long storytelling, but it's not one big painting, it's a long paper. It's called *emaki* in Japanese. I thought my life expression might be good to take that way, *emaki*.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (05:39)

Interesting.

Megumi Ito: (05:41)

Thanks. Yes, but this time you first told me that my painting will be on your book and you told me your size of the book, then I thought not only one page, but also two pages.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (06:09)

Okay, so interesting that you were trying to condense this traditional form into then the limitations of the book form, then having to kind of put everything into one image.

Megumi Ito: (06:22)

Yes.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (06:24)

Okay. Interesting. Did you always know that you would use those materials you use, like the traditional pigments and the glue? Is that your style?

Megumi Ito: (06:38)

Yes, because I'm so fascinated by the Japanese traditional paintings. We call it *nihonga*. It's Japanese painting, but it means a lot. Someone says it's a traditional Japanese painting, but other people say it's a contrast of oil painting and Japanese some traditional painting. I say the materials are all by hand-crafts of Japanese craftsmanship, so I realize it is culture that is extinguishing right now. When I draw something precious, something that I really want to draw, I want to use these materials. This time I used *washi*, the handmade paper, and pigments and gold and silver tins and also glue that was made by craftsmanship, but the company is closed right now.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (08:30)

You have these materials from previously, like you have been using these same materials for a long time, I think.

Megumi Ito: (08:37)

Yes, it has been over 25 or 30 years.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (08:43)

Wow! Yes, because even the materials themselves, they have their own history and life story and they are the same materials that you were using when you were younger and making art, that's amazing.

Megumi Ito: (08:56)

Yes.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (08:58)

That's amazing.

Megumi Ito: (09:00)

It's beautiful. I want you to look at the real one, someday.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (09:08)

Yes. Well, I hope one day I can.

Megumi Ito: (09:11)

Not on the picture.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (09:14)

Yes, not on the screen. That's the other thing that this collaboration, all of it was done completely remotely, because you are in Japan and I'm in England, so we just did everything through emails and

then through video calls. When you completed the painting, then you sent the image to me, and then I used that painting then to interview you about what it means and what the different images within the painting, what they say and what the story is. That's the finished piece that you can see in the TRAJECTORIA publication. How did you feel then being interviewed about your painting? Was it interesting and different experience for you or was it difficult in any way?

Megumi Ito: (10:13)

Yes. I had some explanation about my painting on the past exhibitions of my own, so it's not the first time. But this time I expressed many emotional feelings, this time, particularly about my husband's passing and the things that I couldn't do or things I dreamt of when I was a child. So, it's a unique experience for me to look back upon my half life and explain about it to you through my paintings.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (11:18)

Do you think that there is something that images can do that is more difficult in words?

Megumi Ito: (11:26)

Last time I told you about it. When I first saw Marc Chagall paintings, I thought, "Wow, it's pretty and cute paintings," and that's all my expression. But after I learnt about how Marc Chagall drew the paintings, through the wars or lived as a Jewish, the first expression toward his paintings has changed. I think the explanation of myself will be a good chance for the viewers to reconsider about the paintings through my interviews.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (12:33)

Okay, so the combination of your voice and the paintings tell a bigger story and more full story than the painting alone, maybe.

Megumi Ito: (12:43)

Yes, I believe because I didn't want to draw detail. I didn't want to draw something more detailed, it's not my style, but I could add explanation, then people will understand more.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (13:24)

Okay. Yes. The images that you made, there is kind of the landscape behind and then there is these illustrations of the different scenes and you said that that's quite different to your normal style, which is more abstract.

Megumi Ito: (13:40)

Exactly, yes. I take abstract expressions usually. So, it was difficult.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (13:51)

Yes. Okay. That's interesting I think because maybe because I had asked you to make something that you feel tells something about *ikigai* that you felt that you needed to have more kind of figurative drawings to express that, it's interesting. Has that affected any of your other work that you are doing, the

kind of artwork that you are producing now or want to produce?

Megumi Ito: (14:22)

Yes. My dream is to draw a children's book. So, maybe it's a good chance to start a new style for this upcoming, I don't know when, but upcoming project of my lifestyle project.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (14:52)

Yes. That has been a dream that you have always wanted to do. Do you have any ideas of what that might be or what it might involve?

Megumi Ito: (15:04)

Yes. I have a 5 years old daughter, and we sometimes go to the kindergarten by walk. On the way to kindergarten, there is always something that catches my daughter's heart. Sometimes it's a snail. Sometimes it's a ladybug. Sometimes it's a flower. Sometimes it's some seeds of the trees or leaves or something that falls from the skies. I want to draw these little stories with my daughter.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (16:04)

Okay. Sounds really nice.

Megumi Ito: (16:07)

Yes, especially through the eyes of this 5 years old time.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (16:14)

Wow, because they see the world in a very different way, I'm sure, than everyone else.

Megumi Ito: (16:20)

We often start telling stories through these snails or ladybugs, so we take a walk by telling stories sometimes. I want to keep it as a record of our memory.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (16:46)

That's so lovely!

Megumi Ito: (16:49)

I'm thinking about it.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (16:51)

I can definitely imagine that as a really lovely children's book.

Megumi Ito: (16:56)

Thank you!

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (16:57)

Yes. Okay. I think that's probably everything for this interview. Is there anything else that you would like to say before we finish or anything about your artwork or your kind of ambitions or...?

Megumi Ito: (17:18)

Yes. You can watch whatever you want through internet and you think that you understand fully by watching it, like a website or some movies, but it's not 100%, I believe. As I mentioned before, I really want you to see my paintings for real. If it's allowed, especially for you, I want you to touch the surface of my paintings and watch it through the natural light. Because the pigments are like sand, so you can feel it when you touch. It changes under the conditions of light, the colors are changing, and it's really beautiful, and that's why I'm using these materials. I want you to feel not by watching, but I want you to feel the paintings.

Laura Haapio-Kirk: (18:49)

Yes. It's so true that it's a limitation of doing everything online as we had to do, but I hope that one day we could have an exhibition and then many more people could see the painting as well. I hope that through this interactive platform with TRAJECTORIA that maybe some of the viewers, they can get a sense of the painting, even though it's not the real thing, but hopefully they get a sense of your story and the meanings that you put into the painting. It's an interesting dilemma because how do you then recreate the real experience of being physically in the same space as a painting or even physically in the same space if we were having this conversation, you and me sitting on your sofa, it would be very different to just having the screen between us. But somehow I feel that because we had the medium of your painting as a way to kind of shape the interviews and the discussions, it almost gave that physical dimension to this virtual encounter that we have had as a researcher and research participant. I think in that way maybe the artwork and the painting and those materials that you are using, it helps to add that real dimension to online research. It's something that I'm very grateful for that you were willing to go on this journey and create this artwork for this piece.

Megumi Ito: (20:49)

Yes. I like your expression of our journey. Yes, journey. Yes, I love that phrase. Our life, especially my life, these last 10 years after moving to Tosa-cho from Central Tokyo, I have been traveling, I'm on a journey even now. My life is like a journey and that's what I'm really enjoying.

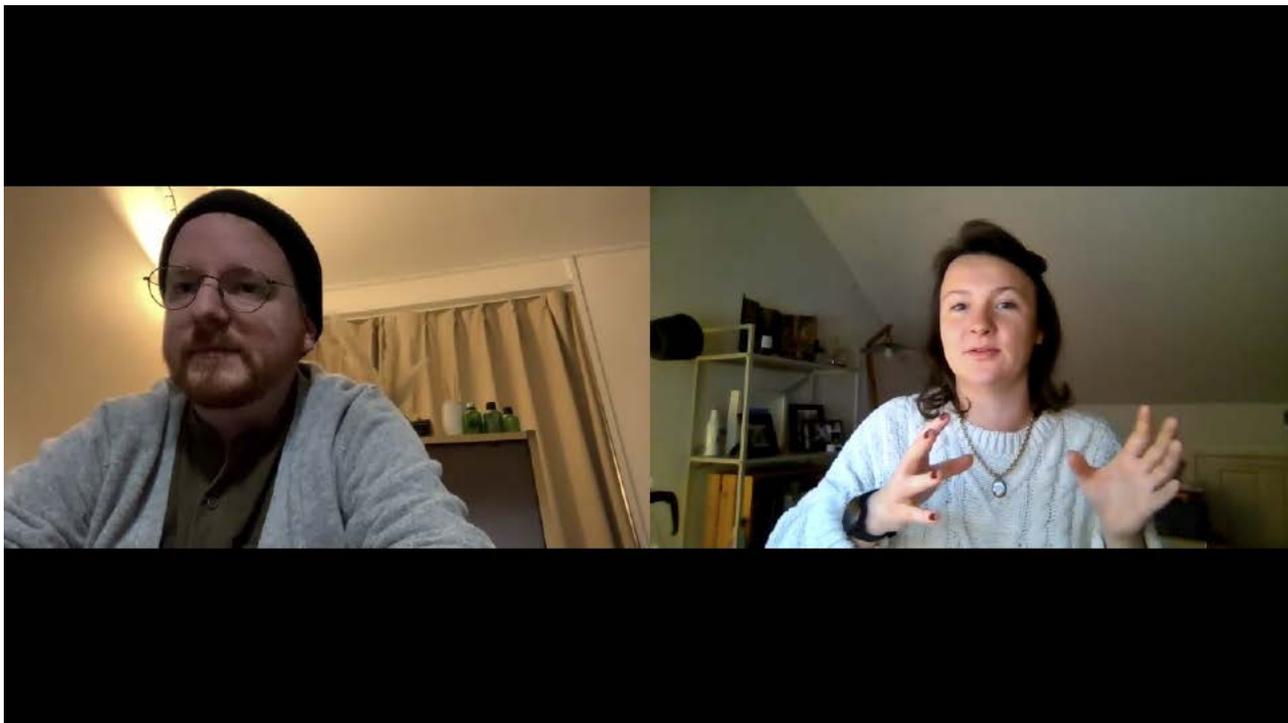
Laura Haapio-Kirk: (21:28)

That's true, and it's always changing and there is always unexpected things around the corner. It's amazing to use the painting to think about those things and to have the moment to reflect on yourself and your life and these important moments. Thank you for sharing and opening up to me and to the viewers as well.

Megumi Ito: (22:01)

My pleasure.

Part 5 Artistic Collaborators II



Charlie Rumsby: (00:03)

Great! Well, it's good to be with you, Ben. As you know, we've had conversations as academics in a different setting to this. But the whole idea is that we are trying to bring into conversation the artist that we've collaborated with as researchers. It's super great to have you or to have this conversation together. My name is Charlie Rumsby for those who don't know. I am the sociological review fellow at Keele University. I will let you introduce yourself, Ben.

Ben Thomas: (00:43)

Great! Thanks Charlie. I am Ben Thomas. I am primarily an English teacher but also kind of a parttime illustrator living in Nagoya, Japan. I mostly work digitally, doing illustration and sometimes comics as well.

Charlie Rumsby: (01:11)

Ben and I know each other from our undergraduate days at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London where we both did our undergraduate degrees. Ben and I have a friendship which is great and has definitely to come to shape our collaboration. The work that Ben and I are doing at the moment looks at the issue of statelessness among children in Cambodia. Statelessness is basically a legal situation whereby people don't have legal recognition and the rights that go with citizenship from the state. My research looks at how people navigate non-citizenship, but also really how people are actually living their everyday lives and forming meaningful relationships, belonging within their communities. This narrative is quite important to tell, I think, because often statelessness is basically tantamount to not

belonging or bare life or being invisible or falling in between the cracks and things like this. The collaborative work that Ben and I do really challenges this narrative and actually shows that no, these people are people before they are stateless; statelessness is just one dimension of their reality.

I wanted to talk to you, Ben, just a bit about the process of our collaboration. I wonder if you could take us back to the early days. We've been going at this for a couple of years now and basically talk us through how it's been to collaborate with an academic.

Ben Thomas: (03:09)

Yes, first of all, working with Charlie has been like really great, really fun collaborative process. I think in the beginning, when Charlie asked me to do these illustrations for her, I think that initially I was a little bit wary of doing it. I wanted to do it because Charlie is my friend obviously. I wanted to help you out and stuff. But I think we've discussed this before at the beginning of the process. We talked about like am I the right person for this job. We talked about how as a white person who has never been to Cambodia, don't know anything about the situation or the stories that you are trying to tell, am I actually the best person to do these illustrations? I was a little bit cautious about that at first. But I think because we have this relationship and after we spoke about it, and we decided to do it and that was great. Then just that whole process, while we were making these illustrations, trying to be as authentic as we can was really an interesting process. There was a lot of back and forth between drafts and things like that. Yes, the whole...

Charlie Rumsby: (05:30)

I think it's worth saying that this process for both of us has been something new, something that neither of us have done before. Therefore, we kind of didn't have a guidebook or anything to follow. So, essentially the conversations between Ben and I, the first one was, hey, Ben, I'd love to make my academic research more accessible. That wish came from participants themselves wanting their stories to be widely told. As Ben mentioned, this question of who gets to represent who, as an academic you go through that thought process anyway. But as an artist, there was some serious question marks – wasn't there – about should this be someone who is local, and most of the questions were valid. Actually, the circumstances that friends of mine who are in Cambodia, precarious circumstances are often characterized by racism and ethnic discrimination. It was really important for me to work with someone that I could trust and someone who was not going to take the project in a direction which was different to the research data but then was also talented enough to bring their own fingerprint onto the work. Someone who doesn't illustrate it was very important for me just to own up and say, look, I don't have anything really to contribute in that way. But working together and having those honest conversations for us would essentially look like phone calls or emails. But I would send parts of my research publications, my pieces to Ben and say, how do we make two pages worth of text into an image? And I wonder, Ben, if you would tell me what that process has been like, because I guess, maybe reflect on some of the work you've done outside of academic illustration and how does it differ?

Ben Thomas: (07:50)

I think one of the things that was really a huge part of this process was research, visual research. Charlie

sent me a ton of photographs, videos, stuff like that, taken in Cambodia with these people, the people whose stories we were trying to tell. I spent a lot of time just trawling through a lot of footage and images and trying to make sure that the images that I produced were visually authentic. I didn't want anyone from that place to look at these images and think, well, it's not what it's like. There was a lot of research. And then also going through the different drafts of the images. Charlie was very helpful, saying like, could you add this or this needs to be a little bit different, or how about this? Charlie was very good at just making sure that the images felt authentic, just things that I would never know to – had no – I think at one point, oh, could you add an image of the King and Queen of Cambodia. I said, okay, I was like, you know government office or whatever, stuff like that. Just that kind of research has been like a really big part of the process.

Charlie Rumsby: (10:13)

As well, I think, sometimes Ben would add things that I just never thought of before. One of the things that really pushed our ability to story-tell in an inclusive way was the actual representation of characters. Ben and I are working towards producing a graphic novel based on my research. But this process is a very long-term process. We started by, first of all, producing images which were purely just illustration and then illustrations that were anchored in interview transcripts in the form of comic paneling. When Ben first sent over images I was thinking, as Ben said, this is a Cambodian context, there were lots of good cultural references in there. The work, absolutely beautiful.

Ben, I'd love you to talk a bit, in a minute, about your use of colors, and what inspired you to use the actual aesthetic that you have used. I remember thinking through the images and thinking, these people don't look typically Vietnamese, and I wasn't sure how you thought about that because, should these be really strong identifiers. I remember basically saying to Ben, on a couple of occasions, do these people look Vietnamese enough which is basically me really trying to anchor it locally. Our discussions about that form of representation and actually softening that so the characters, you would probably guess that they were East Asian or Southeast Asian, but they are not very particular. I actually think, overall, that was a really helpful process to not just talk about, but actually to land on in terms of representation and how, for instance, when I've shown these images to my niece and nephew who at the time, in the earlier days, 10 and 12 years' old, they were able to connect with the characters in a way that they weren't just other people in the globe far, far away, but they automatically identify characters as children, as like them, and therefore having conversations about statelessness and the precarity that children find themselves in, was so much more easy just through looking at the images. I think I would never have landed there in terms of collaboration if it wasn't for working with an illustrator like you, Ben, because my, sort of, narrow mind, I am thinking of the narrowness of the facts of the data, which is very much when you are writing, you are justifying, you are arguing, and representation feels like a very narrow road. Whereas, there is a new possibility I found with this collaboration that you can move across what Benjamin Dix calls this kind of truth-fiction spectrum when you are representing which opens up so much more possibility. I know you basically very briefly just spoke about it. But I would love to hear more about your choice of colors and the artistic esthetic that you ended up with for the pieces that I hope our viewers have seen in this special issue.

Ben Thomas: (13:55)

In the end I chose to go for watercolor style because I think initially the title of Charlie's research was, 'The Waters of Death and Life.' So, I really wanted that to be a part of art style, choosing a kind of water color aesthetic, and taking inspiration from some other comic artists that I enjoy reading. The choice of color, from the beginning I really wanted to have a fairly small color palette, and through that color palette use the color to express emotion and things in the images. So, I think in some of the more shocking images the color is much more red than other colors. Yes, just using color as a tool to just put a little bit of emotion into the stories that we were telling. Also, I found it esthetically pleasing myself.

Charlie Rumsby: (15:55)

They are really beautiful images! I think it's one of the facts that the context of people living on a river. You have few communities on the Mekong River and the Tonle Sap River. This idea that life on the water is embedded in the image, in the strokes of the brush that you are using, it's really beautifully interconnected. I think if you didn't know that detail you might not even see it. But that's what I really love about the artistic representation as well that there were just these meanings that aren't necessarily that obvious to the naked eye. But when you sort of dig in and start to question and think about choices and stuff, it's really wrapped up esthetically quite well with the themes that we are exploring.

You draw characters and tell stories that aren't based on real world realities. What's it been like changing tact to moving into a more truth-based or real world storytelling?

Ben Thomas: (17:03)

I guess the context, I guess, like most of the other illustrations that are pretty outside of our collaboration is kind of – I enjoy fantasy, sci-fi-like things, things that are not real. Obviously, when I do that kind of thing, I can just draw whatever I want. Nothing needs to be accurate to do anything else. So, there is a lot of freedom in that. Coming into a project where the images were a lot more based in reality. Of course, we've talked about it earlier, there is a lot of visual research, making sure that you got things right in terms of clothing or architecture or whatever. So, there is a lot of use of references like from video. But I think it is kind of restrictive, but at the same time, it's still quite fun to work with.

Charlie Rumsby: (18:57)

I remember when we were doing the illustrations that were based on children's encounters with river ghosts. During my research I had never seen a river ghost. I'd only been told about river ghosts. So when I was saying to Ben, explaining, this is what children spoke about, and these are some of things that they said in their interviews, without actually seeing a ghost, when I opened the email box and saw Ben's illustration, I was just like, wow! It was almost as if Ben was in the interview with me, that he had been there, listening to the children, talking about river ghosts, people who had essentially fallen and died in the river, who then come back to haunt children and adults alike spoke about river ghosts. There was something really powerful when I opened that email and I saw that image, not just because it was an incredible drawing, but because, I was like, wow, this says something that I don't think my words could have ever said, the emotions, the way it draws you in, the kind of feeling you get, especially when you start to think about children's realities and that being a kind of thing that's forcing them out of

sleep. They are having trouble sleeping for fear of river ghosts. It's easy to just say that sort of stuff, but when you actually see it and you see it drawn, I think it unearthed a whole host of emotions that I think are intangible. You can't see it, you can't touch it. You are an illustrator, so you just must kind of, images are words in and of themselves. But I think one of the great things about this collaboration is that your illustrations have enabled me to say things I could only feel, if that makes sense.

Ben Thomas: (21:03)

Yes.

Charlie Rumsby: (21:07)

As we developed this comic, for instance, this graphic novel, how do you see this sort of image-based storytelling having an impact, not just on how people view issues like statelessness, but how do you think people can basically like delve in to the worlds, the live worlds of people that they have never met before?

Ben Thomas: (21:34)

My big hope for this graphic novel is just that there is some kind of connection between the reader and the people whose story we are trying to tell. Through image, of course, people who write novels and things they are very good at, that kind of thing, creating connections with just words. But I think an image is a very powerful tool. I don't want to use the cliché, 'an image is worth thousand words' or whatever. I think there is perhaps some truth to that. Things can immediately be understood through an image that would take paragraphs or pages to understand in words. Especially, when we talk about academic research, your thesis, your paper is not a novel. It's not supposed to be emotionally charged or anything like that. But with a graphic novel, while we are remaining true to the subjects of the graphic novel and remaining as authentic as possible that we can put a lot of emotional language in it, the visual language through these images. That will help to create a connection and the people will not just learn about the stories or these people, but actually understand their situation and how they feel, that kind of thing.

Charlie Rumsby: (23:49)

That for me is the strongest element of this whole project. How people act is up to them. Whether people then start to be politically engaged in these issues. Whether it's just about connection and understanding the different life roads of people who share this world with us. I think for the participants themselves, their eagerness to basically get their stories out there. I think this journey that we are on ticks all those boxes for me, for sure. As an academic, as someone who basically spends a lot of time reading and researching, this creative outlet by you is really rewarding and really satisfying. It's life giving, the process that we are part of. I really, really enjoy it. Just to basically wrap up, do you want to tell us a little bit about where we can view your work, because you've mentioned that you do some sci-fi stuff, you do some sort of different genres that maybe people would be interested in finding out a bit more about that and where to find you.

Ben Thomas: (25:15)

Sure. There is a not a lot of out there at the moment. Mainly you can find me on Twitter or Instagram. I don't know, would it be like...?

Charlie Rumsby: (25:31)

Yes, yes, give us your handle, go for it.

Ben Thomas: (25:32)

My handle would be @obento_box. I don't know if that would be on the screen, written.

Charlie Rumsby: (25:42)

Yes, I will make sure that gets put into the bio.

Ben Thomas: (25:49)

Feel free to follow me. There are six images that I post there every year.

Charlie Rumsby: (25:56)

They are all amazing quality. I think quality over quantity is really important. Ben and I are basically going to be continuing our collaboration to get this graphic novel out there into the public domain. I should mention that our collaboration, I as someone who basically worked with Ben, I do believe that artist should be paid. The development of this novel is definitely kind of wrapped up as fund-raising. I am making sure we can get Ben reimbursed for his labor. I think that is important. I don't think you should knock off your friends for freebies especially with long-term projects like this. That is part of our collaboration process. Hopefully, who knows how long this whole process is going to take for us, but I think the traction that we've gained and the interest that we've gained with only – how many images have we got like a dozen maybe, maybe less, maybe 10 images, but in the process making more. Yes, already I think for academic conversation and discussions on representation and just what collaboration can achieve, I think we've already achieved quite a lot, to be honest, in the last year or so. Great, we will wrap up there.

Film 1

Haapio-Kirk, L., C. Rumsby, and J. S. González

2021 Part 1: Motivations for Graphic Ethnography. *Collaborating Through Illustration: Motivations, Methods, and Meanderings*. Recorded on Oct 22, 2021, 27:35.

<https://vimeo.com/668444599> (Retrieved March 11, 2022)

Film 2

Haapio-Kirk, L., C. Rumsby, and J. S. González

2021 Part 2: Why Collaboration. *Collaborating Through Illustration: Motivations, Methods, and Meanderings*. Recorded on Oct 22, 2021, 23:25.

<https://vimeo.com/668103372> (Retrieved March 11, 2022)

Film 3

Haapio-Kirk, L. and D. Theodossopoulos

2021 Part 3: Analytical Gifts of Graphic Ethnography. *Collaborating Through Illustration: Motivations, Methods, and Meanderings*. Recorded on Oct 27, 2021, 20:45.

<https://vimeo.com/668103585> (Retrieved March 11, 2022)

Film 4

Haapio-Kirk, L. and M. Ito

2021 Part 4: Artistic Collaborators I. *Collaborating Through Illustration: Motivations, Methods, and Meanderings*. Recorded on Dec 29, 2021, 22:04.

<https://vimeo.com/668103913> (Retrieved March 11, 2022)

Film 5

Rumsby, C. and B. Thomas

2022 Part 5: Artistic Collaborators II. *Collaborating Through Illustration: Motivations, Methods, and Meanderings*. Recorded on Jan 6, 2022, 27:33

<https://vimeo.com/668104164> (Retrieved March 11, 2022)