Practices of Writing in Ethnographic Work

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Abstract
Although the practice of writing is key to the production of ethnographic knowledge, the topic remains understudied. Using material from our own ethnographic research in the fields of air travel and cultural heritage as data, we develop a reflexive account of ethnographic writing. We examine in detail the practices of jotting down observations, writing field notes, analytic annotating, ordering and rearranging, and drafting and revising papers. The article takes a praxeological stance, conceptualizing writing as a practice that is simultaneously cognitive, embodied, and material. Our analysis finds that writing influences and shapes all stages of ethnographic work, from orienting perception by setting an appropriate mode of attention to organizing the work itself, e.g., by keeping to-do lists. Writing does not simply communicate ethnographic insights, but—as a result of the activity of texts—it also generates them.

Introduction

Writing is an integral part of academic work. Although it may differ in form and extent, all disciplines use writing in order to gather material, to document

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results, and to communicate conclusions. Academic writing may entail noting ideas and observations, compiling lists, producing tables, or formulating reports. However, the role of writing in knowledge production remains understudied. It is usually only covered in guides on academic writing in general (e.g., Eco 2015), and there often is little reflection in the disciplines themselves on the theory and methodology of writing as an epistemological practice. This is also true for ethnography (for notable exceptions, see Becker 2007; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011), even though writing has been recognized as pivotal to the discipline. With the rhetorical question he posed in "Thick Description": "'What does the ethnographer do?'—he writes," Geertz (1973, 19) famously turned the attention of the ethnographic community to writing. This formed part of a groundbreaking methodological discussion about the epistemology of ethnography. Yet, the ethnographic field still lacks a detailed description of the diverse practices of writing that exist within it.

During the twentieth century, ethnographic methodology underwent two major modifications with regard to writing practices: At the beginning of the century, the then-prevalent practice of *armchair anthropology* (Malinowski 1922) was widely criticized, and calls were made for the use of participant observation to gather first-hand data that authentically documented the researched cultures. Accordingly, reflections on ethnographic writing centered on methods of producing descriptively rich field notes (Pelto and Pelto 1978, 69–71). Decades later, however, the so-called "writing culture" movement (i.a. Clifford and Marcus 1993; Flaherty et al. 2002) criticized this approach for its claim to realistically document the populations studied; it instead turned attention to the narrative dimension of ethnographic knowledge. One central argument in this movement was that ethnographic reports were deeply influenced by Anglo-European culture and sometimes implicitly reported more on the beliefs and prejudices of that culture than on the cultures explicitly written about. As part of the subsequent "crisis of representation" (Marcus and Fischer 1986, 8), scholars reconstructed rhetorical techniques for constructing objectivity and credibility (e.g., van Maanen 1988), and created new forms of writing. However, both perspectives have left us with an incomplete picture, since they did not turn their attention toward the practice of writing in all its different forms and usages.

Roughly around the same time as the rhetorics of ethnographic writing came under scrutiny, the emerging field of science and technology studies (STS) began looking at the everyday practices of manufacturing scientific knowledge using an ethnographic approach (e.g., Knorr Cetina 1983; Latour and Woolgar 1986; Latour 1987). More specifically, scholars from this field proposed taking laboratories as research sites in order to uncover "the real-time mechanisms at work in knowledge production" (Knorr Cetina 1994, 148). As part of this

program, STS suggested studying writing among other epistemic practices. For example, in a study of operations occurring in a laboratory, Latour and Woolgar (1986) found that papers are the lab's central products. Likewise, Knorr Cetina (1981, 94–135) provided a description of the development and logics of a scientific paper. However, given that these laboratory studies made the natural sciences their object of inquiry, they initially missed the specificities of knowledge production in the social sciences and humanities.[1]

Only in the last decade have a number of instructive studies ethnographically investigated practices of knowledge production in the social sciences and humanities. Tutt and Hindmarsh (2011), for instance, studied embodied reenactments within data sessions. Greiffenhagen, Mair, and Sharrock (2011) analyzed practices of drawing conclusions in a qualitative and in a quantitative research team. Both of these studies concentrated on analyzing data. Meier zu Verl (2018) observed different stages of ethnographic work, from first contact with the field to writing publications. Engert and Krey (2013) analyzed writing and reading as closely linked epistemic practices. Müller (2016a) elaborated on the physical travel required to accomplish ethnographic "desk work." In sum, these studies applied an STS approach to social sciences. They have offered important insights into daily routines and epistemic practices in empirical research. However, writing practices have rarely been addressed as epistemological practices in their own right (for a notable exception, see Schmidt 2016).

In this article, we build on these studies of daily routines and epistemic practices, focusing particularly on the practice of writing within ethnographic research processes. We have adopted this focus for two reasons: First, writing practices remain understudied, although these practices are key to the production of ethnographic knowledge. If they are addressed at all, the focus is usually limited to narrative and rhetoric (e.g., Bishop 1992), to authorship (e.g., Geertz 1988), or to writing ethnographic field notes (e.g., Walford 2009; Emerson et al. 2011). Second, writing is practiced throughout the entire research process and therefore contributes strongly to accomplishing the trans-situational character of ethnographic research (Schindler 2018). By doing so, the following contribution continues and extends the above-mentioned work on exploring academic knowledge production empirically.

The article takes a praxeological stance, conceptualizing writing as a practice that is simultaneously cognitive, embodied, and material. It investigates the embodied and material characteristics of such writing as well as its particular temporalities and spatialities. Using material from our own ethnographic research in the fields of air travel and cultural heritage, we develop a reflexive account of ethnographic writing, including the contribution at hand.[2]

This perspective makes the close tie between writing and analyzing palpable. We suggest that writing is not just a medium to communicate thoughts, but that the practice of writing itself—of (re)reading, ordering, and rearranging texts—creates analytical thoughts and insights in fundamental ways. Drawing on a practice approach allows us to examine both the epistemological character of writing and the trans-situational relations it produces during the research process.

We will develop our argument as follows: In the next section, we will briefly introduce our perspective on practice and sketch out what it allows us to focus on when we apply it to writing. Subsequently, we ethnographically analyze ethnographic writing and the different practices it is made up of, i.e., jotting down observations, writing field notes, analytic annotating, ordering and rearranging, and drafting and revising papers. This analysis makes three major points: First, we will shift the focus from narrative issues or political representation to an analysis of the diverse forms of writing themselves, which are understood as epistemological practices that create theoretical insights and analysis. Second, we will show the involvement of different forms of texts and their iterative emergence in the writing process, challenging the notion that ethnographic writing mainly revolves around documentation. Third, by characterizing different writing practices, we will show how their different materialities and affordances shape and reshape analytical ideas.

A Practice Approach to Writing

While, in the popular imagination, writing is often equated with cognitive processes, from a practice perspective, writing is an embodied-cognitive accomplishment that is tied to artifacts, spatially located, temporally situated, and unfolding. Practice theory conceives of the social as bodily practices that are performed in time and space (Schatzki 1996; 2002); these connect bodily and mental activity, background knowledge, and the use of artifacts (Reckwitz 2002, 249).[3] Instead of looking at individual actions, practice theory follows practices as they unfold and extend in time. Although a practice is situated, it is seen as transcending any given situation and as connecting to other practices. Choosing a practice approach methodologically calls upon the researcher to closely observe how a practice is being performed and how it is sustained in time.

In this vein, a practice focus reveals the fundamentally embodied character of writing. In learning to write, bodily movement and thinking become inextricably linked. From learning how to draw individual letters to learning how to produce intelligible sentences and even complex texts, the cultural

technology of writing gradually evolves through education, never losing its bodily foundation. This even holds true for advanced forms of writing like academic writing (see Schmidt 2016).

As an embodied-cognitive process, writing is also tied to the use of artifacts. In order to produce the relatively durable traces that make up a script, some kind of material infrastructure is inevitable, be it stone and chisel, ink and parchment, or keyboard and display. The kind of infrastructure we use has an influence on the writing process itself, on the availability and amendability of the written text, and on its ability to travel in time. The STS perspective with its emphasis on the activity and specific qualities of multiple entities involved in a network of agents can inform the praxeological analysis regarding these differences.[4] For example, in his analysis of scientific knowledge production, Latour has considered the role played by charts and tables as what he calls "immutable and combinable mobiles" (Latour 1987, 227). These are fairly durable epistemic entities that can be brought in different situations, retaining their shape while at the same time being susceptible to future changes as they are being used and (re-)interpreted.

If the bodies engaged in writing are fully understood as situated bodies acting in socio-material settings, the spatiality of writing deserves close attention, too. One question is how the specific and hard-to-grasp atmospheres of particular spaces—e.g., libraries, offices, or cafés—have an effect on the ability to write and on the experience of writing. A further question is how writers manipulate their immediate surroundings in order to facilitate their writing, like changing the lighting (Schmidt 2008), arranging the objects needed for writing (Engert and Krey 2013, 370), or shutting out their surroundings with headphones.

The temporal dimension of writing can be viewed in at least two different ways. For one, writing seems to be concerned with recording and thus with fixing what would otherwise be lost in the passage of time (observations, thoughts, decisions, laws, etc.). At the same time, when viewed as a practice, it becomes evident that writing is itself characterized by its own temporality. This means that—as a performance—writing happens at a particular point in time, it takes a specific amount of time, and it is subject to different kinds of rhythms concerning when, how long, and how often we are able to write.

We will account for these dimensions of the practice of writing as we now turn to our analysis of ethnographic writing. While other reflections on such writing (e.g., Stoller and Olkes 1987; Kane 2010) concentrate on situations in the research field (i.e., within the community of local people), we are particularly interested in how ethnographic writing unfolds in time, thereby connecting practices within the research field and practices within academic locations.

In a nutshell: How does ethnographic writing unfold throughout different stages of the research process (including in reviews of manuscripts) until a (final) text emerges?

Ethnographic Writing

In academic writing, the production of knowledge and its presentation for potential readers are fundamentally intertwined. Writing is a prerequisite for academic work, insofar as it renders thoughts intersubjective and also generates or forms them. "It is impossible to think without writing; at least it is impossible in any sophisticated or networked (*anschlußfähig*) fashion" (Luhmann 1992, 53).[5] In this perspective, writing is not merely a simple transfer of thoughts to text but a (material) practice that generates thoughts in writing and thus facilitates analytical insights.

When it comes to ethnography, writing can be understood as a mediation between the researcher's experiences in the field and the requirements of academic writing in the social sciences. The writing in question can only become an academic product if the researcher renders the observations intersubjectively accessible. However, this rendering process is one of the main challenges of ethnographic work, as scholars like Emerson et al. (2011), Hirschauer (2006), or Kalthoff (2013) have shown. Although an iterative quality is widely regarded as one of the main characteristics of qualitative research designs, introductory works on writing—for the sake of clarity—mostly describe it rather like a linear process, from jottings to field notes to publications. It is correct that the iterative design ultimately serves to develop a text—i.e., the design is basically telic. Yet, a closer look at the practice of ethnographic writing reveals the specific temporality of the writing process, which is informed by the different types of text written within a research process. By proposing this, we take up and extend Smith's (2006) and Wolff's (2011) suggestions about the "activity of texts." Smith and Wolff are primarily concerned with the communicative dimension of texts, i.e., their influence on social practices based on their internal organization in order to gain plausibility in a given field. This activity of the text points to a certain materiality of communication (Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer 1994). In our extension of this approach, we suggest focusing on the influence different types of texts have on their authors' practices. How does their internal organization shape processes of writing and of research? As the following subsections of this contribution will reveal, the writing of ethnographies is affected by the particular "logic of practice" (Bourdieu 1990) of a research process that is inter alia accomplished by the materiality and affordances (Gibson 1977) of texts.

Jotting Down

Jottings are the most basic type of texts that ethnographers generate during ethnographic research and primarily serve to facilitate ethnographers' memories. Characteristically, jottings are written while participating in the field. Thus, the above-mentioned influence of the field on the writing process and its particular possibilities is obvious and has been reflected on in different accounts of fieldwork in practice. For example, in his memoir *In Sorcery's Shadow*, Stoller offers an insight into his ethnographic experience among the Songhay of Niger, reminiscing that they forbade him from taking notes during their gatherings and describing the need to rush home afterwards in order to write down his recollections (Stoller and Olkes 1987, 15). On the contrary, Kane's (2010, 28 and 199) informants at some point told her what to write down. In what follows, we will build on such accounts, but we will try to view them through the lens of practices rather than of interpersonal decisions and wishes.

To begin with, the form of jotting depends on the field's common ways of interaction, which also determine what writing tools can be used: pencil and notebooks, laptops, or phones (thus transforming their initial function). While writing was a rather unobtrusive practice in the two research fields we refer to in this contribution (air travel and cultural heritage), it is less compatible with participant observation in other fields, e.g., sports or religious services. However, even in writing-friendly fields, like airports, writing can become problematic, as the following excerpt from field notes about a flight from Rome to Vienna shows:

> Finally, I reach my gate at the international airport of Rome. Many people are already in a long queue waiting for boarding. Just before sitting down on a seat, I ask the lady beside it in German whether it is free. In clearly Viennese-accented German, she answers in the affirmative. Thus, I know she would be able to understand my jottings if I put them down in my laptop sitting next to her, a realization that makes me somehow feel inconvenient. Instead of jottings, I start writing emails. (LS, field notes from air travel ethnography, flight from Rome to Vienna, May 2016, own translation)

In this excerpt, the ethnographer's material involvement with the research field becomes evident. Due to her embodied co-presence in the situation, she is always observable and thus has to develop a "practical sense" (Bourdieu 1990) of field-specific conventions. This includes practically assessing writing conditions. The ethnographer must ask herself when participants will easily accept her writing, when they might feel offended by her jotting, and if she herself will likely feel uneasy about the presence of witnesses. Such considerations are not limited to social conditions of writing in the field but can—as in the quoted excerpt—include the content of such writing.[6]

In addition to this social dimension, the practice of writing demands a particular material setting, i.e., an appropriate state of mind and specific writing tools. While the latter is primarily a question of preparation, the former is a question of practical involvement: The practice of writing requires a certain—spatial and temporal—distance from the situation and at the same time produces analytical distance. When an individual writes anything, even just short notes, they are partly absent from the ongoing occurrence—cognitively, emotionally, and materially—since their attention and use of objects shifts to the practice of writing. The next excerpt from a flight passenger's written report[7] points to the emotional prerequisites for jotting:

> I am now calmer; nothing can really go wrong anymore. I take out my notebook and start putting down some ideas for the logbook. I notice that this task is making me more aware of my environment. (Report by K., sociologist in her late twenties, August 2015, own translation)

Within these few lines, the author delineates the passage from merely participating to jotting. As we have done above, she mentions the necessity of being in an appropriate state of mind and the use of specific artifacts, such as her writing tools, but more importantly, she notes a change in her awareness of the environment. This "mindset of registration" (Breidenstein et al. 2013, 87, own translation) is a crucial element of ethnographic practice in the field. Not only does it make a participant observer of the traveler, but it is also crucial for the practice of jotting. Although writing, as mentioned above, creates and requires a certain distance from ongoing practices, it creates and requires this particular awareness at the same time. In this sense, too, the practice of writing is cognitive, embodied, and material at the same time.

Writing Field Notes

Ethnographic work is characterized by manifold switches between the field of research and the academic field, which Emerson et al. (2011, 48ff.) have called "moving from field to desk" and back again. Field notes are typically written at "academic" locations, like a desk in an office or at home, relating the writing to an imagined scientific community. It is, as Kalthoff puts it,

> a switch of communication channels: from the noisy scenery and events of the observed situation to the silent dialogue with himself. In this dialogue, two selves of the concrete ethnographer individual interact, namely the observing-ethnographer-in-the-field and the ethnographer-in-the-field-notes. (Kalthoff 2013, 273)

Or, to put this into another perspective: At "academic" locations, the field and its practices are reduced to the pictures drawn by the above-discussed jottings and the ethnographer's memories. Practical requirements, social obligations, or influences from the research field are thus pared down to a minimum, while those of the scientific community apply. As Bourdieu (1990, 81) puts it, especially temporalities of the researched practice are suspended: "Because science is only possible in a relation to time which is the opposite of that of practice, it tends to ignore time and so to detemporalize practice." Instead, the writing of field notes (like any other activity in the academic field) is influenced by the social dynamics of academic communities and their locations— i.e., temporal structures, social obligations, material equipment, and the like. Grivel (1994, 254) reveals that writing accomplishes a kind of withdrawal from certain social dynamics: "Sitting down at a desk, at a typewriter, in front of the paper, this is all setting something in motion – getting out of traffic, taking the phone off the hook, not being available, in short: disappearing." Academic writing requires the writer to sit down, often for hours, in order to find good phrasing or to do background research, etc.

Within academic practice, writing field notes fulfills a communicative function (Breidenstein et al. 2013, 106): Its main goal is to reconstruct for potential readers the observed events and practices on the basis of the ethnographer's jottings and her memories. As mentioned above, the opportunities and possibilities for jotting deeply depend on the interaction habits of the field—i.e., there is a continuum between writing-friendly and writing-averse fields. Ethnographers of the latter will thus have to spend more time merely reconstructing while ethnographers of the former will have relatively detailed jottings that already come close to field notes (in the sense of reconstructing for potential readers). However, the obvious challenge of recalling events in detail is only one among many. Writing field notes additionally raises the essential challenges of verbalizing (mostly) "silent" social phenomena (Hirschauer 2006, 422–37) and of interlacing the embodied practice of writing with the practice of recalling and analyzing.

In addition, writing field notes often uncovers organizational issues. While writing at a desk—at a distance to the research field and its practices questions, doubts, and insights about one's own descriptions emerge. The following excerpt from field notes for a cultural heritage ethnography shows such a process:

> At [Liverpool] town hall, a security guard opens the door. This time it is someone else. He is as much at a loss as his colleague from yesterday was when I ask him if I could take a picture of the world heritage plaque. Luckily, there is an employee present who knows where to find it. He is very helpful and lets me

in. [. . .] He tells me that it had previously been on public display in St. George's Hall but had been moved here inside the town hall. There is nothing to see at St. George's Hall either, no plaque or anything. I will ask R.K. why it was moved. >> answer is that the information is not true at all (see email from March 16). (HS, field notes from cultural heritage ethnography in Liverpool, March 2018, own translation)

In this excerpt, the ongoing character of writing field notes becomes visible. In the process of writing, the ethnographer develops a strategy for answering an open question. This requires him to move into the field again. After receiving the answer, he adds it to the field notes and includes details on information procurement. This continuous process of working on field notes, which produces questions, doubts, and insights, fulfills an analytical function: It triggers theoretical reflections. These are often formulated in annotations.

Analytic Annotating

Annotations are (often quick) notes that are made in order to avoid forgetting ones own analytic thoughts about the observed social activities and processes. They are added to jottings and field notes in order to facilitate writing analytically rich texts—i.e., "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1973). However, such descriptions require a sparking idea, an analytical insight worth communicating to the scientific community. Where do these ideas come from? What are the material practices of intensifying creativity and thus generating analytical insights that are also a part of writing field notes?

Following basic assumptions of practice theory, we do not believe that such ideas come by chance in a lucky moment. Neither would we argue that they were the logical result of the given data. Rather, we suggest the following two converging explanations: In a recent contribution on the question of how to teach ethnography, Katz (2019, 26) suggested to "raise to explicit awareness the analysis that has already started." With this he points to the implicit analysis that is done by choosing what and how to observe and to the analytical thoughts within the already written descriptions. Thus, in a way, he suggests reflecting on implicit analytical thoughts. In a more practice-oriented perspective, Rheinberger (2013, 148) has proposed that writing is an experimental system and thus a generator of new ideas:

One should not just talk about producing, but also about solidifying and changing ideas while writing. (. . .) It is not the transparent medium of thoughts. Rather, it gives them a material shape, one that facilitates the emergence of something new. (Rheinberger 2013, 148, own translation)
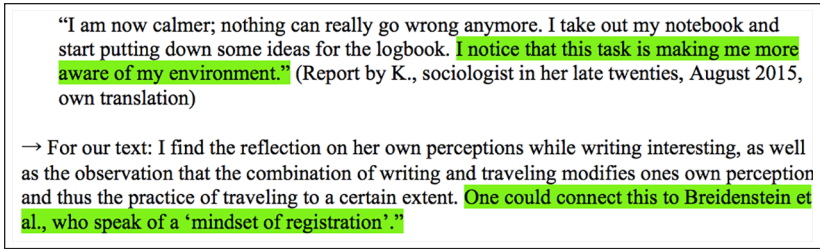
> "I am now calmer; nothing can really go wrong anymore. I take out my notebook and start putting down some ideas for the logbook. I notice that this task is making me more aware of my environment." (Report by K., sociologist in her late twenties, August 2015, own translation)
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> → For our text: I find the reflection on her own perceptions while writing interesting, as well as the observation that the combination of writing and traveling modifies ones own perception and thus the practice of traveling to a certain extent. One could connect this to Breidenstein et al., who speak of a 'mindset of registration'."

Figure 1. Annotation of the excerpt from the report by K. as it appears in a Word file.

In this perspective, the activity of writing is not regarded as a mere transfer of thoughts to text but as a (material) practice that generates written thoughts and thus facilitates analytical insights. Following Engert and Krey's (2013) ethnographic account of academic knowledge production, processes of writing and reading (others' and one's own) texts are fundamentally intertwined epistemic practices. Taking up their suggestions, we introduce the term "reader-writer" in order to emphasize this connection. Following Jackson (2001), we argue that field notes gain a liminal quality as they circulate independently of their authors. Reading field notes written some time ago turns them into "strange" objects; we argue that this strangeness (which arises as the writer becomes the reader) is a prerequisite for knowledge production.

In the following, we will take a look at how the production of analytical insights relies on both reading and writing. To understand such practical accomplishments in detail, we present a reflexive account of our activities of writing this article. The process of jointly working on ethnographic data actually required more effort in expressing thoughts than would have been necessary when working alone. While preparing the contribution, we re-read an ethnographic corpus of field notes in order to identify excerpts that shed light on the practice of ethnographic writing. Reviewing the corpus by topic rather than chronologically, we chose excerpts and copied them into a new file for our joint project. However, these excerpts did not speak for themselves. Rather we had to comment on them in the form of annotations in order to communicate the analytical thought behind choosing a particular excerpt. Thus, our communication on the excerpt from the air travel ethnography (quoted in 3.1) appeared as in Figure 1.

The annotation of the jotting was made for the purpose of authoring this article. It can be interpreted both as a "note to self" and as a proposal directed at the co-author. The green markup adds another material layer to the communication, highlighting passages in the source and in the commentary in

order to make an analytic connection. Here, we find an example of Katz's aforementioned suggestion to become aware of the already done, yet implicit analysis. There is an analytical prehistory to the activity of choosing a particular excerpt that has to be formulated in order to continue the analysis. In addition, the annotation shows an openness to suggestions from the ethnographic literature. Extending the aforequoted argument proposed by Kalthoff (2013), we could say that a third self of the ethnographer enters the scene: the ethnographer-in-humanities, who moves in the noisy scenes of academic literature in order to connect the ethnography to the discipline.

In writing these often rather shorthand annotations, loose ideas for analysis and theorization are generated. Previously written passages gain a kind of materiality—they become an "immutable and combinable mobile" in Latour's terms. Thus, the text becomes an interlocutor for the reader–writer in the process of producing ethnographic knowledge. To advance toward an ethnographic publication, however, these ideas have to be worked out. Thoughts and insights do not just emerge; they are the product of a specific form of reading and manipulating texts by ordering and recombining them, as we intend to show in the next paragraph.

Ordering and Rearranging

In preparing a manuscript for publication, the ethnographer (again) uses all her jottings, field notes, and lists in order to focus on a specific topic. Because they appear in written form, they can be commented upon, sorted, and put into a certain order, allowing for different orders to be tried out. The ethnographer once again becomes a reader–writer. The ethnographic account is not tied to the chronology of the field notes and even less so to the sequence of the observed phenomena themselves.

In this article, when working together on our ethnographic data as described above, we broke up the chronological order of the corpus of our individual field notes in favor of a topic-based one as we chose excerpts and copied them into a new file for our joint project. The practice of compiling and editing sometimes required us to manipulate the text's materiality, as the following note on the process of writing this contribution shows:

> The order of our text seems off; our argument does not develop properly. I feel the need to see this on paper. Working in the library, I make the word processing software print out just the four pages I want to work on, creating a PDF file I save on a USB stick. I need to take the stick to a public printer inside the library. I take the print-out into the cafeteria, because I need some caffeine. While drinking a bottle of Club Mate, I spread out the four pages next to each other

on the bistro table, enabling me to see three sections of our text at a glance. They are of different lengths and in different stages of editing. Working on paper helps me to get a visual grasp of the distribution of the text and to identify possibilities for rearrangement. I have the idea to move some of the paragraphs to later sections, because they seem to pertain to different topics. Using my pen, I circle segments of the text (sometimes individual sentences, sometimes whole paragraphs), attaching long extending arrows to the circles, which are pointing to the locations I want to move the segments to. In order to get the contextual transitions right, I alter some sentences, crossing out words and jotting down others. While doing so, I jump among the paragraphs trying to find the specific order within it. I read and put a note to a paragraph that brings me to another idea about a different paragraph. Next to me, two people are chatting. It becomes harder to ignore their conversation. I feel my concentration waning, also now the work on paper seems done and I feel excited to put my notes into the word processing software again. I leave the cafeteria and return to my desk inside the quiet area of the library. (HS, field notes taken during the preparation of this contribution)

This reflexive account of writing shows that it sometimes requires the use of different materialities or, more precisely, the transformation of the material quality of the text. Transferring the text from screen to paper changes the practices attached to it, as writing on paper is characterized by specific affordances that differ from writing in digital form (Sellen and Harper 2002). In this account, looking at writing on paper enables the reader–writer to see different sections of the text at the same time and to compare them. No longer having to scroll and thus being able to see more of the text simultaneously allows possibilities for rearranging the text to emerge. Thus, the mundane practices of working through the ethnographic corpus become palpable. There is a continuous reading and rethinking about the notes and descriptions that shifts between the field and its practices (which have to be reconstructed appropriately) and potential readers (who, it is hoped, will get a vivid picture and interesting insights). Finally, the account highlights the bodily and affective dimension of writing (feeling needs and excitement) and delineates writing as a situated practice, with the architectural division of the library, the different atmospheres in the silent area and the cafeteria enabling or constraining certain practices (drinking and working and overhearing conversations vs. working in silence and not being able to drink).

Annotating, ordering, and rearranging text also requires the reader–writer to open other documents and use different kinds of texts. In this work, the ethnographer is not only concerned with merely analytical problems but also with her everyday life, its temporalities, and checklists. For example, instead of researching something immediately, she can put it on a to-do list,

postponing it to a later stage. Keeping a to-do list amounts to a manipulation of time, a rearrangement of the temporality of practices. The materiality of the item in the list will remind the ethnographer of the task to be done. Thus, the affordances of everyday practice, of the scientific community, and the activity of the text to be written shape and reshape analytical ideas.

Drafting and Revising

Although the reader–writer may be thinking about an unknown audience throughout the entire research process, at the point of editing a paper, potential readers (including editors or reviewers) become the influential figure, as Breidenstein et al. (2013, 177) have emphasized. To reshape the paper to fulfill this communicative function, reader–writers have to make different decisions about presenting their argument. They address, for example, the way of theorizing, the form of representing the research, the modus of the narrative, and the attitude toward the members of the field (Breidenstein et al. 2013, 179–83). Likewise, as Katz (2019, 18–22) notes, a genre has to be chosen in view of the modus of generalization: portraits of people (iconic), situations (comparative analytic), or social worlds (modeling). In addition, organizational pressure (e.g., to meet a deadline) becomes particularly relevant; thus, to-do lists again play an important role as explained above.

As also occurs when writing at other points in the research process, these decisions and activities are not accomplished by the reader–writer alone; they are also influenced by the (material) activity of the text. After establishing at least a basic line of argumentation and perhaps a working title and/or an abstract, the manuscript has to emerge in a kind of cooperation between the writer(s) and the text. Obviously, a text file has to be generated, which sometimes involves conforming to style sheets and other formal requirements. Often, it is not the only file created within the course of writing a paper. Many authors generate different files representing versions at different stages (as we did for this paper) or a particular file for "leftovers," i.e., writing that does not fit into the manuscript but might be included later. Here again, comments, colored text, and/or footnotes can be used to generate a kind of "inner dialogue" between the author and her text (or between the co-authors).

While the activities of authors are easier to observe, the activities of texts are more difficult to grasp. A crucial path to understanding these activities relates to the sequential order of texts. In order to plausibly communicate an argument to potential readers, the reader–writer has to order thought in line with a linear logic that is both detailed and directional. When phrasing such texts, a requirement of completion emerges

that, so to speak, forces the author to generate textual and analytical ideas she might not have thought about before. This is in line with Luhmann's aforequoted insight that writing is a prerequisite for academic knowledge production.

A good example of such requirements of completion is the trail of excerpts from the ethnographic corpus into a paper. In order to ensure its inner logic and intelligibility for potential readers, they have to be rearranged and re-contextualized. Thus, excerpts that have once been written as jottings in a chronological report and have later been commented on in annotations now appear in a new context appropriate to the inner logic of the paper, like, for instance the contextualization of K's report, we added in the subsection on "jotting down." In addition, unlike spoken interactions, written texts do not allow for situational repair and correction, as Wolff (2011, 247) rightly states. Thus, a need for unambiguity arises. Within academic writing, formal and informal peer review processes add to this requirement and, at the same time, shape the text in a particular way.

In a nutshell, ideas and insights that have emerged in the course of writing different texts have to be cast in a final form, a process that forces the reader–writer to rethink ideas or come up with new ones. The aforementioned troubles and travails, feelings of antipathy toward the text, but also emotional highs when an argument develops and the wording of a passage works out, are part and parcel of the forming the text.

Conclusion

The important role of writing in ethnography is widely acknowledged. The "writing culture" movement has made it a focus of academic attention, resulting in a high level of reflexivity in the discipline. However, this reflection has mainly focused on rhetoric, on the role of the author in the ethnographic narrative, and on writing field notes. While there have been occasional remarks on the particular circumstances of writing in ethnographic studies (mostly limited to writing in the field), there has been little systematic reflection on how ethnographic writing as a practice in general extends in time and space. Drawing on a practice approach and inspired by the current extension of STS to the social sciences, we have proposed a reflexive analysis of ethnographic writing in order to delineate how it unfolds as a practice that is simultaneously cognitive, embodied, and material, i.e., its character as a joint activity of different participants. Instead of focusing either on the production of field notes, as in classic reflections on ethnography, or on the rhetoric of the published text, as

arose in the writing culture debate, we argue that jottings, annotations, to-do lists, and communication with co-authors form part and parcel of the texts produced in ethnographic research. The challenges and successes of each writing process thus result from the particular dynamics between the participants in the practice.

The practice approach and our ethnographic analysis of text production—including our reflexive analysis of the practices around the production of this article—have challenged a view that reduces writing to a cognitive process. Instead, we have shown how much it involves the body of the ethnographer and different objects as well as specific temporalities and spatialities. This may appear to be a self-evident aspect of our daily lives and experiences as ethnographers. Yet, it is precisely this self-evident quality that enables us to overlook the profound impact of writing on ethnographic knowledge production and that hinders us in reflexively analyzing our own writing practices. Our analysis finds that the different forms of text that emerge not only weave together theory and data but also different stages of research. Writing is key to accomplishing the trans-situational character of ethnography. It influences and shapes all stages of ethnographic work, from orienting perception by setting an appropriate mode of attention to organizing the work itself by keeping to-do lists. Writing does not simply communicate ethnographic insights, but—as a result of the activity of texts—it also generates them. The texts produced by the ethnographer gain a materiality of their own, thus obtaining a kind of liminality: Being semi-alien and semi-familiar, they turn into an immutable and combinable mobile, which is able to travel in time and serves as an interlocutor for the writer, who becomes, to use the terminology we have proposed, a "reader–writer." This liminal relationship opens up the possibility of distancing and practical reflection. Within (ethnographic) research, this distancing and reflection plays an important role, not only in order to put knowledge on record, but more fundamentally in order to generate knowledge. Insights and analytic points emerge in the course of writing different forms of text. These forms of text are shaped by the course of research, by the situations they are written in, by formal requirements, and by their inner logic.

In this vein, our own writing was influenced in different ways by the materiality and by the activity of texts. Thus, if our account of ethnographic writing seemed too linear, this is due to the logical need to clearly differentiate and order its aspects for the readers as well as the structural need to organize a text into (sub)sections and to avoid repetition. As we hope to have shown, writing is a fundamentally circular activity, and ethnographic writing in particular is characterized by going back-and-forth from field to desk, by reading and rereading, and by revising one's own texts.

Finally, our reflections could also serve as an interesting starting point for a discussion on ethnographic methodology: How are practices of ethnographic writing passed on by the ethnographic community and why do even very experienced ethnographers encounter writing problems at some point? If we understand writing as a simultaneously cognitive, embodied, and material practice—as a joint activity of different participants—it is clear that its outcomes can never be fully predictable. Thus, academic courses on ethnographic writing only serve as a starting point for a process of learning that will accompany ethnographers throughout their professional lives. The institutions of feedback that go along with ethnographic writing form part of this learning process and of academic knowledge production. For instance, formal and informal peer review processes, which we could address only briefly in the paper but which would be interesting to include in further studies, add another layer of complexity to the practices described, with external comments being produced and different kinds of temporalities needing to be negotiated.[8] Thus, writing is a practice that is accomplished by the interplay of the different participants we have delineated and emerges in its own particular dynamics, which often, but not always, result in a final text.

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Notes

1. For a reflection on disciplinary specificities in scientific writing, see Hyland (2004) and Hyland and Bondi (2006).
2. By doing so, we follow current suggestions (e.g., Müller 2016b, Lichtermann 2017) to reflect on the practice of researching (rather than the person of the researcher).
3. For a detailed discussion on the theoretical grounding of a practice approach to writing, see Schmidt (2016) and Schäfer and Schindler (2017).
4. See also Schäfer (2017) on the relationship between practice theory and actor-network theory.

5.   The translation follows Manfred Kuehn's translation of Luhmann's text published online https://luhmann.surge.sh/communicating-with-slip-boxes. Retrieved January 10, 2020.

6.   Kane (2010, 155–156) argues that losing notes in the research field would be "a sure way to offend local people," since these notes contain narrations of nearly everything. Perhaps the use of laptops, in some situations, can be comparable with such a loss, since the display is located much more in the field of view of people around than a notebook and thus invites them to read.

7.   In the ethnographic study on air travel, the author used an uncommon type of data: Flight passengers were asked to write down their experiences during or shortly after a flight. For details on this method, see Schindler (2020); for similar approaches, see Bolger et al. (2003); Anderson (2015). For the contribution at hand, we have only selected reports written by sociologists, since these come quite close to jottings of field notes.

8.   For this reason, we wish to thank three anonymous reviewers and the editors of this special issue for their helpful comments and suggestions at this point.

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