

## **Blind Spots**

### **Authorship, Invisible Labor, and Ethics in Collaborative Multimodal Engagements**

**Date:** 25-26 February 2027

**Venue:** Goethe University Frankfurt, IG Farben Building

Every collaborative multimodal project is based on a web of negotiations, assumptions, and power relations that can trouble questions of attribution. This workshop engages critically with emerging forms of collaborative work and knowledge production in media and visual anthropology, taking as its point of departure the European Association of Social Anthropologists good practice [guidelines on authorship, collaboration, and data governance](https://easaonline.org/guidelines/) (<https://easaonline.org/guidelines/>). These guidelines emphasize that anthropological knowledge is inherently co-produced, embedded in relations of trust, and inseparable from the social and ethical contexts of its production. Building on this foundation, the workshop asks how such principles must be rethought, expanded, and complicated in the context of multimodal and audiovisual research practices.

Multimodal engagements, encompassing film, sound, digital platforms, performance, games, painting, textile or sensory media, intensify longstanding conceptions of authorship, ownership and responsibility itself. While they foreground forms of labour that are often rendered invisible within conventional academic frameworks, multimodal projects frequently rely on unevenly distributed skills and resources, raising urgent questions about whose labour is visible, valued, and credited and whose remains obscured. While questions of authorship in multimodal ethnographic research are hardly new, they gain new urgency in the context of digitally distributed outputs that may involve filmmakers, visual artists, musicians, performers, community interlocutors, archivists, web designers, and research assistants alongside multiple academic authors. They become newly charged as institutional power asymmetries — between professors and postdocs, PI and research team, researchers and their interlocutors, academics and artists — and continue to shape whose intellectual labour is acknowledged and whose is absorbed into someone else's CV. At the same time multimodal collaborations raise new legal and contractual challenges: projects may span institutional boundaries with differing rules on credit and rights, publishing agreements may assign rights ambiguously, especially for film, sounds and software, or AI tools are entering collaborative workflows in ways that existing frameworks of attribution are not designed to handle.

While outside academia, photographers, filmmakers, composers, editors and sound artists are recognized as authors in the fullest sense, inside academia the same individuals are frequently reduced to skilled assistants: their images, sounds, and films become data or illustration, while knowledge production is often attributed to the credentialed researcher. This reduction rests on a deeper misrecognition: the practical, embodied knowledge that goes into camera ethnography, montage, sound, or curatorial practices is treated as technical execution rather than intellectual contribution. Existing guidelines question these forms of hierarchy and insist that collaborators should not be reduced to “data collectors” and receive appropriate recognition. Yet multimodal works expose the limits of text-centric conventions that equate

authorship with the written word and systematically expropriate the intellectual property of non-writing collaborators, to demand more expansive models of attribution, including distributed, layered and processual forms of credit, as well as credit forms that might go beyond academic “currencies”. For fields such as media and visual anthropology, which take seriously the epistemic dimensions of image-making, sound recording, multimodal engagements and the co-creation of knowledge as part of research, these conventions are not only unjust, but they are also intellectually incoherent. What is required, therefore, is a rethinking of authorship on fundamentally new terms that can account for the collaborative nature of multimodal research practices within structural and institutional contexts of universities.

This workshop, the fourth instalment of DGSKA’s *Working Group Media Anthropology series on Multimodal Digital Engagements* in collaboration with the *Working Group Visual Anthropology series ‘Werkstattgespräche’*, turns to the interpersonal and institutional conditions under which collaborative multimodal research is produced.

Drawing on experiences across documentary filmmaking, artistic research, curatorial practice, digital publishing, and participatory research, we invite participants to think together about the frictions, negotiations, ethics and care practices. Attention will be given to power asymmetries within collaborative teams and infrastructures, including disparities in technical expertise, access to funding and equipment, institutional recognition, and career precarity.

We welcome contributions from practitioners and researchers who have navigated, or are navigating, the complexities of collaborative multimodal authorship, and who are willing to reflect critically and openly on their experiences.

**Deadline for proposals: 15 November 2026**

**Notification of acceptance: by 30 November 2026**

**Please submit here: [Submission form](#)**

Please also forward this call to persons and lists outside academia!

Further information on the workshop will be distributed here:

<https://agmedien.de/events/blind-spots/>

Guiding questions for contributions

- How can collaborative, multimodal work be adequately recognized when the academic system continues to privilege individual, text-based authorship? What would more equitable forms of scholarly credit look like?
- How must funding instruments be restructured to address the structural asymmetry between tenured academics and precariously employed creative collaborators?
- How is authorship conceived differently inside and outside the academy, and what would it mean to take seriously the authorial status of photographers, filmmakers, sound artists, and other non-writing collaborators in multimodal research?
- How do existing frameworks for good scientific practice fail to account for audiovisual primary data, and what would adequate institutional guidelines look like?