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Harshadha Balasubramanian

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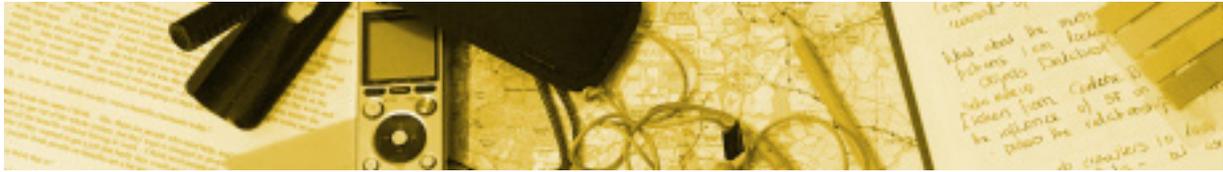
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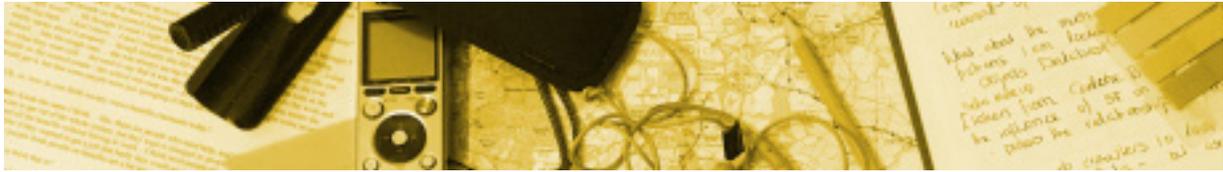
Experiencing writing: lessons for multimodal ethnographers from audio describers of dance

Harshadha Balasubramanian

Abstract

How to write about multi-modal experiences? That question is especially familiar to ethnography writers gathering non-textual data through visual, auditory, and haptic media, and it has long been asked by audio describers who put dance into words for blind and partially-sighted audiences. Here, descriptions of visual choreography must be written and orally delivered to complement sight-impaired audiences' perceptions, such as sounds heard, vibrations felt, and affective atmosphere.

Through establishing a parallel between multi-modal ethnography and Audio Description (AD), this article recognises the challenges and possible strategies for capturing multi-modal experiences in writing, which remains academia's most dominant medium. I draw on fieldwork amongst audio describers in London and Edinburgh, whose approach involves practising a deliberate sensitivity to the experience of writing, which they suggest is crucial to fully understanding the experiences produced by the dance performance being described. Transmitting these multi-modal experiences to sight-impaired audiences is best enabled, describers insist, if the act of writing is experienced and hence opened up to phenomenological possibilities, including describers embodying some of the dance moves in front of their computer screens whilst "trying to find the right words". Writing, considered here as an act to be experienced by those doing it rather than as a mediating or representational tool, is a somatic, sensory, emplaced practice through which ethnography writers could be equipped to capture both the experiential nature of fieldwork and the multi-modality of those experiences.

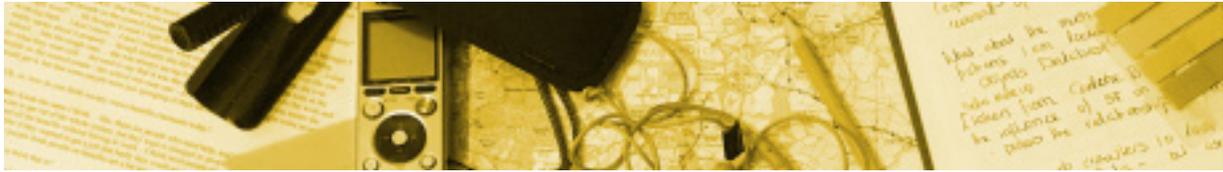


Audio Description (AD) of dance engages describers in writing descriptions and then orally verbalising the visual content of live productions as they occur for sight-impaired audiences, so that the latter can access images and how these interact with sonic, haptic, and affective details. Describers therefore regularly tackle an increasingly familiar anthropological challenge: how could writing provide access to complex multi-modal ethnographic experiences? Although non-textual formats, primarily film and audio, are attracting increased attention in academia, writing remains the most dominant form in which research is recorded, shared, and reviewed (Pink 2009). Severe philosophical and anthropological critiques abound regarding the capacity of symbolic words to accurately represent human experiences (see MacDougall, 2005; Schneider and Wright, 2006), which can only be expected to grow louder with ever more anthropologists subjectively experiencing the worlds being studied and the need to write about these entanglements. Yet, through establishing a parallel between ethnographic and AD practice, I propose learning lessons from describers on capturing multi-modal experiences in writing.

This article follows a strong precedent in anthropology for reflecting on ethnographic writing practices (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Desjarlais, 2015; Pink, 2003; Van Maanen, 2011). My contention is that such reflections need to be refocused from the content and style of these texts to the writer herself and her embodied, subjective, multi-sensory engagement with the act of writing. Drawing on fieldwork amongst audio describers in London and Edinburgh, I explore their approach of practising a deliberate sensitivity to the experience of writing, which they suggest is crucial to fully understanding the experiences produced by the dance performance being described. Transmitting these multi-modal experiences to sight-impaired audiences is best enabled, describers insist, if the act of writing is experienced and hence opened up to phenomenological possibilities, including describers embodying some of the dance moves in front of their computer screens whilst "trying to find the right words". Writing, considered here as an act to be experienced by those doing it rather than as a mediating or representational tool, is a somatic, sensory, emplaced practice through which ethnography writers could be equipped to capture both the experiential nature of fieldwork and the multi-modality of those experiences.

Audio Description and Multi-modal Ethnography

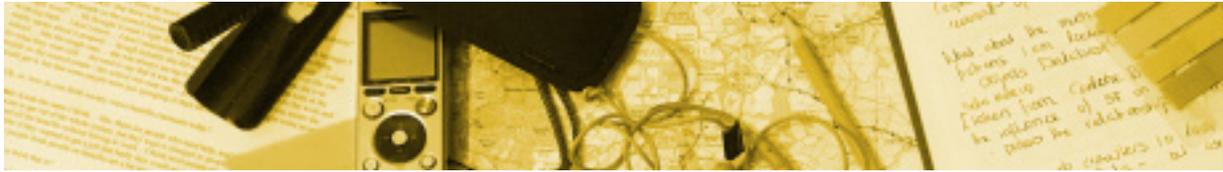
As dance productions unfold, audio describers may be found sat in an offstage booth, or similar, speaking pre-prepared descriptions live, which are relayed discretely to headsets worn by blind and partially-sighted listeners sat in the auditorium. The website of the Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB) states that AD provides "information on the visual elements" that blind and partially-sighted people "might otherwise miss" (RNIB, 2019). Although this position suggests that describers concentrate exclusively on vision, I have argued elsewhere (Balasubramanian, 2017) that this appreciation of "the visual" involves recognising how it shapes and is shaped by other sensory modalities in the experiences generated by the performance. Much like a writer depicting ethnographic experiences gathered through multiple media, audio describers are tasked with under-



standing how meaning is woven through multiple modes of expression in live dance productions: various sound effects, images, music and any resultant physical vibrations. The need for describers to think across modalities persists throughout the preparation of AD scripts. Descriptions, for example, must make sense in text form, but they must also be effective when pronounced out loud and heard alongside other auditory features of the performance (Fryer, 2016, 55). Sabine Braun, an AD scholar, elaborates on how descriptions should be written to interact and cohere with the other modalities likely to be experienced by sight-impaired audiences at a ballet (Braun, 2008, 15), including those within the performance and those possible in the auditorium- such as sounds of laughter from fellow audience members. When feasible, an increasing number of ballet companies offer touch tours, in which blind and partially-sighted theatre-goers can come into bodily contact with the set, props, costumes, and sometimes even be taught some of the dance moves expected in the performance. AD scripts, therefore, must be developed to complement the experiences of those who have accessed these haptic encounters during touch tours. In other words, audio describers of dance and multi-modal ethnographers are both tasked with writing in ways to complement the sonic, haptic, and visual aspects of their audiences' experiences.

In the 2013 production of *Like Rabbits* by Duke and Kirkwood, London's Almeida theatre was set for a striking example of writing multi-modal worlds in AD. The performance was a ballet take on *Lappin and Lappinova*, a short story by Virginia Woolf (1938), in which a young bride deals with the social expectations of marriage by seeking solace in her imagination, picturing herself and her new husband to be wild rabbits (Fryer, 2016, 67). To invoke the dancers' animalistic movements, the describer has peppered their script with references to how the human performers "lope", "bound", "leap", "nestle" (Duke and Kirkwood, 2013- cited in Fryer, 2016, 67). The short staccato verbs not only provide insight into the visual aspects of the dance choreography, but it could, especially when spoken out loud, complement and enhance other modalities influencing sight-impaired audiences' experiences, such as brisk rhythms in the musical score.

I would however go further, arguing that AD not only supplements what sight-impaired audiences can already perceive, but, like multi-modal ethnography, invites them to imagine through other modalities too, even if these do not feature in the performance. For example, the describer does not shy away from addressing some of the sexual content in this dance performance head on, maintaining the same animal-centred word choices: "her hind legs clamped around him in a tight ball; she nuzzles down his chest, to his crotch ... he scrabbles down her back ... her neck ... a tangle of urgent limbs, haunch against flank, forepaws scrabbling, teeth biting ... he noses at her soft underside, pulls her up onto his chest, her rump level with his shoulder, his face buried between her hind legs" (Duke and Kirkwood 2013- cited in Fryer 2016, 105). Indeed, the language does reveal the sexual nature of these visual representations without calling them out in terms of human anatomy. Emphasis is instead put on disclosing these details in the same gradual, suggestive ways possible in ballet. Significantly however, I would propose that sight-impaired audiences are also encouraged to imagine through further modalities only implicitly hinted in the description: imagining the flexibility required for such rapid dancing, the heat and sweat expected from such closeness between

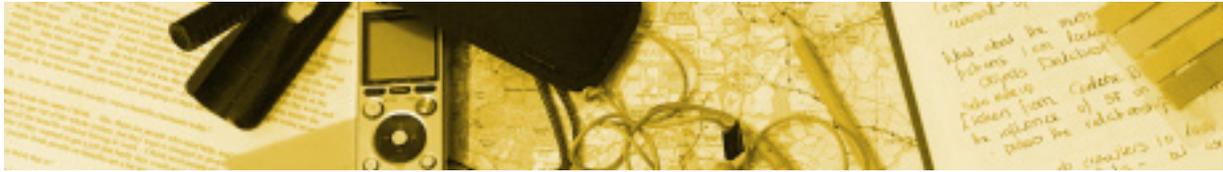


dancers, and the sound of scrambling bodies. Through implying such possibilities in words, describers seek to inform their listeners about the bodies contributing to these performances and hence the visceral, non-visual effects of the "moves" which are communicated visually to onlooking spectators. Thus, AD of dance provides an ideal site in which to explore how it may be feasible to write texts that can cohere with the experiences and imaginations stimulated by other non-textual media used in ethnographic practice.

Throughout these attempts to put multi-modal experiences into writing, both AD and ethnographic practice face similar disciplinary challenges, specifically an uneasy relationship with textuality. One especially persistent approach in anthropology has emphasised the symbolic properties of language over its indexical qualities, insisting upon the arbitrary relationship between language and the world it tries to represent. Clifford Geertz (1983) cemented this position with his interpretive method, according to which language was a site for analysing symbols in public culture but not for discovering undistorted, subjective human experiences. The status of texts deteriorated further following the "crisis of representation" in the late twentieth century, when it was identified as a tool for making theoretical claims, within which the voices of research participants are used to substantiate the author's position (Pink 2003). The emphasis on text, increasingly being understood as a Western influence, was simply termed one specific form of representation and the ethnographic authority it once implied was questioned. Instead, non-textual media, such as ethnographic film, were positioned as allowing research participants' voices to sound out over an implicit theoretical backdrop (Pink 2003, 51).

Fascinatingly, audio describers have to overcome similar anxieties about text to describe multi-modal experiences. This is evident throughout the creative process pursued by describers when preparing AD scripts. Louise Fryer, a well-known audio describer, AD scholar and one of my research participants, remarked that she likes her initial experience of any production to be as immersive as if she was an audience member. "I try not to read any reviews in advance, so as not to prejudice my reaction to the piece", Louise noted. This wariness about the significant influence of texts over individuals' opinions reoccurs later on. It is worth noting, for example, that describers do not speak incessantly throughout a dance production, regularly choosing to keep silence so that audiences can enjoy perceivable elements, such as music, without interruption and may independently interpret those elements. Describers are conscious that their descriptions, especially when bolstered by the authority commanded by an individual with eyesight, could mediate and distort any experiences listeners may have of the performance.

As well as concerns pertaining to the mediating qualities of writing, audio describers, like multi-modal ethnographers, are equally nervous about risking the dominating presence of the describers' subjectivity in AD scripts. This is why describers work in pairs on any production, dividing the AD writing task between them, exchanging ideas, and rehearsing together before live delivery. Indeed, describers are told to produce balanced, unbiased representations. That imperative rests on a long-standing conception of AD as scientific translation, putting "visual images into verbal descriptions" (Braun, 2008, 14) as accurately as possible. Such an epistemological justification for



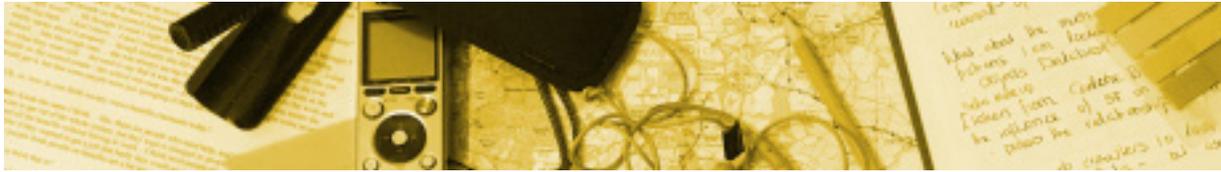
describers favouring neutrality is followed by a moral injunction, namely the need to accord disabled and able-bodied theatre-goers equal agency in developing views about a production. Much like in multi-modal ethnography, describers fear that writing will hinder features of the performance from speaking for themselves and will foreground their own perspectives which are not part of the production being made accessible.

Yet, despite these defects claimed about writing, it remains the most recognised format for scholarship (Pink 2003) and the primary tool in AD. Even in instances where ethnographic films are featured, they are often accompanied by, and intended to be consumed together with, texts that contextualise the videos. Sarah Pink observes the representational opportunities afforded by combining writing with other forms, including video, audio, and multi-sensory stimuli like scented pages, achieving a hypermedia suitable for representing intense sensory experiences. For instance, a book could be accompanied by an audio CD or film, which could then be further explored interactively through hyperlinks and other digital content (Pink 2009). Before the advent of ethnographic film, Pink acknowledges that anthropologists have already been combining pictures, voice-over, and writing in their scholarship. Now what needs unpacking, Pink posits, is how anthropologists have varyingly applied these media to communicate insights, the value of each media, and how they relate to conventional broader anthropological practices and conversations (Pink 2003, 51). I have adopted a similar stance in this article, asking how textual representations of multi-modal experiences should be composed to complement the other ways in which this fieldwork is being represented.

So far, AD and ethnographic practices have illustrated striking parallels in their aims and challenges whilst writing about multi-modal experiences. Crucially however, I propose in the remaining sections that AD has demonstrated how to successfully overcome these obstacles to writing. Thus, given the extensive affinities between these practices, I suggest that there may potentially be valuable lessons for multi-modal ethnographers to learn from audio describers. Such interactions with arts practitioners has previously enabled the creative representation of complex, multi-sensory experiences, critical interventions, and routes towards bearing practical and social relevance (Pink et al, 2010). In what follows, I will outline the two main ways in which audio describers surmount the challenges discussed above and devise transferrable strategies for writing about multi-modal fieldwork.

The experience of writing

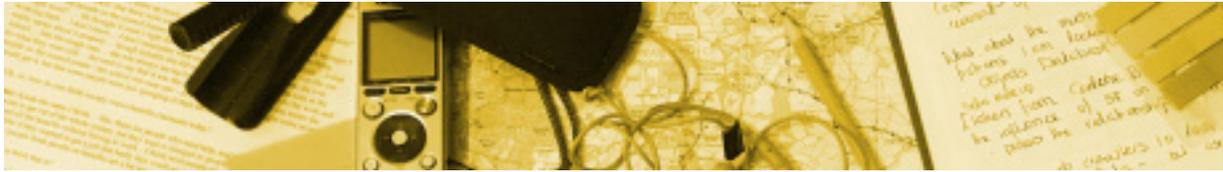
As my fieldwork with audio describers continued, I became ever more aware that their script writing was the most difficult aspect to trace in their creative process. It occurred outside the theatre, generally where ever describers could carry their notes and find moments of inspiration. Working across the UK as freelancers and volunteers, audio describers compose AD scripts in cafes, on trains, on the go, and at home. This temporal and spatial remove from the dance performances is neither said to fog their recollections of them or entirely welcomed as restoring some objective distance. Instead, describers prefer to understand and manipulate this distance to enhance the quality of their descriptions.



For example, audio describers prefer to take time, at least a week or more, to put scripts together. Rather like writing up outside the field site, this distance may afford describers the opportunity to reflect and not found conclusions on immediate personal responses. Citing their AD training, describers reminded me of the need for at least two describers per production, which eases the work load on each person and also provides opportunities to compare notes, exchange comments, and hence not become wrapped in individual perceptions of any show. Louise advocates extending this stepping-back from the performance as the script writing process wears on: "I would often read reviews after seeing a show and before writing the notes, as sometimes a reviewer manages to crystallise elements at the core of the production or design that I think will be helpful to our audience". The spatial-temporal situation formed between "seeing a show and before writing the notes" is a position from which Louise seeks to evaluate her personal responses to performances, through considering the perspectives of her colleague and reviewers. Therefore, far from fearing the mediating qualities of writing from a distance, describers harness the writing process as offering distinct experiences and vantage points from which to reassess and deepen their perceptions of the dance productions being described.

The describer's body is a distinct locus from which to experience writing. Although describers will meet each other for at least one rehearsal and a live delivery of the AD script, collaboration during the writing process is often not face-to-face, owing to describers' remote working style. Emails, phone calls, and Skype, therefore, serve as sites for collaborative description, in which describers' engagements with writing become situated. Their writing experiences are characterised by both the immediacy offered by virtual communication and offline distance between them (Balasubramanian, 2019). While describers aim to provide an immersive, personal perspective of performances and even approximating face-to-face collaboration, each describer's body is located in a time and space that is far beyond the environment created by the dance piece they are describing. This sensitivity to bodily knowing during write-up would urge anthropologists to consider writing as just as any emplaced practice in the field.

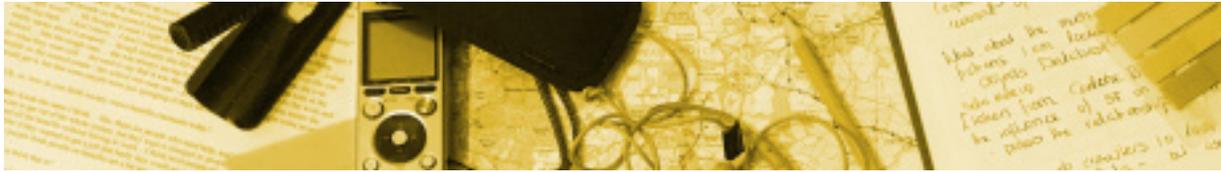
Before detailing audio describers' embodied engagements with AD script preparation, it is worth clearly setting out the various modalities through which the act of writing may be experienced. Here, a detour is requested to consider Japanese calligraphy ("Shodo"). This refers to a way of writing Japanese characters with a Shodo brush to produce a "harmonious rhythm with varying brush posture, speed, and pressure". Although apprentices can learn this art form through replicating visual exemplars, it soon becomes apparent that this still visual image is simply one dimension of this writing. Instructors therefore must, on occasions, physically guide the learner's brush-hand, so that the latter can sense the correct "motion, angle, direction and force" constituting this writing practice (Nakakoji et al, 2007, 75). Audio describers too experience writing through its multiple dimensions: its materiality, the content, form, words used, and even the motion and rhythm of typing on a computer. This clearly shows that, while writing may be used to represent and mediate phenomena in the world, writing itself constitutes a multi-modal experience.



Now follows a clarification of the notion of experience which underpins my position on the experiential qualities of writing. Specifically, rather than a bounded, stable entity which is attained, the experience of writing is temporally-flowing, one where past experience remains in the present and "is feeding forward to anticipate future horizons of experience" (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011, 87). This conception of an ever-changing experience avoids regarding the act of writing as a passive mediator or representational tool through which multi-modal fieldwork experiences are simply re-fracted. Instead, the writing act is taken as an experience in its own right- containing somatic, sensory, and linguistic features which intersect and engage with ethnographic experience. With the ever-shifting nature of experience, temporal parameters, and individuals' attention, it would be no surprise that the existence generated from this context and the attitudes consolidated may transform too. The capacity to change orientations permits individuals to interrogate their taken-for-granted assumptions from another's viewpoint, namely what Edmund Husserl called "bracketing" of the "natural attitude" or "phenomenological epoche" (Husserl, 1989, 91-100). For describers, I propose that such experiences of writing affords an alternative phenomenological orientation to reconsider their own initial impressions of the dance performance.

A factor experienced by any writers of AD and ethnography may be the stiffness from spending prolonged periods at a desk, engaging in the motion of organising notes, annotating material, and, most commonly, typing on a computer. Coming to know such rigidity in a body during write-up is only possible if writing is being experienced with the body and senses. Such stiffness contrasts drastically with the immersive experience describers initially had of the performance, but it also shows marked disparity with the rigorous, dynamic dance choreography needing to be described. Rather than mediating or distorting the original ballet, the experience of a rigid body through writing forms a vantage point from which to "bracket" and analyse the experiences from the production being described. The benefits of drawing on the body then during the write-up stage have arguably been understated. There has, in fact, been much more consideration about how bodies are shaped during the reading and actual fieldwork process. Reading a hardback book is argued, for instance, to be very different physically from using a computer or digital hand-held devices (Pink 2009, 148). Further discussions about the materiality of writing practices and the impact on the body could provide unique insight into how experiencing writing actually shapes the output of descriptions- from describers and ethnographers alike.

Meanwhile, a closely-related concern to materiality is how both the experience of writing AD and multi-modal ethnography involves coming into contact with non-textual media. Two describers from the Audio Description Association in Scotland, Janette and Amanda, introduced me to the use of video recordings - of performances - for guiding descriptions of Swan Lake (Royal New Zealand Ballet). What their practice lucidly evinced was how experiencing writing, particularly its textuality, reveals the points of tension and complement with other media. For instance, aware that they may have missed minute details whilst taking notes, the describers turned to video, hoping for precision and rich detail, informing their AD script with both a company-produced video of a live production and a high quality, commercially-

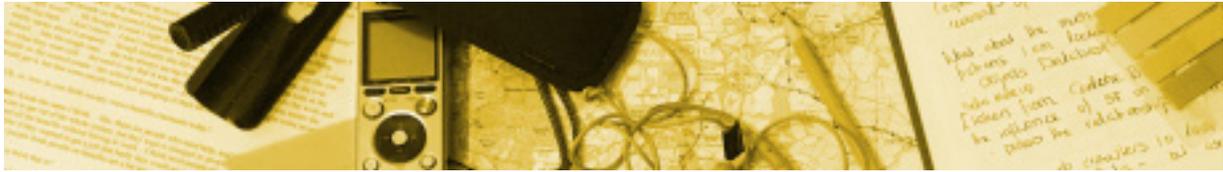


edited recording. These films were exchanged, as each describer scanned separately for nuances: dissecting the long shots and close-ups, repeating complex segments, and trying to get "inside the choreographer's intentions". Thus, it seems to have been the experience and challenge of taking thorough notes which led describers to appreciating the possibilities for combining forces with the camera to inform AD scripts.

Nevertheless, describers also analysed the camera's use, especially in the company-produced recording, for what the film could reveal about the creative intentions behind this production. The video taken is thought to be affected with the emotions, bodies, and senses of the artists who shot it, as well as the purposes for which they intended it, including presumably an intension to aid internal rehearsals. This explains why describers purchased another DVD to provide a viewpoint which was intended to balance the perspective of the company. Further, the DVD film, if allowed to play through, offers a linear narrative (Pink, 2003, 52) which could not be analysed in depth without going back and forth over the story's progression, understanding how the different strands were tied into a cohesive whole. Describers stopped, started, and repeated sections over and over, as this afforded the active interactions they needed to fully unpack how the production has been pieced together. Here again, describers' experience of producing text could have alerted them to the possibilities for skimming through it in non-linear ways and how this contrasts with the linear progress intended by visual media, such as dance performances. In addition to exposing a likely tension between these two media forms, this also suggests grounds on which text, including the ethnographic varieties, may be written to compensate for the linearity of visual media and perhaps even be used to supplement it.

Robert Desjarlais (2015) began formulating an approach for putting words to photographs in Nepal. He contends that an "...informed way to work with the images is to write `around` and `over` them, as it were, explaining what was going on in certain moments, tracing out the lines of relation, action, and consciousness at hand in any specific photographic encounters" (2015, 214). Words can capture the material, cultural, and political contexts from which these photographs arose and hence would, according to Desjarlais, yield greater phenomenological insights. Even in this work however, words appear to be conceptualised as passively applied "over" and wrapped "around" other media, rather than being engaged with phenomenologically.

Conversely, audio describers experience writing through the language they produce as they are producing it. Colour is a case in point. In the 2015 production of *Jane Eyre* at the National Theatre, the two describers presented the colour of objects and settings to the senses of listeners, including the "stab of colour" from a "red dress", an "electric blue", and a "grey pattern reminiscent of storm clouds". According to describers, the word "red" does not only signify the optic manifestation of a certain colour, but it also indexes broader phenomena perceivable through multiple modalities. Indeed, colour has been explained in terms that can be cognitively and sensorially appreciated without vision. For example, the sharpness of the red could be contemplated through imagining the sensation of a piercing knife. Similarly, the sombreness evoked by grey clouds can be comprehended by audiences who have experienced the heaviness of a brewing storm. In order to help listeners make sense of

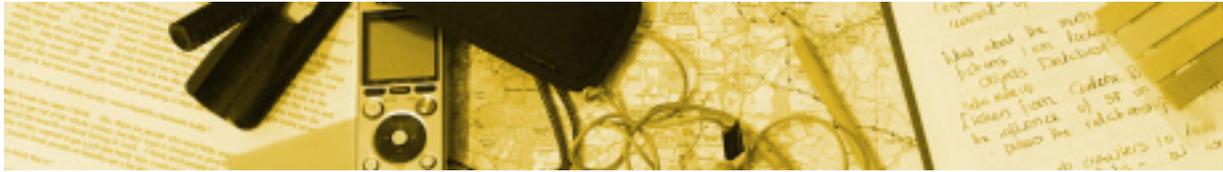


these colours through non-visual means, I would argue that describers had to ascertain these bodily sensations and contexts themselves through experiencing the word "red", that is, considering what broader associations it indexes rather than what it signifies.

Elinor Ochs (2012) elaborates on the indexical qualities of language. Words in reading, writing, and speech, can be experienced by individuals, as they index aspects of people's wider cultural, personal, existential, or physical contexts and recall any experiences encountered in these domains (2012, 148). This means that interlocutors can sense the frustration of a family feud or rush of a packed school routine just by discussing it. Therefore, Ochs does not deny that language provides incomplete representations of the world, she asserts that, through being indexical, language has a potential for rich signification (2012, 148). Understanding what is lost or mediated through these incomplete representations may be useful, but this would involve overlooking the experiences and orientations emerging from writing language.

Laura Marks, in her study of intercultural cinema (2000), explains how contact with media, which in her case is film, can involve absorbing much "extra-diegetic" information beyond the media itself (2000, 211-212). Audio-visual input, in particular, provokes specific sense memories- through narrative identification, whereby audiences may identify with some activities shown but through alternate sensory modalities, such as when seeing the ocean could recall memories of hearing waves, smelling sea salt and fish, or feeling the sea breeze. Though Marks suggests that this multi-sensory memory stimulation occurs while watching cinema, evidence from audio describers reveals that this may also be encountered by writers using language. Being sensitive to the experiential qualities of language would also allow analysis of writing on the same level as other media forms that are thought to generate embodied experiences. Here would develop opportunities to discover ways in which writing can come to complement and enhance the representations projected through other media in multi-modal ethnography.

Acknowledging the experiential qualities of writing permits audio describers to anticipate and shape how the experiences being written about will be received, that is, the role and importance of the audience. In anthropology, this would demand a re-conceptualisation of readers in the process of ethnography-making. For instance, through their word choices, anthropologists could not only produce experiences for readers that mirror elements at the heart of research participants' own, but they could also guide readers on how to bring their previous experiences to understanding this context. Rather than just being passive consumers of information and representations of others' experiences, they need to be recognised as being open and able to have experiences themselves, made possible through the language used in ethnographic writing. Therefore, readers must be conceived as co-producers of their own experiences, or perhaps more ambitiously-phrased, as collaborators in creating ethnographic representations. Such profound awareness of audiences is only possible through embracing writing as an experience, through which researchers could be just as much experiencing agents as their readers, rather than authoritative figures bearing the burden of representing an "other" to passive consumers.



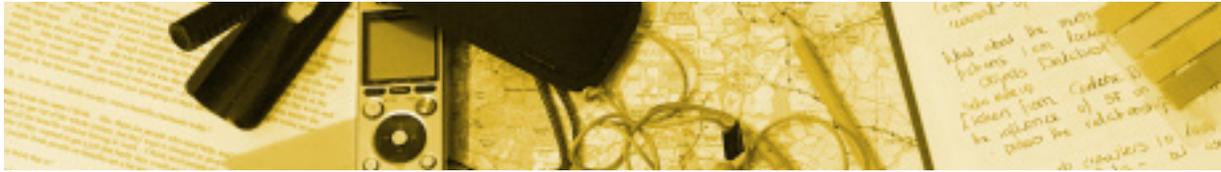
By no means is this a call for anthropologists to be poets or suppress the voices of those they represent. As shown in this article, describers have devised strategies to restrict the influences of any subjective interpretations. What is being privileged in AD, and arguably should be in ethnography, is experiencing, not just in the field but beyond.

In the same way that ethnographic film has arisen from anthropological forays into observational cinema, I suggest another avenue through which arts practice could inform anthropological writing. So far, I have shown that multi-modal ethnographers would be able to understand distance between the write-up stage and the field if they examined both as emplaced, yet ever-shifting and mutually-influencing, experiences. In this way, anthropological writing does not mediate fieldwork but provides an alternative orientation from which to examine it.

Writing through embodiment

The last section of this article explores how audio describers may provide some valuable lessons for tackling the second challenge to the reconciliation between anthropology and text. This challenge manifests as concerns regarding the inevitable presence of the ethnographer in her writing and therefore the potential for diverting attention from the phenomena being described. Significantly however, describers suggest that mobilising the author's subjective engagement throughout the process of creating AD is fundamental to achieving the goal of capturing the multi-modal experiences produced by dance performances. For the purposes of this article, I demonstrate how experiencing the act of writing through the body can improve the capacity of text to transmit fieldwork experiences and to complement the effects of other media the ethnographer might employ.

During one of our conversations discussing Janette's most recent ballet description, she noted: "I spent evenings at the computer, twitching gently as I tried to reproduce moves". "It made me appreciate the dancers' astonishing suppleness even more"! Here, writing is not a tool to be handled passively but an experience to be engaged with through the body. By restricting herself to "twitching gently" before "the computer", rather than replicating the dance precisely, Janette takes steps to know the material space in which her writing is emplaced and particularly the contrast this then generates with the emplacement of the dance performances being described. The computer, keeping her stationary and stiff, does indeed appear far removed from the animated environment within which ballet may generally be performed. It is arguably awareness of this contrast which enables Janette to fully grasp the experiences produced by the dance production, including how much those experiences are constituted by the specific modes of expression used to produce them. As an example, describers may ask: how important is seeing a dance move to appreciating the experiences being intended, and what other modalities may provide access to the same experience? Such understandings of various, yet complementary, modalities for having the same experience is a hopeful signal for anthropological ventures in hypermedia ethnography.



In discussions of re-enactment (see Kalshoven, 2015), theorists have identified that acts of imitation are not about authentically recreating those experiences, but such mimesis erodes the barrier between the imitating and the imitated, ultimately enabling transformation. Through mimicking the ballet moves being described, Janette suggests how ethnographers could transform the isolated, fixed event of fieldwork experiences, embodying, contextualising, and redressing them in the ever-shifting flow of the anthropologist's broader experiences, which encompasses both fieldwork and write-up. As describers use embodiment to explore the diverse modalities through which the performance may be experienced, they transform how the experiences in the production are perceived and who may be able to perceive them. Ethnographic practitioners, if re-enacting aspects of their fieldwork at the desk, could therefore be similarly sensitising themselves to unexplored areas of their fieldwork experiences.

It should be noted that, in this particular instance, Janette is not trying to embody the sensations of audience members in the auditorium but that of the dancers themselves. As Janette told me in an email: "It makes it easier for me to find the words to describe the actions if I can feel the muscle movements involved". This intense sensory immersion appears necessary for describers to capture the visceral quality of what they are trying to put into words. As well as tapping into the non-visual sensations which could be grasped by sight-impaired audiences, audio describers' strategies uncover somatic characteristics which help to frame their listeners' interpretations, whilst allowing some room for maneuver. Rather than focusing on communicating each movement in sequence, Janette concentrated on identifying and conveying the "suppleness" of the dancers. This description could be relatable amongst all audience members and give listeners the freedom to interpret how movements might be performed by such a body. Therefore, describers have put aside anxieties about their overpowering subjectivity in writing, showing that subjective embodiment, for instance, can actually derive ways to limit the influence of the ethnographer's interpretations.

In fact, the thing to be constantly working on throughout the AD preparation, according to Janette, is herself, for she writes: "Eventually I trusted myself to become the storyteller, without getting carried away in the newfound freedom". Yet, even advocates of phenomenological approaches to fieldwork do not tend to theorise ways for this subjective "being in the world" to continue beyond the field site (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011). This resistance to bringing the ethnographic gaze back from the field may suffer the same criticisms that auto-ethnographic and other modes of highly reflexive writing receive (Okely & Callaway, 1992). Nonetheless, describers would argue that this reflexivity is crucial to the premise of multi-modal ethnography. This is, at its core, a claim that expanding researchers' methodological toolkit is a necessary step to making epistemological discovery and cross-cultural analysis possible.

An example of a description which was built from Janette's embodiment technique is the AD script of *Swan Lake*, co-written with Amanda. The describers decided early on to add "ing" to the end of every verb to suggest a sense of ongoing movement: "swinging" around as opposed to "swings" around. To further audiences' immersion in the illusion of the narrative world, including newcomers, describers avoided using technical jargon

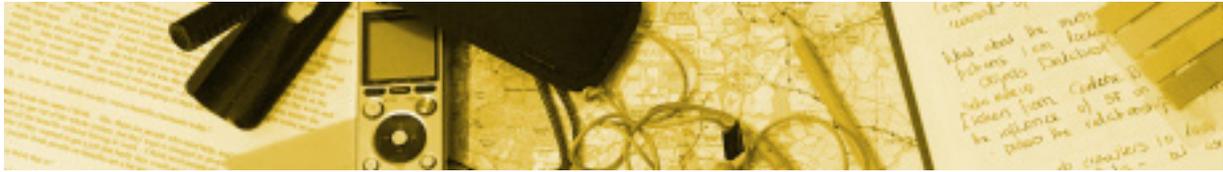


and vocabulary to capture the "bird-like movements of the swans (preening, gliding, pecking)". While the dancers were clearly flapping their arms, describers chose to refer to their "wings", in order to suggest how dancers' movements were intentionally crafted to invoke birds.

Having themselves embodied the "bird-like" dances, audio describers provide kinesthetic, sensorially-unspecific terminology through which experiences produced by the dance can be transmitted to sight-impaired audiences. Although the centrality of the "bird-related" vocabulary may seem enforced by describers' subjective interpretations, the associations triggered by swans' "wings" amongst listeners could arguably vary, ranging from tranquility to aggression. Treating writing as an active experience, within which embodying fieldwork recollections is possible, is a vital means to diagnosing and contesting subjective influences by describers.

The capacity to provide diverse experiences through writing is, I maintain, most available to researchers who engage in embodied fieldwork and then recall these experiences somatically whilst writing ethnography. Undeniably, ethnographic fieldwork is certain to contain many more aspects to embody and may be harder to distill in the same way as dancers' movements in a scripted performance. Drawing on AD practice, I would suggest beginning with the bodily encounter the researcher is writing about. Sensitivity to the researcher's own body during write-up, including experiencing the spatial-temporal situation, motion, rhythm, form, content, and language, would help to explore the fieldwork encounter from another experiential viewpoint. Introducing embodiment of those specific fieldwork experiences here would shed light on how to best write about and transmit those experiences.

Whether it is staying attuned to their own writing experience or embodying features of the dance, describers' insistence on engaging through the body seems to pervade the creative process of AD, from script preparation to live delivery. Janette, for instance, noted, "I found the hardest part of all was getting started- finding my `voice`- because the `detached observer` mode ...' just didn't seem to work for ballet; even I was bored by my own early efforts". Embodied engagement may indeed be the one common denominator between the diverse media forms in multi-modal ethnography. Moreover, as describers have shown, the body brings together various sensory modalities which could prove relevant for accessing multi-modality. There may be potential to coordinate writing, filming, and collecting sounds, smells, and flavours to produce a specific embodied engagement- by ethnographers or their audiences. What is clear, however, is the need to recognise the porous boundaries between fieldwork and post-fieldwork (Van Maanen, 2011), which I propose blurring further by noting the experiential nature of both fieldwork and write-up.



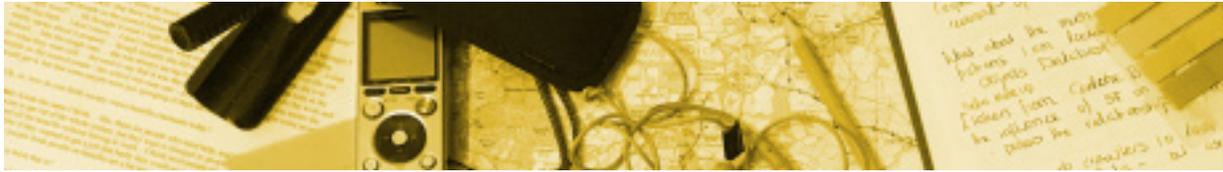
Conclusion

Anthropological debates on writing ethnography have mostly been occupied with assessing content, style, and the capacity to represent complex experiences, like those unearthed by multi-modal fieldwork. In striking contrast, I have argued for an approach that reorients attention towards the writer herself and her embodied experience of the write-up process beyond the field. My source of inspiration and comparison for these arguments has been my own ethnographic research among audio describers of dance, who reveal that writing produces experiences which can provide a fresh, often valuable perspective on the data collected during immersive fieldwork. Drawing on describers' practices, I have suggested that reenacting fragments of that embodied fieldwork may help to deepen knowledge of the ethnographic experience, illuminating the modes of expression constituting it and how else it could be transmitted to audiences who cannot perceive these modalities.

The truly unique characteristic of representing multi-modal ethnography is the importance of extending commitment from phenomenological fieldwork to phenomenological write-up. Rather than being a simple matter of altering word choices, I have proposed that writing up multi-modal insights requires a theoretical interest in furthering phenomenological understandings of textuality, and in this instance, demands ethnographers to construct certain relationships with their work, defined by a somatic, sensory, emplaced awareness of the writing process. This article makes a case for why the question of writing the multi-modal is a serious one, and judging by my findings, could be an area that requires methodological training, or at least, more scholarly discussion.

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Harshadha Balasubramanian is a Masters candidate in Anthropology at University College London (UCL). She conducted fieldwork on Audio Description practices in the UK- for sight-impaired theatre-goers - whilst an undergraduate at Cambridge University. Since then, she has published and presented her findings amongst both the anthropological and Audio Description community. Twitter: [@HarshaEtAl](https://twitter.com/HarshaEtAl)