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## Transcription and the Senses : Cultural Analysis When It Entails More Than Words

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*Transcription and the Senses:  
Cultural Analysis When It Entails  
More Than Words*

By Tom O'Dell & Robert Willim

“This book is a practical guide to the conduct of scientific inquiry in cultural anthropology. It proceeds step by step through the research process, introducing the elements of research design, data collection, and data analysis, and it deals with questions about research methods that I have often asked myself over the years” (Bernard 1988:9). These are the opening lines to Russell Bernard’s *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology*. While it may be a slight exaggeration to call the book one of anthropology’s “classics”, it has at least worked as a highly appreciated methods book for many anthropology students. We quote Bernard’s opening lines here because we think they point to a number of rather conventional approaches that we have observed in the literature on qualitative methods and ethnography. It portrays, for example, the ethnographic process as a rather linear endeavor – as if good research moved smoothly from design, to collection and ending in analysis. There is also something of a “cookbook mentality” in the notion of what Bernard refers to as a “practical guide” – implicitly suggesting that if the student just follows the step by step instructions of the book s/he will inevitably end-up with a good data analysis. And finally, there is reference here in the very first line of the book to “scientific inquiry”, a symbolically loaded phrase that frames what is to come within a paradigm of pragmatism and rationality.

Twenty-five years have passed since Bernard’s book was published. But our point is that the research cultures prevailing today are permeated with ideas about systematic and pre-designed research processes. To some extent these ideas are part of what Simon Coleman and Peter Collins call “‘audit cultures’” (2006:10). According to them researchers, anthropologists, and ethnographers are increasingly required “...to present hypotheses about what will be encountered and even ‘tested’ in the field. Such governmentality is thus taken to stretch across national and cultural borders, while ethnographers are required to take a proleptic view of their fieldwork encounters, anticipating what will be discovered in the field.” (2006:19).

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Today's 'audit cultures' harmonize with ideas about standardized research practices and the disciplined scholar. What is advocated then is in short, ethnography as a rather disembodied process and product of the mind. But what about more irregular dimensions of research, and what about ethnography as an embodied and open-ended practice? What role might the body, senses, and technologies used in conducting ethnography play as the outside cultural world that is the subject of "scientific" study moves through the "scientist" and onto the page?

In recent years we (O'Dell and Willim) have found ourselves urging fellow scholars and practitioners to rethink ethnography – and the way it is explicitly taught – as something other than a rational and linear process dominated by cognitively designed strategic plans. A sound research design may constitute a good point of departure for any study, but there is much more to a good ethnography than the initial plan. In contrast to the all too prevalent manner of approaching and discussing ethnographic methods as a disembodied rationalist endeavor, we have argued for a need to view ethnography as a compositional practice (O'Dell & Willim 2010 & forthcoming). This is a move that attempts to highlight ideas of montage and modes of working and assembling meaningful phrases that parallel those existing in the compositional practices of the arts. But it is also a move that emphasizes the role of the embodied ethnographer who sculpts, molds, splices, performs and *does* ethnography.

At the same time, our interest in developing an understanding of ethnography as a compositional practice has been facilitated by our engagement in a recently established international Master of Applied Cultural Analysis program (MACA) at Lund University (in Sweden), in which we have found that students have a difficult time understanding how they can best develop a good cultural analysis. A large part of their problem stems from the fact that their previous training in qualitative methods has taught them that methods were distinctly different than theory, and a question of mechanically conducting certain practices in a manner that minimized (or ideally eliminated) the researcher's influence upon his/her object of study. In arguing for a need to understand ethnography as a compositional practice, we endeavor to highlight the manner in which theories and methods are ever entangled, as well as pointing to the fact that the ethnographer can never stand outside of the ethnographic practice, but is ever corporeally entwined in it.

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In what follows, this article argues for a need to push sensory ethnography further into the realm of analysis and critical sensory reflection, with a greater attention upon the question of how the senses can be better included in the analytical process that moves us from methods and material, through theory, to final analysis. As a means of doing this the article takes the act of transcription as its point of departure. Transcription, at least in the eyes of our students, is perceived as a rather dry and obligatory process of putting utterances onto paper. It is a process that most of our students are quite sure they know how to do when they first arrive in our classrooms – “Just put every sound and pause onto the paper”, seems to be the truth they have learned. Our contribution here, however, questions the rationality of the text and associated page based understandings of transcription. We argue for a need to understand transcription more as a sensory process that mobilizes utterances and sounds, and represents them as filtered and manipulated representations. By referring to ideas about multimodality several scholars have stressed the role of gestures and signs interplaying with the verbal in situations of communication. However, here we shall intentionally push the notion of transcription as a multimodal process, to the breaking point, and question what happens when transcription (and text) is not enough. In this pursuit, the latter portion of this article follows the ethnographic process (and modes of representation) into the world of business to illuminate the manner in which different ethnographic contexts may place very different demands on the compositional practices of ethnographers. In line with this, we end this article in the boardroom of a Scandinavian consultancy in order to interrogate the degree to which context makes a difference as the representations of applied cultural analysts engage the body and senses pushing and transforming transcriptions into something very different than mere words to be read off a page.

### *More Than Realist Representation*

“Transcription entails a translation ...or transformation of sound/image from recording to text” (Davidson 2009: 38)

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Transcription is an act that has received rather limited scholarly discussion in the past.<sup>i</sup> To the extent it has been addressed, there exist two primary ways of doing so (although these ways are not entirely distinct). On the one hand, there is a tendency to treat it in a highly instrumental manner (cf. Bryman 2001; Easton, McComish, Greenberg 2000). This is the particular genre of qualitative research methods textbooks in which students are continuously taught that the art of transcription is “to get it all down on paper correctly” (cf. Atkinson 1998). A good transcription, it would seem, doesn't miss a breath – regardless of context. Transcription is here all too often allotted just a few pages of space, in which, in the best of cases, students are warned that the act of transcribing is full of choices. The debates from the *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus 1986) era have left a faint trace of themselves as students are warned of how issues of power are embedded in the transcriber's choices of how to transcribe dialects, indicate pauses in the flow of words, or to include (or alternatively omit) fragmental sentences and time filling sounds – such as “um”, “er” or “ahhhh” or repetitive phrases such as “you know” (cf. Davis 2008:127). But by and large this breed of methodological discourse addresses transcription in terms of problem shooting and the art of doing it “right” (cf. McLellan, MacQueen & Neidig 2003).

In the other genre of analysis, the task of transcription focuses more specifically on issues of context, power, and poetics. In particular, the question of how power relations present in the interview situation can come to be conveyed through the process of transcriptions, is one of the “contextual issues” that has gleaned an increasing degree of attention, especially amongst scholars interested in discourse analysis. As Mary Bucholtz has pointed out, the act of transcription is not just a matter of getting it all, but quite often includes a selection process in which cultural theorists have to wade through the vast amounts of auditory (and other) information they are privy to and choose what aspects of it should be transferred to paper (Bucholtz 2000: 1441ff.). It is only after this selection process has been completed, that the manner in which it is actually put into print comes into play (Davidson 2009:41ff.).

Folklorists interested in the ethnopoetic aspect of storytelling have also argued for a greater awareness of how power relations can come into play when different transcription techniques

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are employed. Along these lines, at least some have argued for a need to produce transcriptions that emphasize dialectical inflections in the narrator's voice as well as the framing devices – such as pauses, emphasis of tone, and laughter – used by the narrator in the production of folklore. The end result of a meticulous ethnopoetic transcription is often rather difficult to read (filled with dots, and dashes, as well as incomplete words, phrases, and spellings that emphasize dialectical pronunciations), and almost beckons the reader to read aloud and almost “re-enact” the original (Klein 1990:53) pushing the written text back into the realm of orality and bodily performance. As Michel deCerteau has observed,

In earlier times, the reader interiorized the text; he (sic) made his voice the body of the other; he was its actor. Today, the text no longer imposes its own rhythm on the subject, it no longer manifests itself through the reader's voice. This withdrawal of the body, which is the condition of its autonomy, is a distancing of the text. It is the reader's *habeas corpus* (1984: 176).

The ethnopoetic transcriptions can in a sense be understood as a tactical maneuver reversing this immobilization of the body. It not only highlights the performative dimension of oral communication, but it prompts new forms of performativity from the bodies of the transcript's reader.

But this form of transcription is not without its shortcomings and problems. The reproduction of dialect, pauses, “ums”, and interrupted/broken thoughts may be seen as a means of coming closer to the actual performance of the original oration, but in other contexts such as courtroom protocols or journalistic newspaper reports they can reinforce power structures and effectively work to further marginalize the marginalized (Bucholtz 2000: 1451). The problem here lies not simply in the transcription *per se*, but even in the degree to which transcripts are reflexively used in varying contexts.

### *Performing the Social*

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Amongst the scholars who have critically problematized the act of transcription in an attempt to elucidate its political nature, there has been an all too prevalent tendency to become locked into discussions of such things as why a dialectical spelling of a word may be used in one portion of a translation, while the “correct” spelling is used in another. At the most stringent end of the spectrum, scholars such as Bucholtz have concluded by arguing that it would be more appropriate to base transcriptions on the phonetical alphabet. The problem here is that these manners of understanding transcription – whether they be from the perspective of discourse analysis, ethnopoeitics, or the realm of textbook explanations – are still locked in a positivist mode of thinking incapable of moving beyond an understanding of transcription as anything more than a movement of verbal utterance into *letters* on a *page*. It consequently remains framed as a literary and text based activity.

Cécile Vigouroux has put forward a slightly different intellectual framework for understanding transcription by calling for a need to understand it as a social activity between collaborators. This is a move that helps us begin to understand transcription as something akin to that which Latour calls a “circulating reference” (1999:81) – that is the process through which the utterance moves to paper. And in Vigouroux’s case, this is a context that moves between the utterance, the researcher’s scription, discussions with collaborators about the interpretation of the fastening of the utterance to the paper, the production of new utterances, erasures, adjustments, and new scriptions. Transcriptions, viewed in this manner, are always cases of circulating references in which sounds (primarily, and we are critical of this) enter into motion through “scientific” processes intent upon nailing them down and thereby affixing that which is ephemeral: all in the name of truth. Focusing upon the social aspect of transcriptions as Vigoroux does, thus helps us illuminate the political aspect of translation by focusing upon its social nature, but even here, the discussion is still exceedingly fixed on processes of textual production.

In all of the examples we have brought up here, sounds (usually utterances) are moving from the realm of audio vibration to text on the page. Transcription is, in other words a special practice that is dependent upon a series of micro-mobilities whose organization can be argued

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for in different ways depending upon the scholar's ambition with the outcome of the transcription process (such as the rhythm of ethnopoetics or the illumination of power structures via discourse analysis). But it is also a practice which has to a large extent trapped the "scientific imagination" into a fixation upon letters: concerning the questions of how utterances should be spelled, how silences should be marked, and the manner in which emotions can be indicated. But in doing this, it is also highly dependent upon the spatiality of the page and the manner in which flows of utterances can be represented to convey a conversation's/interview's performative elements. Empty space on the page is as important as the spatial arrangement of black symbols. As geographer Alan Pred has demonstrated in a postmodern play with text in which he has entangled words to emphasize the manner in which certain ideas are connected, and located words on opposite sides of the page, leaving empty space between them, to emphasize issues of distance and disjuncture, the geography and space of the page does matter and can be worked to affect the reader – provoking feelings of frustration and confusion as well as new levels of understanding (cf. Pred 1992). This use of the page is a technique which folklorists interested in ethnopoetics have approached and explained as a means of more closely approximating the rhythm and emotion of an oral narrative (Klein 1990:50; Tedlock 1971:124ff.), but what we are trying to emphasize here, and which folklorists have not sufficiently acknowledged, is that it does so by manipulating the tension which exists between sound and vision in the transcription.

This is not a process unique to ethnopoetics, however; transcriptions always involve the transmodal shift in register implicit in the conversion of sound to the realm of the visual. Much of the writing that has been done on multimodality (which we define as co-existing forms of communication operating in different sensory realms) and transmodality (which more strongly stresses the interplay between sensory realms of communication) has tended to have a rather strong semiotic orientation that has had the ambition of drawing greater attention to ways in which the senses are entwined in one another and implicated in our understanding of the world around us (cf. Dicks, Soyinka & Coffey 2006; Hurdley & Dicks 2011; Murphy 2012, Pink 2009:102). In the end, the semiotic orientation of this writing has tended to produce texts that we would argue are more cerebral than sensory. We see a need to reposition discussions of multimodality more closely in line with a stronger and thorough



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appreciation of how the senses are implicated in the production of knowledge in different ethnographic contexts. How, in short, can an appreciation of the drama and potential involved in different techniques of visualizing sound lead to the development of new ethnographic understandings and means of representation?

### *Drawing Transcriptions*

In his book, *Samtidsislam: Unga Muslimer i Malmö och Köpenhamn* (2010) Jonas Otterbeck has pushed these processes of visualization even further through his collaboration with cartoonist Peter Hallin. The book uses a mixture of traditional (text based) interview quotes with cartoon representations of the interview context. In order to do this, Otterbeck had to “not only” devise rules of his own for the visualization of his collaborators’ utterances, but he had to work closely with the artist to portray the mood of the interview context as well as the physical setting in which the interview took place. Pushing the visual parameters of the transcription in this direction consequently even introduced new ethical considerations. For example, how does one go about drawing environments which people mention in an interview, but which the cultural analyst has never seen?

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(From Otterbeck 2010:118, drawing by Peter Hallin)

In the example above, Otterbeck realized that as he spoke with Venus, she was not only telling a story about a phase of life she went through as she contemplated beginning to wear a shawl to cover her hair, she was also describing her encounter with her middle-class, educated parents. Otterbeck's choice to use cartoons, was one intended to draw the reader further into his collaborators' lives, to make an emotional connect with them, and thus to provide the narrative with a stronger sense of being about specific individuals (2010:18). Together with an artist who had never met the people Otterbeck had interviewed, he had to create "resemblances" of his collaborators that maintained their anonymity while also "staying in line" with their personalities and identities. What might Venus' middle-class Iranian-Swedish home have looked like? Here books are used to represent a status of being educated. Throughout the book, environments are "made up" as the transcription is "drawn up". The choice of cartoon as visual form is an interesting one. Where a photograph may have the tendency to make claims to realism, the premise of the cartoon is from the beginning more distant from reality – an apparent representation which nonetheless includes the scientist (in

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this case as somewhat comical figure in many places). Thus, it offers some form of “flesh and blood” otherwise missing from blocks of interview quotes we are otherwise so accustomed to in scholarly text.

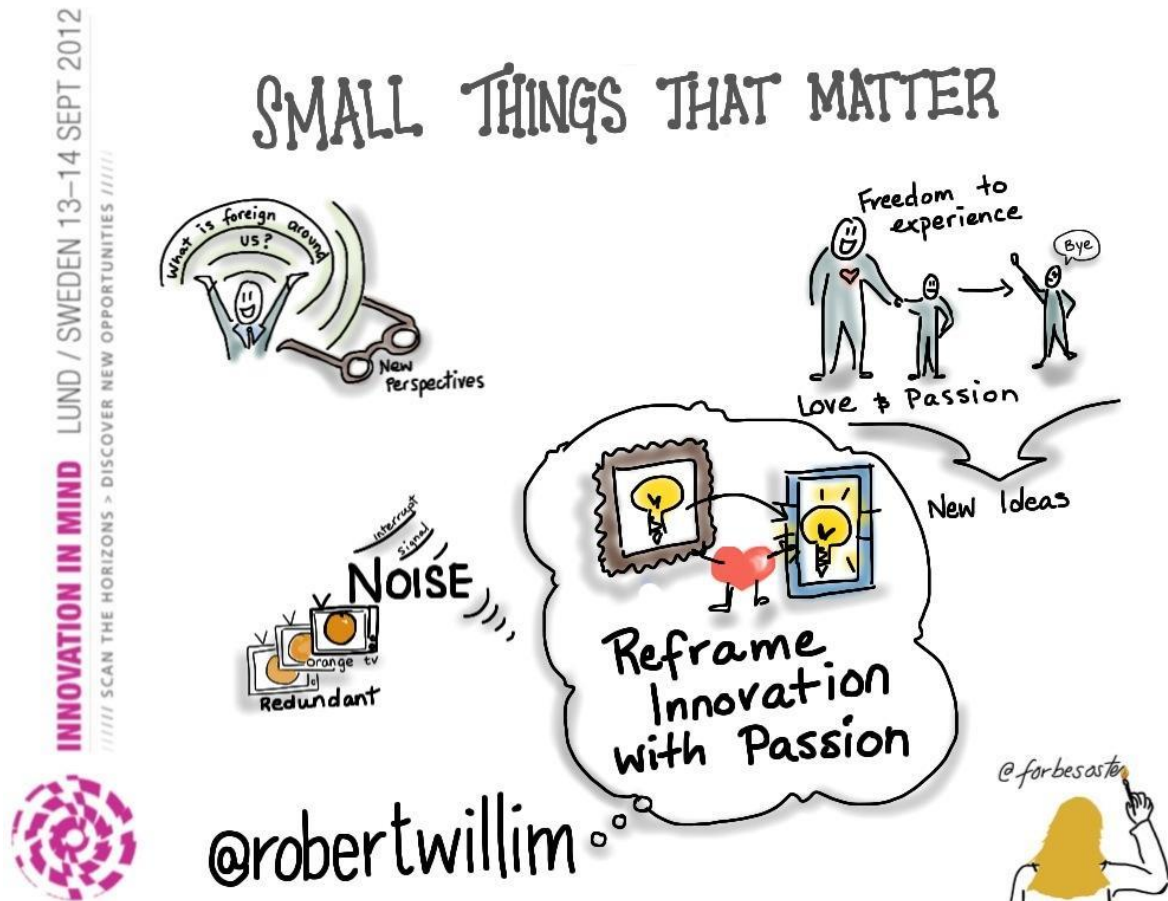
The introduction of cartoon also affects our movement through the text. In *The Art of the Novel* Milan Kundera explains some of the techniques he uses as in writing to affect the reader's engagement with the book in hand. Some chapters are intentionally long, built around long and complex sentences, while others are short – filled with pages only half full of text. These types of chapters force the reader to quicken the pace of page turning, giving the reading of such chapters a very different corporeal feel than the longer chapters.

Otterbeck's invocation of cartoons works in somewhat similar manner to engage the body of the reader. It quickens the pace, filling more space with fewer words, but still providing information which would be absent in a text based on words alone. Where ethnopoetics may encourage a re-audioization and performance of the interview, the cartoon offers the emotional connect integral to an active *seeing* of the transcription, which is very different than an active *reading*. In this case the interview moves through and beyond the register of letters on pages as symbolic representations of sound gone by, and introduces the *drawn line* as a medium that Shanghai's the transcript delivering it to the genre of the cartoon through the collaboration of the artist. It may help bring some new degrees of understanding to the transcription (the inclusion of the ethnographer with his emotional states depicted, the scenes of the interviews, etc.), but it also creates confusions (altered appearances of everyone represented, made up environments, questions about the existence of books in a parent's home, etc.).

Another example of the manner in which sounds and talk are being turned into visual representation has appeared over the last few years in the practices of sketchnoting (see <http://sketchnotearmy.com> ). This can be seen as a practice to some extent paralleling the practices of transcription. Sketchnotes is based on a kind of visual note taking. When taking notes from talks, keynotes, and other occasions where oral (and visual presentations in the

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form of Powerpoint presentations, for example), sketchnoting has been a way to combine words with other graphic elements, not totally different from cartoons like Otterbeck's.



*This sketchnote was made by Heide Forbes Öste as an interpretation of a keynote speech by Robert Willim on ethnography and “small things that matter” at the conference Innovation in Mind, in Lund 2012.*

In order to condense stuff from a longer talk into a visual sketchnote, keywords and other parts of the talk are composed as a montage of images, symbols, and snippets of text. The talk (which extends over an ongoing period of time) has to be collapsed into a visual composition, “frozen in time”. The conventions dictating how a sketchnote “should” be composed are quite open-ended, but as is the case with the cartoons mentioned above, the receiver have to be able to decode or interpret the visual language of the sketchnoter.

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The transcriptions and visualizations we have here involve letters, lines, and graphic elements. But this is not the ends of transcription. The transformation of sound into other sensory modes has many avenues it can follow. Some involving the improvisatory style of sketchnoting and the playfulness of cartoons. Others evoke more formal systems of interpretation and standardized representation. Music for example is ever being affixed to paper and lines with the help of notes and numbers, among other symbols. But musical transcriptions can take many forms. Students of electronic music, especially before computer based composing became mainstream, often spent hours representing the music they had composed on long rolls of paper in which time moved from left to right and the frequencies of sound moved from high to low vertically from the top of the page to the bottom. Here the purpose was not to break the flow and rhythm of the piece by chopping up its visualization into a series of adjacent and overlapping pages.

Perhaps the linearity of this transcription was problematic, to the extent that it portrayed the transcription process as linear and unidirectional (most transcriptions are made, after all, by continually rewinding the tape in order to listen again – moving backwards in order to make progress). But this was somewhat broken by the inclusion of multiple sounds (from multiple tracks) being including in the transcription, represented as layered on top of one another. In addition to this, the musical score as a form of transcription of sound provides information on tempo, rhythm, intensity of a sound and its resonance as well as the repetition of themes (refrains, for example). However, it achieves all of this in a highly abstract manner. While most people would be able to read and understand a common interview transcription, the score requires a high degree of expertise to understand and interpret. (however, to some degree, all kinds of interpretations: interview transcriptions, sketchnotes or musical scores require some common understanding of how to interpret the representation, even if the level of complexity of the system vary in degree) This complexity highlights the question of what happens when we work transmodally, what is sound as a source of ethnographic information, and what happens when we work with techniques of converting it into a visual representation? What is lost, what is abbreviated and what is highlighted?

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### *Words, Audio, Video and The Coming of Digital Ethnography*

One manner in which ethnographers have approached these types of questions is through the omission of the transcription process entirely. Technologies like the tape recorder and the camera have been fieldwork companions for ethnographers and anthropologists since the early days of ethnographic expeditions. But to a strikingly large extent the capturings and recordings made with audiovisual technologies have most usually been translated into text. During the 1970s technologies for sound recording were used to develop an anthropology of sound. As part of this anthropology scholars such as Steven Feld have argued for an understanding of sound as a form of ethnographic representation in and of itself. Feld introduced the term *acoustemology*, which entails one's sonic way of knowing and being in the world (Steven Feld, in Feld and Brenneis 2004:462). Within these strands of anthropological practice the recording, editing and sonic presentations of sound has been highly important. But as late as 2004 Feld, who for some decades had published and presented acoustemological accounts of various fields, was pessimistic towards the state of sound as a mode of conveying ethnographic work. He lamented the lack of knowledge about the technologies of sound: "Until the sound recorder is presented and taught as a technology of creative and analytic mediation, which requires craft and editing and articulation just like writing, little will happen of the interesting sort in the anthropology of sound" (ibid:471). According to Feld, the anthropology of sound is still mostly about words (ibid).

The question is whether the focus on technology and craft within these strands of ethnography might actually work as a constraint when trying to advocate the role and importance of using sound in ethnographic practices? Recording and editing technologies can be very complex. It requires long experience to become a good sound designer or sound engineer. And the complex world of acoustics is a science in itself that intersects with the practices of sound ethnography. But does that mean that it is harder to make an ethnography presented as sound than a written ditto? As an ethnographer working with text, you do not have to know everything about book production. Some parts of the production and dissemination of ethnographic text are done by professionals with whom ethnographers collaborate without reflecting much about it. Why can't similar collaborations with professionals in the realm of

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sound be possible? And to turn the coin, why are the collaborations with publishers of text not problematized more? The layout (including typography and the interplay between images and text) of a published book or article are seldom discussed among ethnographers, although we are quite aware that typefaces and layout are not neutral conveyors of information. What if ethnographers were required to be layout experts, or professional craftspeople of typefacing in order to be allowed to publish or disseminate a text? And what if you as an ethnographer had to reflect on the various uses of sometimes automated tools embedded in word processor, like spell and grammar checking algorithms or thesauruses which become a kind of technological co-authoring companions? And what about the way that actions like cut and paste as well as other compositional micropractices are utilized to transform texts? These everyday technologies have to a large extent become invisible in ethnographic practices, they are part of what Nigel Thrift has referred to as the “technological unconscious” (Thrift 2004:585). We use and rely upon them regularly without actually reflecting upon their existence.

If you (at the time when this is written) present a sound composition as part of an ethnographic project, several of the technologies used are not part of the routinized arsenal of everyday scholarly tools. However, in recent years the technologies of sound (and images) have become integrated in equipment used by many people on an everyday basis. Some of these technologies are perhaps about to slip into the technological unconscious. Maybe they will also trickle into the mainstream practices of ethnography? Laptops and even smartphones as well as various kinds of tablets like iPads and MS Surface provide ethnographers with the possibility of recording, capturing, editing and composing sound in ways that were almost impossible to imagine a few decades ago. There are still shortcomings when it comes to issues of such things as the sound quality of different microphones among these tools. But nevertheless advanced tools for creating sonic (ethnographic or musical) compositions are carried in people's pockets on an everyday basis. When these technologies are integrated in the compositional practices of ethnography we'll be forced to reflect on and to learn more about the intrinsic interplay of transmodality and composition. One can easily record sounds, which are turned into files, which can be transcoded into other sensory modes (see Manovich 2001). Sounds are packaged as digital objects that are manipulated and handled visually, touched either by cursors or fingers through touchscreens. On a smartphone a soundfile can be

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looked upon, touched, pinched, stretched and moved in ways that engage several senses (like sight, hearing and touch). These technologies raise questions about the performance and enactment of sound, and the manner in which the act of transcription can change and be re-framed as it borders and enters the world of digitally engendered icons, waveforms, clips signs, and editing tools. When these visual representations are acted upon they are underpinned by code and algorithms. Compared to the mute graphical symbols of the printed musical score on a paper, the symbols and objects on the computer screen have a digitally engendered agency through which a user can easily bring them to life. It is in this sensory ecology of hidden code and algorithms that text, sound, and image will interplay, mutate, and thrive in the future (see Kelty et.al. 2009; Pink 2011).

Where ethnopoetics strove to linguistically simulate oral performances, new and not so new technologies are making it increasingly possible to bring to life such performances with the click of a button. While ethnographic film and other moving media only occasionally found their way into the anthropological classroom a few decades ago, students are now accustomed to receiving similar sensory ethnography bites from their teachers' powerpoint presentations as recorded interview quotes, photographs, audio and video clips. Moving media are nowadays regularly incorporated into course and lecture materials. And this material provided by teachers is surpassed by a vast amount of anthropologically and ethnographically relevant moving media material available through services like Youtube, Vimeo or Facebook. Everything from old ethnographic classics like the films by Jean Rouch to various kinds of later ethnographic works are available on the web. In this way a new generation of students are growing up and being educated through a variety of sensory ethnographic techniques in a more intensive degree than ever before. As the material on the web is an example of, the interest in the power of various kinds of ethnography and its both knowledgeable and affective potential is not limited to the classroom or academia.

*Applied Cultural Analysis and  
The Ethnographic Place of Transcription*



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The interest in the potential of ethnography to engage people both cognitively and viscerally has spread as is witnessed by the rise of corporate ethnography, business anthropology and public ethnography, all of which are examples of how ethnographic practices are finding their way into contexts outside academia. Businesses are increasingly interested in understanding how they (and their products/services) are viewed by customers. They seek to learn how they can develop their products through an understanding of these customers, and increasingly they speak of such things as “co-creation” and “user-driven innovation” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004). In business contexts, the genres and styles of ethnographic presentation, like the book or the journal article are not very effective. Still, there is a growing interest in partaking of the customer's voice. This means that practices of transcription have to be aimed toward other forms of communication. Quotes often have to be evocative. As anthropologist Katarina Graffman has pointed out, there is an expanding market of “those who are on the lookout for *cool quotes*” (2011:99) which can be used to develop a product, and turn a better profit.

The transcriptions of “cool quotes” consequently find their way into final reports and powerpoint presentation. In this context, transcribed words are intended to work as evidence that can support actionable deliverables leading to concrete strategies for new courses of action. Transcribed quotes are embedded in a very different discursive language than that familiar to anthropologists in academia – a language of economic rationality and laden with a belief in the need to define possible courses of action in terms of “right” and “wrong”. There is little room here for discussions of how transcriptions can be regarded as context bound representations open to multiple interpretations. As Graffman and Börjesson explain, in relation to the Scandinavian context, “Ethnography is regarded as new and still in the trial stages: the results appear fairly subjective and are difficult to translate into strategy and action” (2011:99). Transcriptions have to be more than representational in this context; they have to be both evocative and convincing.

There are obviously many different ways in which this might be done. One consultancy agency working with applied cultural analysis that we have observed have invested great effort into their choice of office space and the décor used to furnish it. The consultancy,

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Cultural Solutions,<sup>ii</sup> has located its office in a several centuries old townhouse in a posh neighborhood in one of Scandinavia's larger cities. In order to get to the office, clients have to ascend several stories in a wide, dimly lit wooden stairway. At the office itself a large wooden door without windows is the final barrier between the outside world and the inner office. Inside the office, a fire burns in a fire place directly to the left of the door. The room smells faintly of smoke, and the sound of the crackling fire creates an aural backdrop. A secretary to the right of the door sits behind a modern desk and receives visitors. The office space has high ceilings and wooden moldings and fixtures. In general the office feels very much like an old bourgeois apartment (a space embedded with history and traditions), and the homey feel of this space provides it with a sense of assurance, trustworthiness and stability. But the office space is also open and filled with white modern desks and laptop computers, providing it with an aura of being a flexible space for a modern creative class. In the back, behind two tall wooden doors is a small conference room. This is a space in which visitors and clients can be received. Here transcriptions can be evoked. All together, the office can be understood as what anthropologist Sarah Pink refers to as an "ethnographic place", a place "that we, as ethnographers, make when communicating about our research to others" (2009:42). As a space for the performance of a transcription in a powerpoint presentation, or final report, this is a significant place. As we are arguing, transcriptions are not just read here, they are staged and performed.

The entire atmosphere of the office, from the smell and sound of the crackling fire to the classical architecture of the room all contribute an important aura of authority to the results of the ethnography presented here. In relation to the practices of transcription there is a very large need for cultural analysts to reflect more fully on the manner in which the ethnographic places in which transcriptions are received have a sensory impact upon those transcriptions. To what extent do these ethnographic places become sensory spaces that turn quotes (cool or uncool) into convincing evidence or actionable deliverables – or that fail to do so? And how might we begin to understand and problematize other ethnographic places in which transcriptions are received. Think about the large scale anthropological conferences. In a maze of rooms and corridors in hotels like Hilton, Marriott or Sheraton anthropologists gather on an often yearly basis to read and listen to each others texts and transcriptions. In the air

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conditioned rooms equipped with small performance areas and rows of chairs words from fieldworks are evoked through transcriptions. What kind of ethnographic place is this? And what about the genres and forms of performance taking place at these conferences? Take a transcription, place it in a document, allow it to be uttered by a consultant in the room next to the crackling fire at the office of Cultural Solutions – the room full of businessmen and women. Take the same words, instead uttered in one of the conference rooms deep inside a Hilton conference hotel. An anthropologist reading the words to 22 empty chairs and 3 graduate students listening. In which ways do these performances, these ethnographic places transform the transcription?

As we are arguing here, transcriptions involve much more than the reading and writing of words. They pull both the ethnographer and the recipient of the ethnography into new worlds of sensory understanding. We can't ignore the fact that much of the writings on transcription come from worlds of scholarship focused upon discourse analysis, folklore, ethnopoetics and so on. It has focused extensively upon questions concerning the best and most appropriate way to spell words and affix symbols (letters, dots and dashes) to the page. The overwhelming majority of this work is heavily biased towards the sphere of linguistics. At times one can find an acknowledgement of the fact that the space of the page can be worked to affect the actual reading of the transcription. However, this is never framed as a sensory activity, and the transmodal movement of going from sound to vision remains unaddressed in this literature. It is perhaps not surprising that the senses and material contexts (from the technology of the page, to the aura of the room where a transcription is performed) have been left out of the discussions of what a good transcription may or may not be – academia has an unfortunate history of having prioritized the cognitive sphere above (and disjointed from) the corporeal. Our ambition here has been to draw attention to the manner in which we can begin to problematize, and reconsider a wide array of diverse forms of transcriptions as sensory endeavors. But in moving from cartoons, drawings and musical scores to the burgeoning availability and potential pocket devises, we have also striven to indicate some of the ways in which a larger degree of sensory awareness can help us produce very different types of transcriptions that may be able to open and understand the cultural world around us in new (or at least underdeveloped) ways.

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The potential transformation that practices of transcription (from production to reception) seem posed to make as they are bound to new technologies urges us to increasingly contemplate the role ethnographic places can have in different contexts. New technologies are opening the way for cultural analysts to deploy transcriptions in ways and directions that have not been possible (or at least appreciated) before. The question of ethnographic place and the flexibility/mobility offered by new technologies even opens questions as to how new participatory and democratic movements might deploy transcriptions and other forms of sensory ethnography in the future. We see the need to further scrutinize the ephemeral fluidity of ethnographies as they move from place to place and through various mediations.

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<sup>i</sup> In what follows, we have no intention of approaching any form of a review of the literature that has been done on transcription. Such a task lies outside of the ambition of this article. For other texts that do work more in this vein see: Bucholtz 2000 and Davidson 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> The consultancy's name has been changed for the sake of anonymity.