

# Writing Tales of the Future: Five “Balancing Acts” for Globographers

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**Abstract:** Since the early 1990s much has been written about how ethnographers should do fieldwork of the local in a globalizing world. The challenge of communicating their analyses authentically in a world of information overload is much less debated. To rectify this situation, I argue in this paper that five balancing acts are crucial to those who do ethnographies of the global, or “globographers,” in their writing. Emerging from a review of the history of fieldwork and writing, these balancing acts constitute a template of how a communicative consciousness may assist qualitative researchers in achieving ethnographic integrity.

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In his review of the second edition of *Tales of the Field*, sociologist John van Maanen’s influential book on doing ethnography, first published in 1988, John Goodall (2010:261) writes:

Since *Tales of the Field* was published in 1988, rampant globalization, violent extremism, failed states, new media, rising economic and political powers in Europe and Asia, the specter of global warming, and a host of other challenges have demonstrated that how we think about organizations and report research about them has extraordinary potential for new forms of expression and impact.

Following Goodall, this paper argues that qualitative research methods are very well suited to advance these “tales of the future,” despite the momentum of Big Data analytics and the advent of “digital positivism” (Fuchs 2017). However, this position requires a more coherent approach to the place of ethnography insofar as it helps us to “develop *languages of the social* that help us to make sense of the world in which we live” (Glaeser 2005:37, italics added).

A step towards this goal is to solidify the process of writing “globography.” Coined by Hendry (2003), globography is not expounded as a concept by her in detail. Yet, as a metaphor, it encompasses a lot of the attempts from 1990 onwards to develop a fieldwork practice that grasps how “the global” and “the local” and the various links between them are understood and acted upon by people. This does not imply that fieldwork has to be translocal or transnational. Instead, by starting out with a particular research premise—grasping the intertwined relations between sites (here and there, or “several sites in one,” see: Hannerz 2003a) and levels (micro-, meso-, macro-)—a globographic approach enables the researcher to approach the topic differently from conventional ethnography and, subsequently, write a different tale. In this paper, therefore, globography is understood as a methodological approach to qualitative inquiry.

Compared with other debates on contemporary ethnographic practices, the issue of communicating fieldwork analyses has received relatively little attention. Despite several monographs, comments on qualitative methods, and textbooks on how to write ethnographically attractive stories (Abbott 2007; Law 2007; Jacobson and Larsen 2014; Ghodsee 2016; Gullion 2016), constructing “textual representations of reality” (Atkinson 1990) in a *global context* is seem-

ingly taken for granted as something qualitative researchers know how to do. But, the stories we tell as fieldworkers do not come fully interpreted. The practice of globography is also far less explored than, and different from, conventional ethnography (Falzon 2009). Addressing the empowering link between globography and better writing is therefore just as important as discussing other criteria for research quality in qualitative studies.

Globography as a methodological approach, consequently, makes it possible to endorse certain kinds of linguistic clarity, narrative awareness, and evocative techniques as characteristics of quality research in the context of information overload. In respect of the criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research, which in general downplay writing, focus on “storytelling” does not mean that all globographers should become novelists or playwrights. Moreover, the focus on globography as the key term does not dismiss other qualitative fieldwork traditions. In fact, this paper explores the history of ethnography on a broad scale on its way to a potential fit between globographic engagement and qualitative research standards rather than re-representing ethnography in a conventional way (Atkinson and Delamont 2008).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In section two, a brief literature review on the relation between writing and ethnography is introduced. After having established the need for a debate on how to write “tales of the future,” five balancing acts are developed in section three as a template on how to “side with your readers” (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2003:xii) as globographers. This template, moreover, is fleshed out by a number of communicative beacons from various fields. As a result, the findings are transferable to other qualitative meth-

ods and practices that share a similar platform for inquiry. Finally, the limitations and possibilities of this combination as input to quality in qualitative research are discussed.

## Historical Context

The ethnographer Matthew Desmond (2014:553) provides a point of departure to this discussion by claiming that the analytical possibilities available to any analyst depend on the kinds of questions asked, which, in turn, “depend entirely on the constitution of one’s scientific object.” In the early days of ethnography, this constitution of social life was operationalized in two ways. First, by *discovering* the practices of culture and societal arrangements through participant observation (Clifford 1983; Clair 2003), and second, *representing* this diversity by combining analytic innovations and textual devices to both educate and engage the reader. Two methodological elements from these early endeavors can be said to have made a lasting impact on the craft of writing ethnography: a) making field notes and b) the analytic approach to one’s observations (Sanjek 1990a; 1990b). Lewis Henry Morgan’s (1818-1881) prolific diaries, made with great detail and intricate drawings (Morgan 1959), are one of many examples. Leslie H. White (Morgan 1959:17), who edited a volume on Morgan’s field notes, points out that a characteristic feature of them was his ability to make explicit the role of the ethnographer: “Above all, he carefully distinguished between what he was told and what he himself actually saw, or otherwise ascertained to be a fact.”

As part of the post-war debate on colonial influence on writing in terms of cultural misrepresentation and reproduction of power asymmetries, the question arose of what ways the ethnographer’s view

was coloring the text (Clifford 1983; Clair 2003). By exploring Malinowski’s (1884-1942) field notes on Baloma (the spirit of the dead) as the first attempts at formalizing ethnography, Roldan (2002:391) argues that what makes his type of writing compelling is the emphasis on transparency—which later led to the conclusion that ethnographers “should be explicit about their theories and document their research processes.” Besides notable sociologists associated with the Chicago school of ethnography in the 1960s that indulged in the textual possibilities of doing this from a literary point of view (Deegan 2001), there was Clifford Geertz (1973:19), who in *The Interpretation of Cultures* claims that by inscribing social discourse the researcher “turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscription and can be reconsulted.” Similarly, in the 1980s, ethnographers like James Clifford and George E. Marcus (1986), John Van Maanen (2011), and the abovementioned Geertz (1988), all thematized the claim that “content, by itself, doesn’t really accomplish anything; the knowledge that ethnography produces emerges from the relationships formed among writers and readers” (Kahn 2011:184).

This empowering diversification of the researcher’s position in the text led to a plethora of different approaches to writing ethnographies. For example, to avoid the criticism of inventing rather than representing cultures (Clifford 1986:2), and the idea that ethnographic realism was in fact “real” (Jacobson and Larsen:182; see also Brodkey 1987), Van Maanen (2011) argued that ethnographies should be read differently: as a realist, impressionist, or confessional tales created by the ethnographer. Furthermore, as Crapanzano (1977) and later Tedlock (1991:69) argued, it was no longer necessary to make a choice between “an ethnographic memoir centering on

the Self or a standard monograph centering on the Other,” as they were inseparable in practice and, thus, should be communicated when transforming societal processes into written text. To some, the postmodern turn of this development drifted into an anything-goes attitude that increased the risk of devaluing qualitative research in general (Spiro 1996). In contrast to Geertz (1988) and others who, according to Roldan (2002:378), “consider ethnography as a writing genre,” critics argued against the idea “that ethnographic authority depends on the author’s capacity to persuade—or to get the complicity of—readers by simply using literary resource” (Roldan 2002:378).

While the combination of using techniques from fiction and preserving the analytical gaze was particularly stretched in the postmodern writings of social science, it was also challenged anew in the 1990s on a much less debated area. With the emergence of multi-sited ethnography (MSE) (Marcus 1995; 2007), global ethnography (GE) (Burawoy 1991; 2000), and other forms of translocal ethnography (Glaeser 2005; Desmond 2014), it became reasonable to expect that textual representation should be reconsidered, as the sociological circumstances for doing fieldwork differed from the context that had formed the previous debates. According to anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (2003b:206, *italics added*), sites in translocal fieldwork are “connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this *formulation* as the relationships within them,” which makes such a study different from a mere comparative study of localities. Consequently, the researcher has to place oneself “at critical points of intersection of scales and units of analysis and...directly examine the negotiation of interconnected social actors across multiple scales” (Gille and Ó’Riain 2002:279). “The field,” in other

words, is to an increasing degree composed by an ethnographic sense of intersections rather than of fixed dimensions (Næss 2016).

In the new world order after the Cold War, not least when considering the invention of the Internet and its transformation of society (Graham and Dutton 2014), this rescaling of life conditions was internalized by an increasing share of the globe’s population. For sociological ethnographers, who “hardly ever aim at giving holistic representations of clearly bounded (small) groups” (Nadai and Maeder 2005), these circumstances inspired new perspectives on “developing case-specific causal accounts that derive their authority from an in-depth explication of the cultural contexts of action” (Voyer and Trondman 2017:5; based on Reed 2017; see also Burawoy 2000). Furthermore, sociological ethnographers accepting this outlook aim “to build maximal interpretations that explicate landscapes of meaning—the historically grounded, discursive sense-systems motivating action and forming the ways in which people act” (Voyer and Trondman 2017:5; based on Reed 2017). Although the disciplinary consequences of this position are not the topic of this paper, the communicative opportunities it creates certainly are—especially since the special issue of *Ethnography* edited by Voyer and Trondman (2017), where this methodological position was promoted, omits the difficulties of writing sociological ethnography.

The idea of doing fieldwork unbounded by Malinowski and conventions is not a new one. It was practiced most notably by Max Gluckmann and others from the 1950s onwards (Burawoy 1991; Glaeser 2005). But, its impact on writing was rarely discussed among translocal ethnographers in the 1990s. In contrast to sociological ethnographers like Burawoy, it was one of those critical of translocal eth-

nographies—Clifford Geertz—who again provided an answer by making the new demands of writing explicitly. Grasping the connections between local life and global forces, Geertz (2000:227) argued, “demands an alteration of not only the way we conceive of identity, but of the way we write about it, the vocabulary we use to render it visible and measure its force.” In practice, this communication tactic was changed either as part of the theoretical choice or as a reconsideration of “the field,” as mentioned above. Regarding the former, Burawoy (2013:533) touches upon this in his biographical essay on ethnographic fallacies:

Some have said the problem lies in the theoretical presuppositions that I took with me to the field, presuppositions that blinded me to the reality of the field. I would claim the opposite—the problem was inadequate attention to theory.

Regarding field perceptions, Marcus—who in earlier publications (1986; 1995) cherished the “messy” nature of its writing—now emphasized the increasing mismatch between the characteristics of conventional ethnography and the writing styles needed to grasp the new social circumstances. In a 2007 essay, he praises the “baroque” character of contemporary ethnographies which, in contrast to a convention, are the result of the release of “the traditional writing tropes of ‘being there’ and place ethnography as a discursive field into its networked and nested knowledge paths” (Marcus 2007:1131).

Both Burawoy and Marcus, therefore, add important perspectives to the discussion on writing tales of the future. It is not my intention here to decide the efficiency of the above approaches to ethnographies of the global (see: Burawoy 2017 for further

debate). What can be argued is that the systematic aspects of crafting textualized presentations of reality are left between the lines by both authors. This paper aims therefore to draw attention to why theoretical differences and field understandings should impose epistemological aspects of writing rather than deprioritizing them. Even more, it is a call for rationalizing attention to communicative tactics as part of the ethnographer’s broader aim to improve the art of doing participant observation of people in their natural settings in order to increase the methodological relevance of that observation in contemporary society. Reaching the audience, as emphasized by Booth and colleagues (2003), requires that the ethnographer thinks like a reader—and understands why they need “to begin reading with a sense of the whole and its structure” (Booth et al. 2003:209).

This requires us to grasp “the whole” in new ways, as translocal fieldworkers do. Geertz (1995:100-102) was skeptical about what he (somewhat pejoratively) called “gas station ethnography,” because “as old certainties and alliances dissolved...we, it seems, are left with the pieces” (Geertz 2000:220). Yet it is exactly these pieces and our ability to put them together into explanatory images that are pivotal in developing new perspectives on human activity. To communicate these connections to contemporary readers, and to gather the splinters from old world views (Biehl & McKay 2012), I argue that five balancing acts in writing are crucial. These balancing acts are cumulatively organized and correspond with established quality criteria in qualitative research, because, instead of using the misleading criteria of quantitative methodology to evaluate qualitative research (Baskarada and Koro-nios 2018), they are central to writing, as well as to ethnographic integrity.



**Table 1. Five balancing acts and their corresponding criteria for research quality**

Quality criteria	Continuum
Confirmability	Authority $\longleftrightarrow$ Humbleness
Transferability	Change $\longleftrightarrow$ Continuity
Credibility	Realism $\longleftrightarrow$ Faction
Authenticity	Rigor $\longleftrightarrow$ Simplification
Resonance	Involvement $\longleftrightarrow$ Distance

Source: Self-elaboration.

These concepts should not come as a surprise to sociological ethnographers, or to qualitative researchers in general. Yet being reflexive about communicative practice is an underdeveloped topic when it comes to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. On that note, we turn to the five balancing acts.

### Balancing Act 1: Authority $\longleftrightarrow$ Humbleness

The major privilege of the ethnographer is that he or she “was there”—the stories told are not based on secondary sources, but participant observation in those situations that are crucial to understand and explore the research topic. Raw data gathered from being anywhere, however, do not constitute a knowledge product. In translating experience into textual form and acting as a purveyor of truth (Clifford 1983:120), the ethnographer acquires a kind of authority that comes in different shapes: experiential, interpretive, dialogical, polyphonic (Clifford 1983:142). It is difficult to convey authority in writing unless one is humble about one’s epistemological

foundation. Epistemology understood as the theory of the existence of a knowable reality and the means for knowing it (Salamone 1979:47), has been debated for years in relation to fieldwork (Sardan 2015). While overconcern with epistemology can lead to “sterility that is more concerned with methodology than content” (Salamone 1979:47-48), the opposite can also be true:

The problem is more the plethora of data, for the relationships and analysis of data seem overpowering in the initial stages of empirical science. In addition, founders of new disciplines must demonstrate that they are dealing with a kind of reality not subsumed under other disciplines. Such a stand entails a number of epistemological presuppositions. [Salamone 1979:48]

Although globography does not qualify as a new discipline, the debates on the distinctiveness of translocal fieldwork and the sociological version of ethnography nevertheless demonstrate that epistemological clarity creates the potential for ethnographic studies of the global. One reason is that doing fieldwork at and away from the home blend in practice for today’s globographers. Wiederhold (2015) exemplifies this with her study of the Manufacturing Belt town of Wilmington, Ohio, in the US. Considering herself a native to Wilmington, having grown up nearby, she nevertheless finds it difficult to accept complete insider status for identity reasons. At the same time, she acknowledges the fact that her personal relation to the place separates her from other American ethnographers in Ohio without such relations. Reflecting upon this complexity makes us go beyond the dated insider-outsider issue in ethnography and into the epistemological conditions for trustworthiness. In other words, which epistemological presuppositions it is necessary to

clarify is not the issue here, but how these can be made explicit.

In terms of writing, this position is exposed in Rowe's prison studies (2014). She shows that it can be beneficial "to explore the epistemological possibilities of making the self of the researcher visible" (Rowe 2014:404). To illustrate this, Rowe shares some of her field notes, which are rich in situations where a reflexive balance between exposing and protecting her own identity—that goes far beyond the sociologist—enables and constrains routes to information on prison life. I shall not recite them here, but because imprisonment is a specific physical embodiment of power and control, without making her own identity a part of the fieldwork, ways of knowing would be limited. The very experience of becoming involved in the prison world would have been different—and thus generated other kinds of data—had she not been able to draw upon "our embodied and subjective presence in the field," which becomes "both a source of substantive understanding and a solution to the discomfort and compromises that even marginal participation in a complex field like a prison inevitably entails" (Rowe 2014:414). Consequently, although one's persona can be a part of the story on an emotive level, as I will come back to below, this balancing act is founded on deeper reflexivity of epistemological varieties.

## Balancing Act 2: Change ↔ Continuity

Any social system or phenomenon has its tensions between the past, the present, and the future. Focusing on storytelling rather than the storyteller means paying attention to how narrative often mirrors the primary elements of the phenomenon (Carr 1986). Herein lies a caveat—using the concept of the narrative without liability may reduce its potential

as a technique. Desmond (2014), who contrasts both GE and MSE in his "transactional accounts of social life" (see: Burawoy 2017 for debate), seeks explanations "in contingent relational pathways presented in *narrative terms*" (Desmond 2014:551, *italics added*), but does not explain what he means by a narrative. However, Ewick and Silbey (1995:198) offer a definition:

First, a narrative relies on some form of selective appropriation of past events and characters. Second, within a narrative, the events must be temporally ordered. This quality of narrative requires that the selected events be presented with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Third, the events and characters must be related to one another and to some overarching structure, often in the context of opposition or struggle.

This form of narrative can be divided into two strategies, which can both be used to balance change with continuity. Czarniawska (2004:119) names these "feedforward" and "feedback." The former looks at the presentation of the history—the story so far. The latter looks at the selective fashion in which the narrative is reversed. An example that demonstrates—at least when read—the latter strategy is Thomas Hylland Eriksen's monograph *Boomtown: Runaway Globalisation on the Queensland Coast* (2018). It details the complex relationship between environmentalist worries and economic strides. Although fieldwork is concentrated on the city of Gladstone and primarily affects the locals, the twofold challenge of improving the climate and keeping their jobs in energy-intensive industries is impossible to confine to city limits.

To illustrate this dilemma, Eriksen (2018:xiii)—in the very first sentences on the very first page of the prologue—offers the following description:

In Gladstone, even the sunset is sponsored by the fossil fuel industry. To watch the sun setting in the west, you must also simultaneously stare at the three tall, symmetrical columns of Gladstone Power Station. The largest in Queensland, the power station feeds on black coal from the interior of the state and, doubtless by coincidence, it was placed in the exact spot where the sunsets.

Eriksen then goes back in time to trace the relations between the everyday struggles of ordinary citizens, the politicians’ paradoxical job of creating jobs while protecting the environment, and the corporate interests where making a profit is a requirement for saving jobs, in order to understand the social dynamics of “overheating”—an umbrella term to metaphorically categorize the interdependence of economy, climate, and community and the politically induced gridlocks that may burn it all down. Along the way, as Eriksen explores one topic after another and encounters numerous informants, he builds an argument that, within such a complex fabric, the narrative structure is unavoidable. His selection of “evidence” is seemingly decided by its ability to link various levels of analysis and temporalities, rather than as a quest to include as much data as possible.

### Balancing Act 3: Realism ↔ Faction

Any ethnographic text combines descriptive realism (how things are) with “faction,” or “imaginative writing about real people in real places,” as Geertz (1988:141) termed it. But, to achieve this combination, ethnographers use different techniques. While some keep their creative input to a minimum, others rely on fiction to engage the audience, and in some cases explore the grey zones between travel literature, fictional works, and the thrilling features

of some qualitative endeavors (Brettell 1986). While this paper does not endorse creative elements as mandatory for good ethnographies, the “two voices” of the ethnographer—the analytic and the evocative (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996)—are better seen as allies than adversaries in the textualization of social life.

More specifically, “ethnographic fiction,” as described by Jacobson and Larsen (2014:180), means “that all cultural representations are crafted and in this sense fictional.” For that reason, ethnographies become “partial truths structured by relationships of power and history.” The latter element is for example evident in global ethnography (GE), where Burawoy (1998:6) claims that “the postcolonial context provides fertile ground for recondensing these proliferating differences [on the politics of development] around local, national, and global links.” At the same time, Burawoy is short on what Narayan (2007) calls creative non-fiction, which includes a set of tools to shape the materials of fieldwork: “story, situation, persona, character, scene, and summary” (Narayan 2007:130). Of these tools, the scene is particularly relevant to explore as it is “not merely backdrop to plot and character but rather an active element in their constitution and believability” (Jacobson and Larsen 2014:187). What is more, the scene comprises all these materials in what Marcus (2007) calls “the most enduring trope of ethnography”: the encounter. To Marcus (2007:1135), a conscious approach to encounters taps into the credibility of the study:

The story of fieldwork relations, condensed as scene of encounter, became a powerful way to guarantee critical reflexivity—the resolved image of a complex subject opened in 1980s anthropology and closed soon thereafter—and to identify ethnography as it



came to encompass the complicated and fragmented space of the intersection of theory, its objects, and the pragmatic realities of new fieldwork situations.

An example that incorporates scenes and encounters is Anna L Tsing's (2005) *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. In the second sentence on page 1 of the book, in which she explores the contradictions and conflicts between capitalism and environmentalism in the Indonesian rainforests, she argues that: "this book is about aspirations for global connection and how they come to life in 'friction,' the grip of worldly encounter" (Tsing 2005:1). Through a series of field visits and "experimental textualization" (Biehl and McKay 2012:1212), Tsing (2005:4) gathers examples of friction and demonstrates how the "messiness of capitalism in the Indonesian rainforest exemplifies the encounters in which global capital and commodity chains are formed." These encounters, moreover, do not come with a unifying narrative. Instead, Tsing's portrayal of different scenes shows the staggering difference between how people understand the very same situations and serves two purposes. First, friction denotes competing perspectives on social phenomena, and second, "fragmentation and points of friction illuminate the situatedness of macro processes, but are also entry points for a distinct (post) humanism and politics vis-à-vis the Forest" (Biehl and McKay 2012:1213).

### Balancing Act 4: Rigor ↔ Simplification

Rigor is a common requirement for qualitative researchers as "a researcher with a head full of theories, and a case full of abundant data, is best prepared to see nuance and complexity" (Tracy 2010:840). But, this is not merely a question of saturation or the technicalities of the interview. It is just as much about

the process of selecting from the data and the use of theoretical input in order to simplify the mosaic of the world. As this balancing act drifts into the *role* of theory in ethnography, we should notice the claim from Henne (2017:99): "The drive for multi-sited ethnography is as much theoretical as methodological: it advances a notion of connectivity—one that assumes a 'local' site is linked to a broader set of globalized relations." Henne's key example is Merry's (2011) research on international conventions, the quantification of human experience, and developing an anthropological theory of human rights. An example of what Merry (2011) calls "analysis of commensuration," which is "the process of translating diverse social conditions and phenomena into comparable units," this topic illustrates the theoretical consequences of decontextualizing "people, events, actions, and objects to create points of comparison and similarity" (Henne 2017:106). As indicators of adherence to human rights principles cannot give an account of the complexity of how these principles are practiced, the ethnographer is better off observing the actors and situations where human rights are an issue rather than deducing "the contours of the human rights network from a set of prefigured theoretical assumptions" (Goodale 2009:105).

In order to do so, applied ethnographers Cury and Bird (2016) suggest two approaches based on an interpretive mode of understanding. The first is "low fidelity," which "involves employing aspects of a theory, paradigm or discipline without rigidly following or wholesale adopting it in research framing, design and analysis." The second approach, "bricolage," "highlights the mixing and matching of theories: combining seemingly unrelated theories from disparate disciplines to make sense of the project's phenomenon" (Cury and Bird 2016:213-214). What matters are the characteristics of the phenomenon,

not theoretical honoring. An example that combines these approaches, without using them explicitly, is Vachon’s (2018) study of “Smalltown.” A native of the state “who grew up in a working-class community of similar size to Smalltown” enabled him to “forge strong connections with participants over the course of the project” (Vachon 2018:53). But, instead of letting this background impose on the text on all levels, and including every detail of his field movements and observations, Vachon makes a different move. His selection of data woven together with a low-fidelity theoretical approach enables him to convey the connections between macro-economic developments and local efforts by public officials to remain employed. By combining a Hemingwayesque style of short, aptly descriptive sentences with an almost poetic recitation of the urban characteristics of a New England town, the unionization of its public workers becomes a bricoleur theorization of dignity in modern America.

### Balancing Act 5: Involvement ↔ Distance

Considering the space between complete detachment and “going native” is mandatory among contemporary ethnographers. Yet, there are few who exploit this space for the sake of linguistic clarity. A recurring theme in this part of the research is the insider-outsider challenge. To Desmond (2016), the presence of the self constitutes a double filter that must be dispensed of in order to gain access to the field (Desmond 2016:324). Others argue that “the silent researcher” does not exist (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996), and instead exposes “the researcher’s biases, goals, and foibles [and] how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research” (Tracy 2010:841). An example is a collaboration between the academic and the practitioner in Yeo and Dopson’s (2018) relational ethnography of organiza-

tional change in Saudi Aramco. While the insider position of one of them made it possible to gain access and get a head start to understand the norms of interaction, it also led to a paradox between control and connection.

Instead of bemoaning this paradox, Yeo and Dopson (2018) see it as an opportunity to create a deeper awareness of the tension between subjectivity and objectivity. In my own research on motorsport culture, it became clear almost from the start that my own predispositions and knowledge about the field could not be hidden. At the same time, I had never been actively engaged in the sport that I was researching. Consequently, I was considered an insider in some situations, and an outsider on other occasions, and had to replace the entire insider-outsider dimension with a balance between distance and involvement. In writing, this created an opportunity to engage in a more nuanced way with different perspectives on the topics under scrutiny (Næss 2016). As I did translocal fieldwork of a quite mobile phenomenon, it was relevant to inquire into the claim that “the process of data collection about mobility issues may not necessarily occur ‘on the move’” (D’Andrea, Ciolfi, and Gray 2011:154). Rather, because global processes are situated somewhere: “The multidimensionality of mobility is entwined with the researcher’s own relative positionality before, during, and after empirical research” (D’Andrea, Ciolfi, and Gray 2011:155).

In short, as supported by my own work (Næss 2014; 2016), this means that the writer has to decide when to move to the front of the text and when to step back in order to convey a mobile reality as a product of ethnographic techniques. Similarly, Sharon Wilson’s (2016:223) study of Volkswagen campers, characterized as “experimental fieldwork as an em-

bodied practice,” illustrates the relevance of writing out the moral dilemmas that emerged “where demarcations of confidentiality and privacy with familiars had elastic boundaries.” These dilemmas occurred because Wilson (2016:223) bought herself a VW campervan and used it “for identity formation and self-expression,” as well as a ticket to a culture of VW festivals. Being neither in nor out, she discovers that certain conditions must be in place in order to keep socializing, for example, being able to park near her crew at festivals. Similar to my own experiences of being immersed in the field only at times where I was naturally embedded in the action, spatial marginalization—or being placed far away from key informants—meant she had to invite herself, which led to stress and a feeling that “authentic” leisure in such circumstances became difficult (Wilson 2016:229). If she had just reproduced her observations, these considerations would not have been difficult to read into the text. By making the merger of this balance explicit, however, the study gains aesthetic merit through her emotive relation to both involvement and distance.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that “globographers” are in a special position to develop new languages of the social. Achieving ethnographic integrity in this kind of inquiry is not a matter of ticking the boxes of established criteria for quality in qualitative research—it is just as much a communicative endeavor that requires from the researcher a particular combination of scientific soberness and a persuasive mode of story analysis. Despite digitization, visual communication, “transmedia storytelling,” and other inventive ways of getting the message across, textualization still is, as it was in the 1980s, “at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise” (Marcus 1986:264).

In light of climate change, the politicization of the Olympics, or the COVID19 pandemic, tomorrow’s ethnographers, therefore, have to paint a bigger picture in order to make room for the small details. Rudimentary as they may be, the five balancing acts introduced above—and the context into which they are fitted—together work as a *sorting mechanism*. Strategically utilizing this sorting mechanism in one’s writing, moreover, makes the balancing acts correspond with established criteria for quality in qualitative fieldwork.

In the light of *confirmability*, “the qualitative objectivity of a naturalistic report” (Edwards and Skinner 2009:72), the balance between authority and humbleness provides the ethnographer with space to elaborate on their epistemological position. Quality is not produced by simply adhering to a philosophical position as there are “limits of any approach that expects research practice to conform precisely to a philosophical position” (Seale 1999:470). With regard to *transferability*, or whether the study is eligible for “inferential generalization” (Lewis and Ritchie 2003:264), the textual positioning between change and continuity gives the researcher a narrative structure on which the story can be shaped. *Credibility* is a concern for the writer insofar as one must manage doses of realism and imaginative portrayals of social life in order to enhance “the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings” (Tracy 2010:842). *Authenticity*, that is, whether the researcher has provided a sincere version of the story without covert motives of any kind, can be strengthened by managing the continuum of rigor and simplification of the phenomenon and the people involved. Following the ideal of “thick descriptions” can be messy unless “the action” is subject to “the director’s cut” in conveying the “truth value” of the study. The pro-

duction of this version of the story, however, needs to be transparent. Lastly, *resonance*, or the quest for a story “that moves the ‘heart and the belly’ as well as the ‘head’” (Bochner 2000:271 as cited in Tracy 2010:845): a thorough examination of one’s involvement and distancing from the field can aid the researcher when choosing to either include or exclude personal minutes to enrich the story.

Although several of the examples of these five balancing acts offered here are gathered from conventional ways of doing ethnography, and quite eclectically so, they are still particularly relevant to globography as a methodological approach. The ethnographer’s loss of exclusivity in terms of “being there” has to be countered by a more comprehensive and diverse approach to what version of “there” one

is telling. Obviously, not all translocal studies will fit the grid above, nor are the five acts exhaustive. That is not the point. Neither does it make any sense to claim that, as long as these balancing acts are represented in the ethnographer’s work, it will be flawless. The point of using them as a template for writing is that they provide ideas on how to make sense of the multiple impressions, sources, data, and mistakes that ethnographers encounter during fieldwork. As with any template, they leave a lot to be filled in, but hopefully, they provide a reasonable trade-off between guidance and flexibility. In the increasing competition for attention, the coherence produced by using the five acts described in this paper, helps the ethnographer to communicate their findings in a way that utilizing the acts separately cannot do.

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