



Anaïs Bloch

From Digital Waste to Critical Pedagogies: An Ethnographic Comic on Circuit Bending

Anaïs Bloch

Von digitalem Abfall zu kritischer Pädagogik: Ein ethnografischer Comic über Circuit Bending

Abstract: Dieser Beitrag untersucht digitale Bricolage und Circuit Bending mittels gezeichneter Ethnografie. Durch die Kombination von teilnehmender Beobachtung und comicbasierter Transkription wird erforscht, wie grafische Erzählung verkörperte, dialogische und sensorische Formen der Wissensproduktion fördert. Zeichnen verlangsamt die Beobachtung, unterstützt kollektive Reflexivität und macht die materiellen, affektiven und prozessualen Dimensionen der technologischen Aneignung sichtbar. Comics erweisen sich somit sowohl als methodisches Instrument als auch als kritisches pädagogisches Werkzeug in der ethnografischen Forschung.

Keywords: Gezeichnete Ethnografie; Ethnografische Comics; Visuelle Methodik; Digitale Bricolage; Forscherposition

(Übersetzt mit DeepL.com und bearbeitet von Victoria Hegner)

Brief contextualization

Since 2022, I have been conducting ethnographic research on digital bricolage – a term used by artists, craftspeople, and associations who repurpose end-of-life digital objects (computers, consoles, TVs, etc.). My ethnographic approach combines participant observation with drawn ethnographies (Nocerino 2016), transcribing interviews and field experiences through comics. This methodological choice allows me to engage with materiality, techniques, engagement of the body (Mauss 1936), and knowledge construction around digital objects. This piece demonstrates how comics enable a deeper understanding of hijacking practices, understood as the creative subversion and repurposing of technologies, through an engagement with my own body.

The medium also opens a dialogical space with research participants (Ballard 2013; Bloch 2025; Rougeon 2023), not primarily through verbal exchange, but through the shared attention generated by the drawing process. Showing my work-in-progress sketches often sparks unexpected conversations, such as technical corrections, comments on sensations that are difficult or impossible to verbalize, or the

emergence of peripheral stories. In this context, the drawing becomes a shared surface of projection and a support for the co-production of meaning. This interaction fosters a form of collective self-reflexivity, in which each person adjusts their understanding of what they see and do. This form of writing also engages the unconscious and allows for a renewal of imagination (Rougeon et al. 2017).

Rather than merely narrative devices, comics constitute for me a genuine space of ethnographic engagement. Drawing introduces a temporality and materiality of attention that profoundly transforms both my mode of inquiry and my epistemological position. Sketching a gesture, a hesitation, a sound, or an atmosphere forces me to slow down, to return to details, to expose myself to zones of uncertainty, and to acknowledge what I had not seen – or not understood – at the moment of observation (Bloch 2025). Moving through images gives rise to what I call a “hands-on understanding”: tracing the contours of a makeshift tool, reproducing a soldering movement, or capturing the trembling of a circuit triggered by an error becomes a way of thinking anthropologically about what is at stake in these practices.

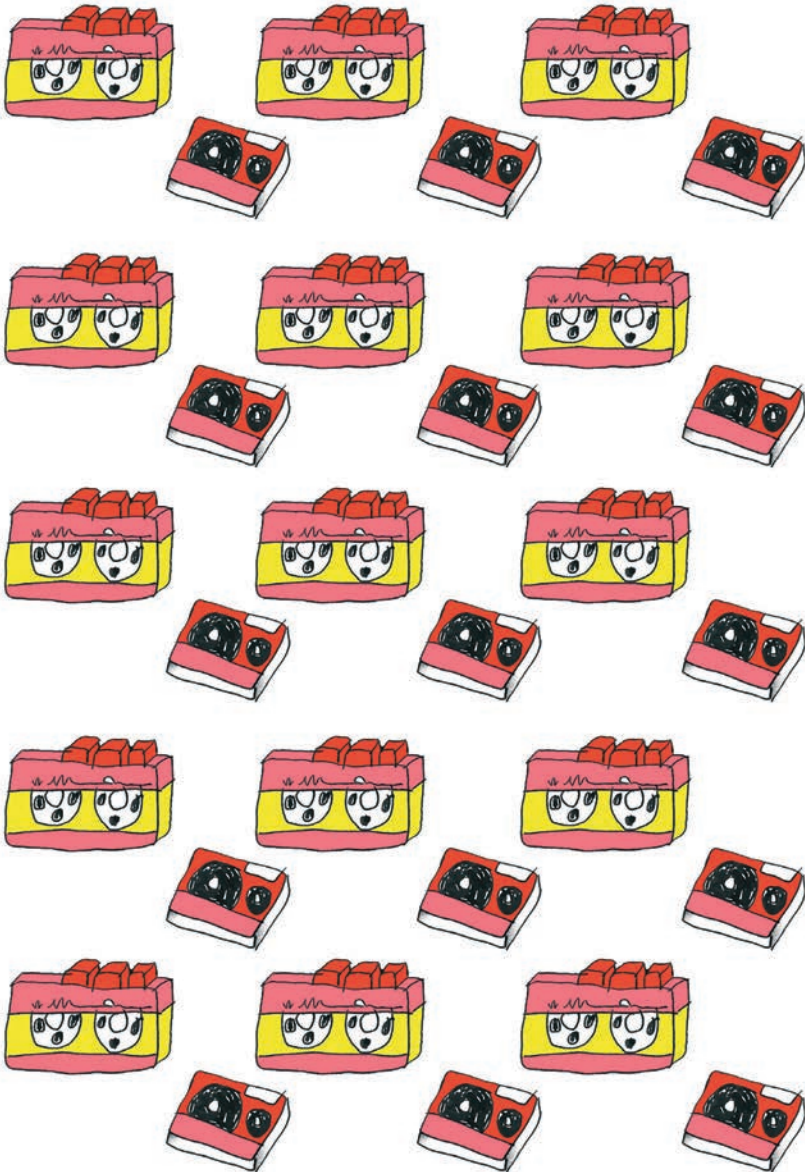
Finally, comics allow me to convey a sensory thickness that escapes traditional academic formats (Causey 2016). The gestures, textures, and rhythms of a circuit-bending workshop generate knowledge that is transmitted through the body, through sound, through the unexpected. The sequential form makes it possible to render visible this processual dimension, shaped by trials, errors, and emergences. Thus, this graphic work does not merely illustrate ethnographic knowledge; it proposes a mode of writing capable of accommodating the materiality, affect, and incompleteness inherent to the phenomenon in question. In this sense, comics function as media of knowledge production: both a method of generating ethnographic knowledge and a mode of sharing this knowledge – an embodied, sensitive, and open ethnography. So I want to take part in the debate on drawing as a research method in the fields of anthropology and education, and as a pedagogical tool.

References

- Allagnat, Malou, Dolorès Sophie Nadine Bertrais, Émilie Guitard, and Muriel Côte. 2024. Penser les villes et les citadinités par le dessin: Entretien avec Malou Allagnat, Dolorès Bertrais et Émilie Guitard, réalisé par Muriel Côte le 3 mai 2024 sur zoom. *EchoGéo*, 67. <https://doi.org/10.4000/11y08>.
- Ballard, Chris. 2013. “The Return of the Past: On Drawing and Dialogic History.” *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 14 (2): 136–148. doi:10.1080/14442213.2013.769119.
- Bloch, Anais. 2025. Des bandes dessinées pour représenter les pratiques de réparation de smartphones et leur transmission, *Pratiques de formation/Analyses [En ligne]*, n° 71
- Causey, Andrew. 2017. *Drawn to See: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

- Mauss, Marcel. Les techniques du corps, Article originalement publié Journal de Psychologie, XXXII, ne, 3—4, 15 mars – 15 avril 1936. Communication présentée à la Société de Psychologie le 17 mai 1934.
- Nocerino, Pierre. 2016. Ce que la bande dessinée nous apprend de l'écriture sociologique. *Sociologie et sociétés* 48 (2): 169–193. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1037720ar>.
- Rougeon, Marina. 2023. "Anthropologie et dessin(s)." *Parcours anthropologiques* 18 (juin): 18. <https://doi.org/10.4000/pa.2456>.
- Rougeon, Marina. 2023. "Dessiner la fabrique d'un scandale environnemental et sanitaire: Autour de l'enquête graphique Tropiques toxiques de Jessica Oublié." *Parcours anthropologiques* 18. <https://doi.org/10.4000/pa.2356>.

From Digital Waste to Critical Pedagogies: An Ethnographic Comic on Circuit Bending

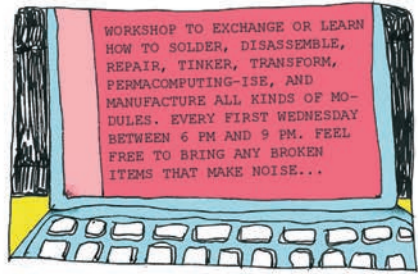


CIRCUIT BENDING WORKSHOP

LED BY GERRY



ON JANUARY 23, 2025
I RECEIVED THIS EMAIL:



It would be interesting to have a look!



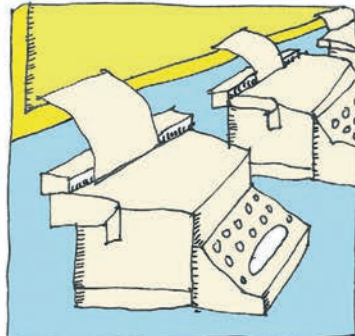
"Permacomputing-ise" sounds cool

"Objects that don't damage batteries and make sound", what a category!

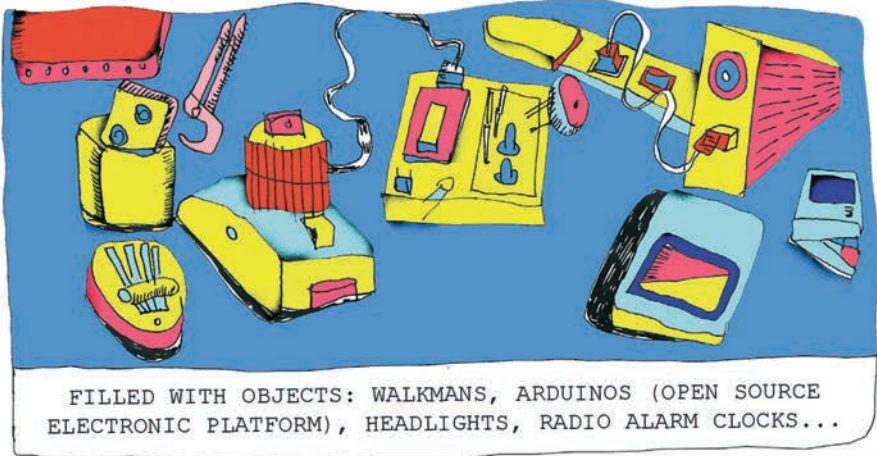
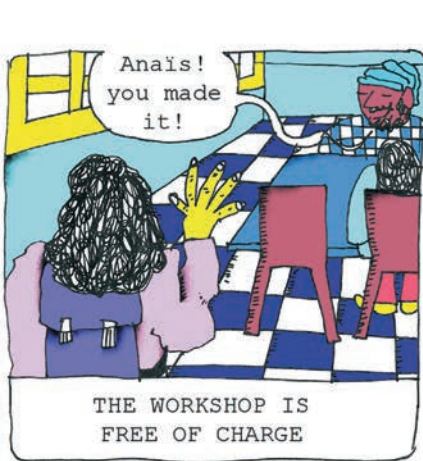


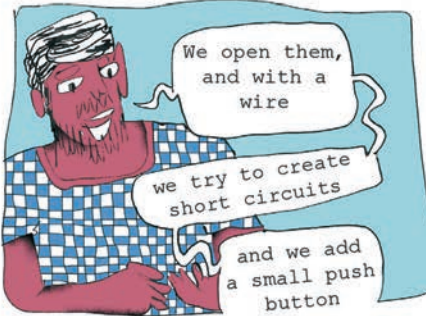
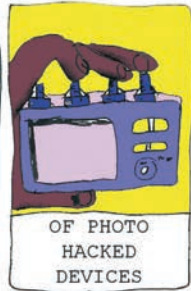
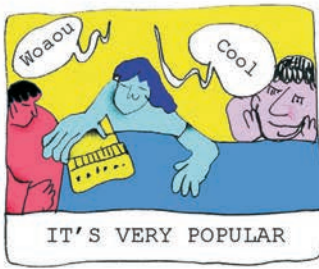
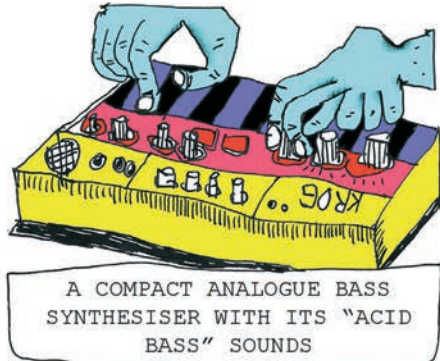


IT'S HAPPENING AT THE
TYPEWRITER MUSEUM IN LAUSANNE



ONE OF THE ONLY MUSEUMS
IN THE WORLD ENTIRELY
DEDICATED TO THIS OBJECT







SHE SPENDS THE EVENING LISTENING TO OLD RECORDINGS...



AND MAKING NOISE...

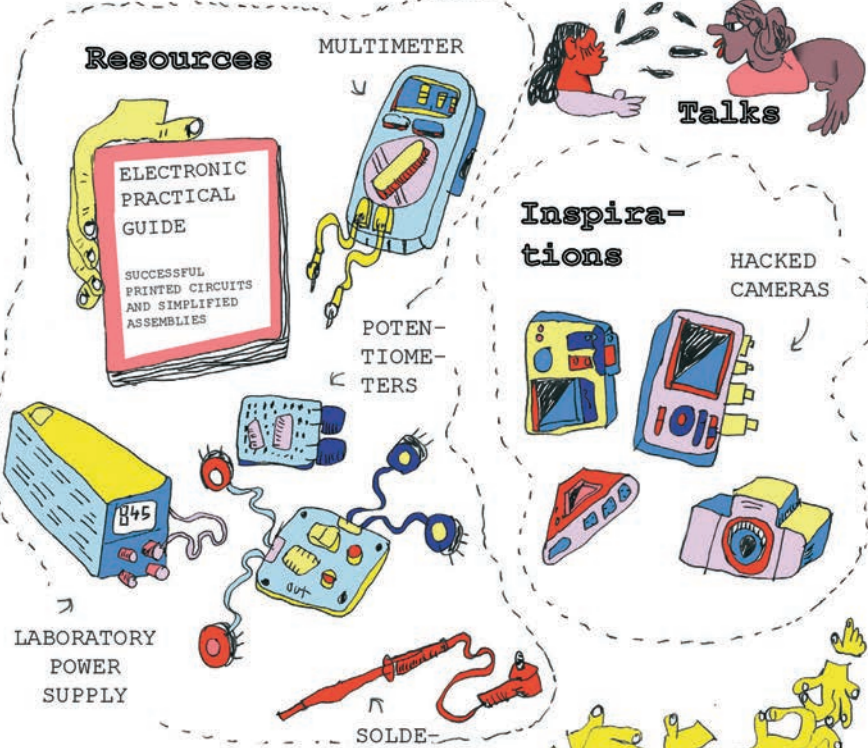


THE ATMOSPHERE IS RELAXED.
WE LEARN THINGS.
SOMETIMES ALONE,
OTHER TIMES TOGETHER.
THERE IS NO OTHER GOAL
THAN TO WORK WITH THESE
REMAINS THAT WE REDISCOVER
WITH AN AMUSED EYE.



SPENDING THREE HOURS TOGETHER DOING THINGS THAT ARE USELESS... OR USEFUL?

MAPPING OF OBJECTS USED AND ACTIONS



Manipulations



I LEAVE THE WORKSHOP
WITH MY HEAD FULL OF
IDEAS AND QUESTIONS...

?
How can we encourage
other voices and
other ways of
experiencing the
digital world?

?
How can a Walkman,
a cassette player
or an old Discman
become vehicles for
knowledge?

?
What do these old machines
tell us about our world?
About our relationship with
digital technologies? About
ourselves?



?
Can we reinvent our
relationship with
digital technology
through breakdowns
and bricolage?



