

**Introduction to the Special Issue “The Transdisciplinary Travels of Ethnography” co-authored by Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston and Virginie Magnat**

The theme for this special issue, which examines the transdisciplinary travels of ethnography at the intersections of anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies, performance studies, sport and physical culture studies, as well as theology, emerged from a roundtable panel co-convened by Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston and Virginie Magnat at the Canadian Association for Theatre Research (CATR) Annual Conference held at Brock University in 2014. This discussion became the basis for their co-authored presentation titled “Transdisciplinary Travels of Ethnography: Potentials and Perils” for the 2015 International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry hosted by the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. This special issue of *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* offers a unique opportunity to enter into a cross-disciplinary dialogue by opening this discussion to an international community of qualitative researchers whose work engages with ethnography. In recent years, the transdisciplinary romance with ethnography has become an urgent topic of concern vehemently debated among social sciences and humanities scholars in informal conversations and graduate seminars. Responses to this romance have varied, ranging from an outright scepticism and criticism to initiating conversations and ethnographic collaborations across disciplinary boundaries. Notwithstanding, thus far no special issues or edited volumes have taken up the question of what is at stake for researchers employing ethnography within, as well as across, disciplinary formations sanctioned by the neoliberal university. This issue addresses this publication gap by asking: What is lost and gained when ethnography “travels” across disciplines? How can ethnography’s transdisciplinary travels contribute to how we might conceptualize, reimagine, and practice ethnography today and in the

years to come? What does it mean for ethnography to “travel” within a competitive and profit-driven neoliberal academia, where the pursuit of knowledge is no longer seen as a public good and an end in and of itself? While many anthropologists and ethnographers in cognate disciplines have been critical of the pursuit of knowledge detached from real-life concerns and social problems, and have, instead, practiced socially engaged and interventionist research that benefits the people with whom they work, the utilitarian notions of knowledge under the neoliberal academic regime represent something quite different entirely. As Kazubowski-Houston (see this special issue, p...) asserts, the language of social justice and activism has been coopted by the neoliberal academia to disparage the notions of knowledge for knowledge’s sake in order to advance its entrepreneurial goals and agendas. Also, as prominent anthropologist Paul Stoller notes in his recent Huffington Post blog, ethnography has come under attack from other scholars, most frequently from legal and quantitative researchers. Its plausibility, accuracy, and honesty are questioned and contrasted with the rigour and verifiability of “scientific” methods (Stoller, 2019, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-stoller/in-defense-of-ethnography\\_b\\_8028542.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-stoller/in-defense-of-ethnography_b_8028542.html)). Stoller’s blog is a rebuttal to legal scholar Paul Campos’s recent essay scathing the ethics and legitimacy of Alice Goffman’s widely respected ethnography, *On the Run* (2014), on the damaging and dehumanizing effects of policing of African-American men in a Philadelphia neighbourhood. Consequently, academic ethnography frequently finds itself in defence of its own legitimacy and authority as a research methodology. Certainly, Stoller’s blog is an indication that, in recent years, such a defence has become urgent enough to break through to public discourse and reach wider, non-academic audiences. The contributors to this special issue hold that it is in such contested and uncertain contexts that the transdisciplinary travels of ethnography must be ultimately understood and debated.

## **Ethnography**

Since anthropology has always differentiated itself from other disciplines by its deeply contextual, historical, and quotidian methodology of ethnography, it is crucial to carefully historicize the confluence of anthropology and ethnography in order to understand what might be at stake when engaging with ethnographic inquiry. Readers of *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* will notice when consulting the newly published fifth edition of the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* that Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna D. Lincoln provocatively state in the preface: “indeed, the traditional ethnographic text may be dead (see Snow, 1999, p. 97; Erickson, Chapter 2, this volume). [ . . . ] We are in a postethnographic, postethnographer space” (pp. xv-xvi). In the second chapter titled “A History of Qualitative Inquiry in Social and Educational Research,” Frederick Erickson provides critical insights into the genealogies of ethnography. He observes that the term ethnography was initially used by anthropologists in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to refer to “descriptive accounts of the lifeways of particular local sets of people who lived in colonial situations around the world” (p. 38). He foregrounds the etymology of ethnography, which he argues is informed by the ancient Greek xenophobic propensity for treating non-Greeks as the Other, inferring that ethnography originally signifies “writing about other people” (p. 39). He links ethnographic research to early forms of qualitative social inquiry such as descriptive reporting of social practices and cross-cultural comparisons, and includes in his historical overview the writings of Greek scholars Herodotus (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.) and Sextus Empiricus (2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.), Renaissance and Baroque “how to do it books” on courtly dancing, pedagogy, fishing or violin playing, along with accounts by travelers and missionaries about Native Americans under Spanish colonial rule. Erickson argues that with the

rise of the Enlightenment, quantitatively based inquiry became associated with a world view assuming universally applicable principles of causality. The notion of a social science emerged from this increasingly dominant worldview: “Some of the French Enlightenment philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the possibility that social processes could be mathematically modeled and that theories of the state and of political economy could be formulated and empirically verified in ways that would parallel physics, chemistry, and astronomy” (p. 28). Early sociology and anthropology were informed by this doctrine of discovery and embarked on the search for “causal laws that applied to all cases” to produce general knowledge about “universal stages of development from barbarism to contemporary (European) civilization” (p. 38). However, the imposition of a natural sciences paradigm upon the study of human social and cultural practices was contested by German scholars such as Dilthey, Weber, Simmel, Husserl and Heidegger, who advocated for the interpretative approach that eventually led to the “hermeneutic turn” in mid-twentieth century anthropology.

Yet, in spite of this methodological shift, the positionality of ethnographers remained that of outside observers relying on their scholarly expertise to generate etic descriptions that could contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their discipline, that is to say, “*for an audience consisting of people other than those who had been studied*” (p. 41, italics in original). Erickson specifies that the researched “were not expected to read the research report” as most of them were illiterate (p. 41). However, the so-called subjects of ethnographic research would soon dramatically disrupt the “golden age” of this realist ethnographic paradigm grounded in “its literary quality of ‘you are there’ reporting” (p. 42), which anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski pioneered. While privileged white men largely dominated mainstream sociology and anthropology whose authority had remained unchallenged, women such as Laura Bohannon

(1954), Hortense Powdermaker (1966), and Rosalie Wax (1971) chose to address their personal experience of ethnographic fieldwork through the use of fictionalized and self-reflexive writing (p. 45). Moreover, Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria indicted the anthropology of Amerindian societies and cultures as an “ethnocentric and implicitly colonialist” enterprise in his 1969 book *Custer Died for Your Sins* (p. 46). Deloria’s critique has been further articulated within the context of dominant Western research systems by the following generation of scholars who have developed “Indigenous research perspectives and methods [. . .] practiced by members of communities formerly studied as ‘others’ by ‘outsiders’ (see, e.g., Kovach 2010, Tuhiwai Smith, 2013)” (p. 50).

Feminists, Indigenous, non-Western, postcolonial and postmodern researchers have thus called into question “the entire Enlightenment project of authoritative academic discourse concerning human activity, whether this discourse manifested in the arts, in history, or in social science” (p. 50) to delegitimize the evidence-based credibility of master narratives produced by such discourse. Echoing anthropological conceptions of ethnographic truths as partial and subjective that have defined the discipline since the 1980s “crisis of representation” (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1988), Erickson asserts that qualitative research reports (and, by extension, ethnographic writing) are “often considered partial – renderings done from within the standpoint of the life experience of the researcher,” and suggests that their validity may be “compared to that of novels and poetry – a pointing toward ‘truths’ that are not literal” (p. 53). He nevertheless underlines salient cross-disciplinary contradictions: while “realist” ethnography has come under intense scrutiny in both anthropology and sociology, this paradigm still tends to be privileged in applied fields such as education, medicine, and business, “while more recently developed approaches have sometimes been adopted (especially in

education) and sometimes met with skepticism or outright rejection” (p. 53). Moreover, he foregrounds current tensions between scholarly standards for research excellence promoted by universities, funding agencies and peer-reviewed journals that require “rigorous, systematic, and objective methodologies to obtain valid and reliable knowledge” (p. 56), and calls for critical and interventionist forms of inquiry that oppose these institutional expectations. Ethnography is therefore confronted with new challenges while being offered opportunities for further transformations.

In recent years, within anthropology, the wide range of imaginative, collaborative, visual, auditory, embodied, performative, and multi-sited methodological experimentations—that require anthropologists to think critically about the ethnographic process/product, ethnographer-interlocutor relations, ethics, ethnographic field, and ethnographic data—have further driven such ethnographic transformations (Elliott and Culhane 2017; Faubion 2009; Fortun 2009; Kazubowski-Houston 2010; Magnat 2011; Marcus, 1995, 2000; Salazar et al 2017; Taussig 2011). Today, anthropological ethnography tracks routes, global connections, scapes, and zones of friction, and concerns itself with interior dialogues, imaginaries, human-non-human relations, and affective dimensions of the everyday (Appadurai, 1996; Crapanzano 2004; Clifford, 1997; Irving, 2011; Kohn, 2013; Stewart 2007; Tsing, 2004). Those who carry out multi-sited research, for instance, frequently work in a field that cannot be conceptualized in any traditional and long-term sense. Moreover, anthropology’s recent turn to textualism, ontology, and anti-representationalist frameworks privileges the literary and/or the philosophical over ethnography and social analysis (e.g. Asad, 1993, 2003; Dirks 2001; Henare et al 2007; Kohn 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2015).

## **Transdisciplinary romance**

The genealogies of ethnography as anthropology's central and defining methodology have been undeniably multifarious, tracing back to the nineteenth-century Christian missionaries and merchants' colonial descriptions of the "primitives," the work of anthropologist and social theorist Lewis H. Morgan, the fieldwork of nineteenth-century sociologists in Britain and France who relied on observation to understand their own societies (Wax, 1971, pp. 21-41), the twentieth-century urban "community work" of the Chicago School (Sluka and Robben, 2007, p. 12), and finally to the contributions from literary and cultural studies that have refocused ethnography towards questions of hegemony, power, identity, and agency in capitalist contexts. However, it is not until the late 1990s that participant observation-based ethnography gained currency in other disciplines, which began theorizing, practicing, and writing about ethnography from their own unique perspectives (see, for example, Jackson 1987, Delamont 2002). This development marks what has been called an "ethnographic turn" in the humanities and social sciences, especially in the fields of cultural, communication, and performance studies, but also in sociology, education, health studies, business, social work, the study of sport and physical culture, and theology, among others. This, in part, is the result of postmodern critiques of scientific positivism, reductionism, armchair scholarship, and traditional researcher-researched power imbalances. These critiques, in turn, have been articulated as responses to the shifts in the global relations of power emerging from post-World War II, anti-colonial liberation movements and, since the 1970s, from Indigenous, anti-globalization, and environmental justice struggles worldwide. The so-called "subjects" of academic research—as well as scholars committed to postcolonial critique, socially-engaged research, and decolonizing Western academia—have taken to task not only global capitalism's neocolonial institutions, policies, and practices, but

also the dominance of Western knowledge systems, theories, epistemologies, and methodologies. The 1980s and 1990s had already borne witness to a transdisciplinary questioning of the relationships between knowledge and power (Fabian, 1993; Foucault, 1980; Mitchell, 1988; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988), further taken up in the work of feminist theorist Emma Pérez (1999); historian and postcolonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000); anthropologists Ann Stoler (2002), Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and Arturo Escobar (2006), and Rosalind Morris (2010); and qualitative researchers Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008). “Who has the power to represent whom, under what circumstances, and for whose benefits?” have become some of the central questions guiding these critiques. It is not surprising, then, that anthropology’s questioning of its own imperialist and epistemological underpinnings, and its shift towards cultural critique more broadly, have deeply resonated across the humanities and social sciences. Most significantly for this discussion, anthropology’s central and defining research methodology—ethnography—with its unique focus on lived experience, contextual analysis, and its commitment to cultivating deep and long-term ethnographer-interlocutor relationships, has become acutely relevant to the growing transdisciplinary concerns over the relationship between knowledge and power and the ethics of academic research. This, in turn, has made the marriage between ethnography and other disciplines an inevitable outcome. In the last decade, in particular, in certain disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts, ethnography has become a buzzword synonymous with interviews, qualitative research, community-based performances, autobiographical research, performance ethnography, etc. Ethnography “how-to” books and edited collections have proliferated in many disciplines and fields (e.g. Gobo, 2008; Pawluch, et al 2005; Thomas, 1992).



Some scholars—usually (but not exclusively) anthropologists—have mistrusted this transdisciplinary romance with ethnography (Fabian and de Rooij, 2008; Carter, this Special Issue). They perceive it as the methodologizing of ethnography, a process that appropriates ethnography as “method” to provide a set of tools that can be learned and applied across different disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and methodological fields, and they express concerns over the ethical implications of misappropriating ethnography stripped of anthropological historicity. They hold that ethnography is largely improvisational, creative, and situated – a sensibility that cultivates a particular understanding, a way of being in, sensing, feeling, and responding to, the world. It is also a particular way of creating knowledge: an “unfinished” (Stewart, 2008) process of tacking back and forth between field and theory. Researchers may use different “methods” of conducting research – interviews, participant observation, life story recordings, photography, film, performance, drawings, sounds recordings, etc. – which could, to a certain extent, be taught and learned, yet ethnography is not a sum of various methods since it is performed differently by different individuals under different circumstances (Castañeda 2006; Malkki 2007; Wolcott 2004). Even how one conducts interviews or participant observation might have to be modified or entirely refigured according to the specificity of the research field. Additionally, there is a wide range of context-specific skills, forms of awareness and perception, embodied responses, and imaginaries that researchers need to cultivate and inhabit – all of which cannot be easily passed on from one researcher to another. Any attempts at reducing ethnography to “method” risk compromising some of its most valuable features, including the notion of the partiality of ethnographic truths, the strategy of reflexivity, a commitment to cultural critique, and “writing against culture” (Abu-Lughod, 1991). Johannes Fabian and Vincent de Rooij have best exemplified these concerns in their seminal critique of the methodologization of fieldwork

published in the *Sage Handbook of Cultural Studies* (2008). In their view, what anthropology knows about ethnography cannot be easily exported to other disciplines for quick consumption, because committing to ethnography as a research methodology also entails committing to anthropology, its history, and the lessons that come with it (p. 5). These lessons concern not only “how to do” ethnography, but also what types of knowledge to produce, and for what purposes. Ultimately, for Fabian and de Rooij, each disciplinary context should re-invent ethnography for its own sake, but in ways that eschew the “how-to” approaches and “hit-and-run” (p. 22) methods, and that focus on cultivating deep and prolonged relationships with interlocutors in the field.

Other perspectives (both within and outside of anthropology) have dismissed such concerns as representative of academic turf-claiming (Turner, 2002; Youngblood, 2007) linked to an anthropological obsession with ethnography, especially in its more “traditional,” Malinowskian rendition (Widlok, 2009; Green, 2011; McLean 2013; Ingold, 2014). Indeed, it is possible to argue that instead of inevitably watering down ethnography, some borrowings by non-anthropologists have enriched its practice by enhancing “our understanding of what constitutes good ethnography” (Widlok, 2009, pp. 42-43). Appropriation anxieties expressed by anthropologists about ethnography might hence be assuaged whenever non-anthropologists help to remind them of “the contemporary and trans-disciplinary relevance of ethnographic fieldwork” (Green, 2011, <http://intergraph-journal.net/enhanced/vol3issue2/4.html>). Moreover, there is a pressing need for anthropology to curb a growing tendency to “define its identity and distinctiveness principally on its deployment of ethnographic methods,” a disciplinary stance that seems inadequate to those who, like Tim Ingold, argue that anthropology must reassert its public voice by offering productive ways of “healing the rupture between imagination and real life”

(Ingold, 2014, p. 383). For others, like Stuart MacLean, anthropology's defensiveness comes from being challenged to engage with the complexities of the contemporary world (MacLean, 2013, p. 67).

### **Rethinking ethnography in neoliberal academia**

Such defensive mechanisms resulting in methodological turf-claiming may be triggered by the paranoid climate of the neoliberal restructuring of academia and the devaluation of qualitative inquiry. As noted by Denzin and Lincoln in their introduction to the fifth edition of the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, “the re-invigorated evidence-based research movement” and its attempts to “scientize qualitative approaches” have incited some qualitative researchers to advocate “a strategic positivism,” and compelled others to call for “a return to neopositivist or postpositivist traditional ethnographic methods (Clarke et al. 2015, p. 40)” (pp. 2-3). While they interrogate these problematic re-orientations, Denzin and Lincoln simultaneously caution against uncritical claims of qualitative ethicism that “can direct our attention away” from the ways in which qualitative inquiry and ethnography are “used to sell products in the consumer marketplace” (p. 7). Paradoxically, in spite of the growing popularity of ethnography in other disciplines, anthropologists have been struggling to defend the viability of this time-intensive methodology within the behemoth that is academic managerialism. Understandably then, some of them harbor strong misgivings about the transdisciplinary trajectories of ethnography, for when their prized methodology wanders off into other disciplines and fields, they feel caught in a double-bind requiring them to either reclaim its ownership or develop new arguments about what makes anthropology unique and viable. In this transdisciplinary moment, when anthropological research is carried out both at and away from home, anthropology's topical foci – power and politics, marginalization, globalization, ontologies, networks, consumption, human-non-human

relations, etc.—clearly overlap with those of other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, which calls into question the relevance of anthropology within the escalating competitiveness of corporatized academia.

In their introduction, Denzin and Lincoln point to “an increasing sensitivity to and sophistication about the pitfalls and promises of ethnography and qualitative research” (p. 2), and it is therefore crucial to foreground the significant number of scholars who have addressed the value, challenges, and potentialities of ethnography from entirely different multidisciplinary standpoints. For example, Dwight Conquergood’s “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” published in an anthology of his influential essays, *Cultural Struggles: Performance Ethnography, and Practice* (2013), asserts: “No group of scholars is struggling more acutely and productively with the political tensions of research than ethnographers. For ethnography, the undermining of objectivist science came roughly at the same time as the collapse of colonialism” (p. 81). Defining ethnography as “an intensely sensuous way of knowing” that challenges “the visualist bias of positivism with talk about voices, utterances, intonations, multivocality” (pp. 83, 87), he favors metaphors of sound that privilege “temporal process, proximity, and incorporation,” and listening as “an interiorizing experience, a gathering together, a drawing in,” that he contrasts with sight, observation, detachment, distance, and objectivity linked to “the spatial practices of division, separation, compartmentalization, and surveillance” (p. 87). Stressing the embodied dimension of ethnographic practice, he contends that “the return of the body” shifts the emphasis “from space to time, from sight and vision to sound and voice, from text to performance, from authority to vulnerability” (p. 87). D. Soyini Madison (2006) responds by stating that “Conquergood’s call to rethink ethnography is to revision, reinvent, and recommit to an ethnography that must engage a postcolonial, post-civil

rights, post-cold war, postfeminist, and postmodern world. [. . .] We are called to attend in the most deep and abiding way to an ethnographic encounter with Otherness that demands our whole body” (pp. 347-48). In *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2012), Madison argues that if critical ethnographers understand performativity not only as citationality, that is to say, “an internalized repetition of hegemonic stylized acts inherited from the *status quo*,” but also as having “the capability of resistance [through] an internalized repetition of subversive stylized acts inherited by contested identities” (p. 181), then it becomes possible for them to harness the subversive potential of performativity to resist, challenge, and change hegemonic forces of exclusion, oppression, and discrimination. Accordingly, in their “Manifesto for Ethnography” published in *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* in 2002, Paul Willis and Mats Trondmann define ethnography as “the sensitive register of how experience and culture indicate, as well as help to constitute, profound social and structural change,” and observe that the challenge for ethnographers lies in bringing “that ‘registered experience’ into a productive but unfussy relation to ‘theory,’ so maximizing the illumination of wider change” (p. 399). J. Van Loon (2001) contends that “the main impact of cultural studies on ethnography has been that the latter has become not only a subject but also an instrument of a continuous process of critical engagement with our own being-in-the-world, beyond the taking for granted of that which already exists” (p. 4). While embodiment is pivotal to ethnographic practice, Van Loon stresses that “the body is never simply there, it is made, practised and processed,” and suggests that it is precisely this processing, this “becoming-body,” that is the work of ethnography (p. 22). In her examination of the turbulent relationship between anthropology, ethnography, and cultural studies, Charmaine McEachern (1998) remarks that while the field of cultural studies has been influenced by anthropology’s critical re-evaluation of the ethnographic enterprise in the 1980s’,

anthropologists who are investigating their own contemporary society and culture could learn from cultural studies forms of ethnography whose main focus has been on identity and agency in capitalist societies. Moreover, exploring hegemonic and subversive constructions of identity in contemporary culture and issues of personal agency has also been pivotal to autoethnography, a practice whose theory, history, ethics, and commitment to social justice are examined in *The Handbook of Autoethnography* (2013).

George E. Marcus and Paul Rabinow discuss anthropology's transformation under the influence of its most important interdisciplinary alliances in the humanities, namely, literary and cultural studies, leading to the re-definition of ethnographic fieldwork as the practice of "forming relationships of mutual stakes and mutual appropriations for different purposes on a common intellectual ground, forged together in perhaps a halting, partial way, but sometimes, when one is lucky, in a committed way" (*Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*, 2008, p. 66).

Luke Eric Lassiter asserts in *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography* (2005) that engaging in collaborative ethnographic research "challenges the authority not only of the single-authored text, but also of the single-voiced activist, and it forges a 'co-activism' in much more complex, diverse, and multivocal ways (Schensul and Stern 1985)." He further contends that such a collaborative process "blurs the lines between academic and community discourse, between academic and applied anthropology, between theory and practice, and it places collaborative ethnography among the many kinds of public and activist efforts that have long abounded in our field (see, e.g., Stull and Schensul 1987)" (p. 153-54).

Most recently, a growing number of scholars in diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields have welcomed the multifarious potentials of working ethnographically and collaboratively across social sciences, humanities, science and technology studies, and the

creative arts. A testament to this are several recently published interdisciplinary edited volumes on ethnographic experimentations and multidisciplinary collaborations, including *A Different Kind of Ethnography: Imaginative Practices and Creative Methodologies* (2017) edited by Denielle Elliott and Dara Culhane, which focuses on ethnography at the intersections of anthropology and the creative arts; *Anthropologies and Futures: Researching Emerging and Uncertain Worlds* (2017) edited by Juan Francisco Salazar, Sarah Pink, Andrew Irving, and Johannes Sjöberg, which explores creative techniques for researching possible and uncertain worlds; or *Theoretical Scholarship and Applied Practice* (2017) edited by Sarah Pink, Vaike Fors, and Tom O'Dell that engages with collaborative interdisciplinary research at the intersections of theoretical research and applied practices outside academia.

As well, a variety of transdisciplinary research and educational centres, ventures, and networks have sprung up in the last few years, such as *The Centre for Imaginative Ethnography* (CIE), a transnational cyber-collective committed to creative, embodied, critical, and politically conscious research; *Sensory Ethnography Lab* at Harvard University that explores intersections between ethnography and aesthetics; *the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology* at Manchester University (UK), which initiates collaborations between sensory ethnography, practice-based methods, photography and digital media, and art/museum installations; or the two new European Association for Social Anthropology (EASA) Networks, *Future Anthropologies Network* (FAN) committed to creative, interdisciplinary, and applied research focused on futures, and *# Colleex-Collaboratory for Ethnographic Experimentation* devoted to exploring experimental approaches to ethnographic fieldwork.

## **From “turf claiming” to “turf sharing”: the promise of transdisciplinary coalition and collaboration**

Building on the work of scholars whose perspectives have been highlighted in this introduction, the articles featured in this special issue draw from specific areas of expertise to explore possible (re-)orientations spanning a broad spectrum of ethnographic research and raising key epistemological and methodological questions. In particular, contributors put diverse multidisciplinary perspectives into conversation in order to consider what it means for ethnography to travel across disciplines and fields, and, conversely, what different disciplines and fields might contribute to the practice of ethnography.

Anthropologist Thomas F. Carter thus argues in “Disciplinary (Per)Mutations of Ethnography” that ethnography must acknowledge and address “the incomplete nature of human knowledge” through the ethnographer’s own “entanglement with the object of enquiry” (p...). Stressing that the ethnographer does not begin from a position of authority or expertise through which empirical facts are to be discovered and analyzed, Carter refers to his long-term fieldwork on Cuban baseball and reflects on the ways in which his ethnographic knowledge had to continually reconstitute itself as the practice of Cuban baseball underwent transformations over the last two decades. Providing examples from acclaimed ethnographies on the urban poor conducted in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia by Bourgeois, Venkatesh and Goffman, he contends that ethnography, while being inherently comparative, focuses on different kinds of comparison when ethnographers working on the same topic have different disciplinary training. Carter specifies that ethnography is a craft requiring specific investigative skills honed through long-term practice, and that it is through the combined implementation of these skills “in a specific context-laden field” (p...) that ethnographic knowledge is crafted. Ethnography is



therefore informed by “the disciplinary framing of one’s epistemological practices” (p...), leading to the development of a particular ethnographic sensibility. He observes that because the study of culture has become increasingly important in other disciplines, anthropology can no longer claim ethnographic fieldwork as a methodological approach specifically designed for the production of anthropological knowledge about culture. Within the context of globalization, transnationalism, and new technologies, the field itself may be “conceptualized as a confluence of various forces enmeshing the ethnographic object of enquiry” (p...), while the mutations of ethnography that occur in the course of its transdisciplinary travels may be traced to each discipline’s primary focus, “whether it be ‘society’ (sociology), ‘health’ (medicine), ‘space’ (geography), ‘mind’ (psychology) or ‘culture’ and ‘subculture’ found in a range of interdisciplinary fields (cultural studies, sport studies, media studies, leisure studies and so forth), underpinning the ethnographer’s default position” (p...). Carter warns, however, that one of the consequences of these permutations has been the conflation of ethnographic *methodology* with *method*—which may include participant observation, interviews, life histories, mapmaking, film, photography, and archival work. Yet for Carter, ethnography is not a method, but rather, a methodology, because it is “a specific way of doing research and producing knowledge about our world in which the researcher engages with the limits of one’s own knowledge” (p...). Foregrounding the open-ended nature of ethnographic enquiry and the ethnographer’s critical positionality, Carter concludes that it is precisely because this form of enquiry produces partial and incomplete knowledge that ethnography succeeds in “raising uncertainties in our certitudes” (p...) through its exploration of the “ambiguities, uncertainties, and unknowns” (p...) of human existence within particular contexts and under specific circumstances.

In their co-authored article “Researcher Safety? Ethnography in the Interdisciplinary World of Audit Cultures,” anthropologists Jennie Morgan and Sarah Pink seek to “harness the creative potential of uncertainty” (p...) and provocatively suggest that developing “a reflexive awareness of *what we do not know* could be safer than the ‘truths’ that *we think we know*” (p...). The authors hence scrutinize the regulatory logics of institutional research governance and investigate the implications of occupational safety and health (OSH) on ethnographic practice. Their collaborative autoethnographic approach to researching workplace OSH in the construction, healthcare, and logistics sectors raises salient questions about the dangers of research safety policies imposed through institutional guidelines, regulations, and protocols to anticipate and safeguard against the potential risks linked to conducting fieldwork, whether these risks be physical (e.g., injury), emotional (e.g., feelings of isolation), or linked to gender (e.g., harassment). Pointing out that such regulatory frameworks are informed by disciplinary behavioral theories that are contested in anthropology, health care, and social work, the authors argue that ethnographers working in the interdisciplinary field of safety research are uniquely positioned to identify and address the contradictions lying at the core of OSH top-down regulatory frameworks focused on individual behavioral issues. They contend that “a critical understanding of how transdisciplinary anticipatory logics of OSH encroach on ethnographic practice” (p...) is crucial to the development of alternative methodological and conceptual approaches to researcher safety. They employ autoethnography to provide insights into how it is possible “to ‘know how’ to research (safety) safely” through the blending of “anticipatory OSH logics with contingent, personal, and improvisatory ways of knowing” (p...). They refer to the fieldwork they conducted on workplace OSH across healthcare, logistics, and construction organizations. Within this transdisciplinary context, the authors contend that ethnographically

informed anthropological theory can produce a critique of “the bureaucratization of academic practice and research governance” (p...) that can be beneficial to ethnographers working across disciplines. They suggest that while OSH has played a significant role in facilitating the travels of ethnography, it has done so under the influence of biomedical disciplines that privilege behavioral theories and accountability to protect researchers from the potential dangers associated with ethnographic fieldwork. Yet they emphasize that according to some anthropologists and research safety scholars, “shifting analytical and applied focus from controlling risk to managing uncertainty” can become a way of acknowledging and capitalizing on “the experiential, emotional, technical, and systematic learning that arises through encountering uncertainty” (p...). Morgan and Pink foreground the notion of “ethnographic apprenticeship,” which they envision as “a ‘mode of learning’ that is itself generative of researcher safety” (p...) because it requires ethnographers to engage in “an on-going practical activity situated in specific material, social, temporal, affective, and sensory environments” (p....). They relate this perspective to the creative and responsive dimensions of ethnographic research that can be productively harnessed to critique OSH anticipatory logics. Their critical autoethnographic analysis of their fieldwork experience enables them to identify four key aspects of researcher safety — learning, knowing, doing, and improvising — that have been pivotal to their research process. They advocate the development of a “storied knowledge perspective” which can become a way of cultivating what they define as “an anthropologically-theorized reflexive awareness of what we do not know and of how we might ongoingly and creatively respond through our research practice to such uncertainty” (p...). The challenge, of course, is to effectively promote researcher safety while supporting a form of risk-taking that embraces the unpredictability of ethnographic practice and resists the logics of “anticipation” and

“preparedness” symptomatic of audit culture in the increasingly techno-bureaucratic environment of the neoliberal university. The authors respond to this challenge by asserting that anticipatory and adaptive ways of engaging with uncertainty must be relational rather than oppositional, and they urge ethnographers to contribute to critical transdisciplinary debates about the necessity to creatively re-design OSH guidance in the academy.

Creativity, storied knowledge, improvisation, risk-taking, and embracing uncertainty are pivotal to Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston’s article “quiet theatre: The Radical Politics of Silence,” which explores how working at the intersections of ethnography, performance, storytelling and imagination might contribute to an engaged and interventionist anthropology and activist ethnographic research practice more broadly. She focuses on the project she conducted in collaboration with an elderly Roma woman, Randia, which studied Roma elders’ experiences of ageing in Poland after the nation’s accession to the European Union. Over the past decade, in the aftermath of mass migration of young and middle-aged Roma to Western Europe, many elderly Roma struggle alone to make ends meet in a context of growing prejudice and discrimination. Kazubowski-Houston used dramatic storytelling as an ethnographic research methodology in which the ethnographer and interlocutor stepped into character and co-performed fictional stories loosely based on their lives. Their acting style merged elements of what could be characterized as psychological realism where the actor identifies with the character portrayed; Brechtian epic theatre, where the actor portrays, rather than identifying with, with their character; and magic realism, which works through the intermingling of reality and fiction. This fictional dramatic storytelling approach can be seen as an “imaginative ethnography” that attends to people’s imaginative lifeworlds and experiments with a variety of creative techniques in the field. In the dramatic storytelling sessions, the interlocutor and ethnographer constructed characters that

partook in a process of “surrealist adventure” (p...) by means of “projective improvisation” and mimicry (p...). Kazubowski-Houston employed dramatic storytelling with the intent to practice what she calls “an anthropology of possibility” (p...) committed to engagement, collaboration, reflexivity, and intervention. In particular, she was interested in exploring how transdisciplinary approaches to ethnography that engage the imagination through the creative arts might contribute to an interventionist and applied anthropology by facilitating a space for reimagining the real, and for constructing knowledge about “imaginative lifeworlds” as a form of “oppositional narrative.” “quiet theatre: The Radical Politics of Silence” focuses on the ways that dramatic storytelling— where silence defined the ethnographer-interlocutor relations—constituted “quiet theatre,” a form of radical politics working through imagination, affect, fiction, projective improvisation, and empathy. Likening the silence that encapsulated her dramatic storytelling sessions to that of Samuel Beckett’s existential play *Waiting for Godot*—a poetic commentary on the hopelessness, absurdity and bankruptcy of a post-World War II world—Kazubowski-Houston traces how such a seemingly paralyzing “quiet theatre” in her project constituted an important transformative politics, facilitating a reciprocal empathic attunement between ethnographer and interlocutor – a “space of sincerity.” Silence, Kazubowski-Houston argues, while historically equated with lack, deficiency, absence, or trauma, needs to be reimagined as space for radical action, where “quiet forms of knowing” (p...) make and remake the past, present, and future. Such “quiet” activism, for Kazubowski-Houston, is a contextually-specific method that takes to task the meanings of intervention in ethnographic research. She proposes that when working against Western ideals of humanitarianism and hollow neoliberal discourses of social justice and community engagement, transdisciplinary ethnographic approaches might

provide a starting point for attending to the unpredictable, complicated, ephemeral, humble, and elusive ways in which intervention might play out in the field.

Natalie Wigg-Stevenson contributes to current debates on how transdisciplinary ethnographic approaches intervene within specific disciplinary discourses in her article “What’s Really Going On: Ethnographic Theology and the Production of Theological Knowledge.” She highlights a shift away from text-based theological traditions towards how these traditions are embodied in practice, and argues that while ethnography can help theology to develop a more reflexive articulation of its own discourse, working within a theological context is also an opportunity for re-inventing ethnography. Wigg-Stevenson refers to her own experience of disbelief when, as a theology graduate student and practicing Christian, she went on a field trip with her classmates to a nursing home where a woman who was battling an incurable illness “claimed to have died, met Jesus, and come back to tell her story” (p...). Wigg-Stevenson explains that upon hearing the woman’s testimony, the cohort of graduate students rejected the story’s plausibility, a collective experience which led her to ask why the possibility of a human encounter with God was unfathomable for ethnographers working within the discipline of theology. She recalls that when listening to the woman’s story, “something in her joy, in her witness, made me want to believe,” and goes on to observe that “when theological tradition presses theologians to dismiss theological reality, then something has gone wrong” (p...). She specifies that whereas theology’s relevance is questioned by many church-going Christians, its legitimacy as an academic discipline that maintains an allegiance to Christian doctrine is also at stake, as evidenced by theology’s on-going interdisciplinary negotiations with religious studies. Wigg-Stevenson chooses to foreground tensions between these two fields by pointing to theology’s problematic lack of critical reflexivity, perhaps most significantly manifest in its inability to historicize the

complicity of Christian traditions with institutional violence, while simultaneously highlighting the positivist approach privileged by religious studies, whose claims of scientific objectivity, rigor, and neutrality have long been challenged by anthropology. She infers that “ethnographic methods cannot, in and of themselves, solve the problem of an approach that obliterates the empirical with the theological. But neither [. . .] can we use them to do the reverse” (p...). Having acknowledged, along with Fabian, de Rooij and others, that “the methodologization of ethnography in its trans-disciplinary migration is deeply problematic” (p...), she envisions an alternative approach that builds upon Kathryn Tanner’s description of theology as a cultural practice through which Christian identity is produced and experienced, and suggests that emphasizing the hybrid and relational dimensions of this identity can help to “map a much more dynamic theological terrain” (p...) for the kind of reflexive cultural critique championed by anthropologists who conceive of ethnographic practice as a form of activism and intervention. Wigg-Stevenson hence proposes to re-invent theological ethnography that might be reconfigured as “an apprenticed spiritual discipline” through which apprenticeship to faith and scholarly apprenticeship may be fully integrated. From such a perspective, theological ethnography cannot be reduced to either “a cultural analysis of a Christian practice or a cultural critique of a Christian tradition” (p...), thereby becoming free to focus on the production of “fresh theological insights and possibilities for Christian living” (p...). Re-visiting her reaction to the Christian woman’s near-death story, the author envisions an interdisciplinary approach combining cross-cultural studies, non-reductionist neurological perspectives, insights from pastoral care, and Christian doctrines of revelation and eschatology. She observes that “the proliferation of creative, literary, artistic, or performance-based approaches with which anthropologists have experimented have not, by and large, found their way into the array of methodological options

for theologians to engage” (p...), even though these might offer productive representational strategies. Moreover, in light of the “shared complicity between anthropologists, theologians, and Christian missionaries in colonial projects” (p...), she argues that critical reflexivity and historical consciousness must be practiced rigorously by theologians when engaging with ethnography. She further contends that theology can contribute to the social sciences its commitment to fully engage with the spiritual dimensions of life, thus opening possibilities for mutually beneficial interdisciplinary collaborations focused on decolonizing research that might address the theological Doctrine of Discovery, the intergenerational spiritual impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities, as well as practices of reconciliation in South Africa, Canada, and elsewhere. In support of such interdisciplinary research orientations, the editors of this special issue would like to suggest that these collaborations might also consider the crucial role of spirituality for Indigenous sovereignty movements in their on-going resistance to colonialism.

In “A Travelling Ethnography of Voice in Qualitative Research,” Virginie Magnat tracks anthropology’s colonial legacy in the development of ethnography, a methodology initially designed to make the cultural practices of the Other legible to the West by translating orality and embodiment into scholarly writing. Linking the privileging of literacy and print culture in the academy to Dwight Conquergood’s (2013) notion of scriptocentrism, she investigates how the sensorially experienced non-discursive materiality of vocality becomes “voice” when reduced to a conceptual abstraction or a metaphor through visualist and textualist theoretical frameworks. Magnat argues that the potentially scriptocentric dimension of the anthropological ethnographic project poses a methodological risk in light of the increasingly widespread usage of ethnography within the interdisciplinary domain of qualitative inquiry. She traces the ways in which



anthropology problematically equates 'having a voice' with concepts of agency, subjectivity, representation, and power grounded in dominant Western conceptions of an autonomous, rational, speaking subject, which have perhaps been most effectively challenged by Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) notions of dialogism, heteroglossia, and polyphony. She foregrounds interdisciplinary voice studies scholar Konstantinos Thomaidis's analysis (2014) of what cultural theorist Adriana Cavarero (2005) names the "devocalization of logos" in Western philosophy (p. 40), making it possible to historicize the exclusion, marginalization, and silencing of vocality. Inviting us to embark on an imaginary visit to ancient Greece, Magnat proposes to probe the origins of devocalization through a performative ethnographic encounter with Plato's *Ion*, a conflictual dramatic dialogue opposing the illustrious philosopher Socrates to Ion, an acclaimed epic story-teller, champion of rhapsodic contests, and established vocal expert. Magnat contends that critically examining Plato's anxiety about performance and vocality can become a way for performance studies scholars to reclaim the embodied, non-visual materiality of the sonic, aural, phonic, and vocal dimensions of performativity. She infers from this close encounter with the *Ion* that Plato might have associated vocality with the power of orality and the dangers of live performance, as suggested by Walter Ong (2002). She highlights the perplexing nature of Plato's prejudice against embodiment, performance, and voice by pointing out that these fundamental elements of oral culture "must have played a pivotal role in the traditional pedagogy of ancient Greece, where philosophy was an interactive public forum, or a sport event of the mind that probably took the form of improvised arguments between highly skilled debaters" (p...). This is corroborated by a happenstance meeting 'in the field' with Thomaidis, who describes the sonic/phonic environment of Socrates's symposium as inherently dialogic as well as inclusive of musicality and rhythm, an aspect that Plato rejects in his writings. These remarks compel Magnat

to posit that Plato strives to silence the aural/oral properties of logos precisely because he senses that their potentially subversive power can undermine the primacy of discursivity, as in the case of epic poetry chanted by skillful rhapsodists. To redress the ideologically-charged devocalization of logos whose genealogy can be traced to Plato, Magnat challenges qualitative researchers to listen to, engage with, and learn from the practitioners of contemporary oral cultures “whose continuity critically hinges upon the vulnerability, relationality, and reciprocity of the lived voice” (p...).

In “Beyond Boundaries: The Development and Potential of Ethnography in the Study of Sport and Physical Culture,” Kass Gibson and Michael Atkinson focus on embodiment and agency as they explore the implications of the transdisciplinary travels of ethnography for their research on exercise, physical activity, and fitness practices. The authors observe that whereas play and games have been thoroughly investigated by anthropologists, sport and exercise have not been considered legitimate subjects of inquiry because they do not seem to fit anthropological categories of cultural practice. Having acknowledged anthropological ethnographies that focus on sport to explore issues of cultural reproduction and resistance, nationalism, identity, globalization, gender, and sexualities, along with ethnographies of bodybuilding as a form of subculture, Gibson and Atkinson stress that gym studies, aerobic classes, and other fitness practices tend to be investigated by sociologists and cultural studies scholars rather than anthropologists. They note that violence in sport has been a major focus of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by researchers interested in marginalized subcultures. The authors foreground a growing interest in privileged sporting subcultures as well as physical cultures beyond sport, whose study might provide new insights into privileges linked to race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. Yet they observe that because Physical Culture Studies (PCS) laboratories

are usually housed in kinesiology departments, research focused on advancing athletic performance and chronic disease prevention tends to be prioritized and supported by private funding. The authors nevertheless identify PCS scholars who resist this trend by privileging issues of embodiment, reflexivity, representation and intervention, and who are committed to effecting cultural, social, and political change through the promotion of “more equitable, safe, inclusive, pleasurable, and meaningful experiences” (p...). Warning against the pitfalls of auto-ethnographic hyper-reflexivity, including “introspective hand-wringing [and] tales of self-valour” (p...), the authors assert that PCS scholarship must explore ways of understanding the milieu of sport and physical culture beyond that of “a breeding ground for injustice, suffering, alienation, and a host of other social problems” (p...) and make room for the socio-historical situatedness of practitioners’ perspectives to inform PCS theorizing, which they argue necessarily requires long-term fieldwork and rigorous ethnographic practice. They advocate “embodied cultural studies in and of the *first-person*,” an ethnographic approach they consider to be more humane, emotionally-sensitive, and interpersonal. They contend that privileging the emic perspective of insiders makes it possible to explore “human pleasure through movement as a (if not *the*) core substantive and ethnographic focus” (p...) and to theorize this lived experience as a form of embodied cultural pleasure that can provide practitioners with “a sense of creative agency” (p...). By challenging dominant discourses focusing on power differentials, the authors invite PCS scholars to consider the meaningful and pleasurable dimensions of physical culture and investigate the extent to which “forms of sport, exercise, dance, and play” might help practitioners to fulfill “psychological, emotional and cultural needs and desires” (p...) through the cultivation of a type of agency that promotes mind-body connection, health and well-being, and inclusivity. Gibson and Atkinson conclude their discussion by providing a detailed guideline

designed for PCS ethnographers committed to the development of alternative perspectives through a sustained engagement with first-person research practice.

Norman K. Denzin's dialogical and polyphonic contribution titled "Performing Ethnography: Staging Resistance" is a non-traditional text offering a performative writing model that employs a play-within-a-play structure, requiring readers to become active co-creators called upon to imagine and possibly perform the characters summoned by this dynamic web of relationships. Denzin opens with a manifesto-qua abstract in which he sets the stage for a transgressive, imaginative, and interventionist approach that "bends and twists the meanings of theatre, drama, audience, ethnography, [. . .] performance, politics and ethics" (p...) and that refuses to separate the writer from the ethnographer, the performer and the world. The role of the ethnographer thus becomes that of a performer-poet-critic whose unruly, passionate and disruptive actions "can change reality by making social justice visible" (p...) in a world whose democratic public life is dangerously undermined by Trump's "politics of extremism, misogyny and ultra-nationalism" (p...). Denzin provocatively de-centers his own authority by featuring an impressive cast of influential theorists, artist-scholars, and activists whose work has shaped the interdisciplinary field of qualitative inquiry. These include Victor Turner, Richard Schechner, Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, Erving Goffman, Dwight Conquergood, D. Soyini Madison, Anna Deavere-Smith, Johnny Saldana, and Gloria Anzaldua, whose voices he juxtaposes with those of historical, legendary, fictional, and mythological characters such as Buffalo Bill, Tonto, and especially Coyote, whose role as savvy trickster, irreverent cultural hero, and incisive devil's advocate, helps to destabilize theoretical discourses by poking fun at academic authority and asking tough questions. It is Coyote who points out, for example, that Freire and Boal believed in the necessity of putting one's life on the line: "They have lived the call. They have lived lives of

resistance. It is not idle talk for them. In their hands theatre becomes the means for revolution” (p...). In the spirit of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, this multilayered, plurivocal, and at times surreal ethnographic montage performs resistance with virtuosity and bravado on the edge of carnivalesque chaos. Perhaps most importantly in the context of this special issue, Denzin’s intersubjective cocktail of critical and creative insights sparks flashes of reflexivity that mimic the epiphanies of ethnographic fieldwork. Anna Deavere-Smith hence shares her experience of being an African-American woman “speaking in the voice and manner of historical figures (living and dead)” and explains that “an actor’s race and gender is on one side of the bridge, and the other they pursue is across the bridge. The effort to cross the bridge is the drama” (p...). While Deavere-Smith’s performances are based on facts, they are “not offered as truths, but as fictions that attempt to tell other truths, the kind of truths that live in fiction and in imaginary worlds” (p...). This piece similarly relies on fiction and imagination through the interweaving of the dramatic, theatrical, performative, and ethnographic strands of qualitative research. Foregrounding the resources offered by critical pedagogy, the theatre of the oppressed, performance studies, anthropology, critical ethnography, and arts-based inquiry, Denzin invites us “to inspire acts of activism” (p...) and to take a courageous stance against the pervasiveness of nihilist rhetoric epitomized by Trump’s rise to power in the US. Through this spectacular call to enact a politics of liberation in the era of late neo-liberal capitalism, Denzin compellingly asserts his conviction that the facts and experiences of oppression can be used to change history, thereby urging us to embody a critical pedagogy in action whose insurgent performativity he believes can dramatically empower global and local struggles for social justice.

These articles therefore offer a wide range of perspectives on salient epistemological and methodological questions related to ethnographic research, from anthropological and

sociological understandings of fieldwork to performative and imaginative ethnographic journeys that call into question prescriptive conceptions of research and academic writing. While several of these contributions share legitimate concerns about the necessity of maintaining rigorous standards for ethnographic praxis, as exemplified by reflexive discussions of challenging fieldwork experiences requiring a re-configuration of the power dynamics of research, others openly challenge anthropology's (contested) methodological ownership of ethnography, especially when such a claim is underscored by disciplinary-specific defensiveness about the fraught history of anthropology's ethnographic enterprise initially subsidized by European colonial regimes. In light of the tensions, frictions and contradictions that often characterize interdisciplinary debates about the production and dissemination of knowledge in the neoliberal university, this special issue proposes to bridge perceived irreconcilabilities by initiating conversations across disciplinary formations that include but are not limited to fields of study in which ethnography has long been valued. Given the current privileging by university administrators of profit-driven market logic, technocratic bureaucracy, and audit culture based on a politics and ethics of evidence that fuels competition over resources, funding, students, and professional opportunities, qualitative researchers find themselves in the precarious position of having to justify methodologies often dismissed as too "soft" hence "unscientific." This includes ethnography, one of the most widely employed methodologies within the increasingly broader spectrum of qualitative inquiry. We therefore suggest that when attempting to resist this serious threat to autonomy and self-determination, "turf-sharing" through coalition and collaboration between like-minded ethnographers across the social sciences, the arts and the humanities makes much more sense than holding onto the garrison mentality of disciplinary self-righteousness. By working together to re-invent ethnography, as prompted by Fabian and de Rooij, in a way that

values the cultivation of morally and intellectually sustainable relationships, we might foster a mutually beneficial cross/inter/trans-disciplinary dialogue about otherwise unforeseen possibilities, including the application of twenty-first century research to real-world issues that call for ethically sensitive, culturally specific, socially responsible, and politically efficacious alternatives. As unequivocally stated by Norman Denzin in the conclusion of his energizing contribution: “There is no going back” (p...).

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