Article

Imagination as Method

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Abstract

In the article the authors argue for the imagination as a central method in ethnography employed to create a more abundant, just, and connected planet. Imagination is the creative energy that links conscious with the generation of the world of material experience. Through imagination the ethnographer becomes immersed in a space of play in which the world can be imagined as something not yet or in emergence, rather than as it is. Our hope is that by employing imagination in this way, ethnography can be focused to generating new possibilities for life on the planet.

Keywords: ethnography, imagination, research method

> "It will take big, creative imaginations for us to evolve to the next step. Imagination is not fed by fear, but by beauty" (Susan Osborn, singer songwriter, quoted in Lappe, 2009, pg. 194).

The rise of the global has allowed for a shift in consciousness to emerge. As the idea of the nation-state fissures, perforates, and decenters under the pressures of both top-down and bottom-up globalization, new strategies and methods emerge for the ethnographer to explore the nature of social and cultural lived experience. In this article, we will suggest that the imagination is an ethnographic strategy and method that is fundamental not just for understanding culture and society but for offering the possibility of a more abundant, just, and connected planet. Appadurai (1989) argues that in the age of globalization, imagination must occupy a central position in the ethnographic project. For Appadurai, imagination allows individuals and communities to construct identities that are elsewhere, or permits connections within and between communities separated by vast distances of space and time. Moreover, participating in and understanding the global flows of information, people and goods require the application of imagination. Imagination is at the center of contemporary lived experience, and it must become the central focus of the ethnographer.

The global is a particular kind of space/time matrix that some have argued is quite different from our modern model of the territorialized, contained, and bounded nation-state. It is a space constituted by the creative, generative, and imaginative capacities of human social experience (Brah, 2002). With this imaginative conception of contemporary global space, it is imperative to rethink the ethnographic methods that have been traditionally used to examine and understand society. Our purpose in this article is to reformulate ethnography so that it becomes an act of imagining and generating the contours of society and culture rather than describing intact cultures or societies that exist outside or beyond the observations and analyses of the ethnographer. The rearticulated and emerging social geographies of the global offer the potential for rethinking the relationship between society, individuals, and researchers that is established through the practice of ethnography. The new global space is, at its core, generative and creative, and requires that imagination become the centerpiece of ethnographic work. Moreover, we argue that this imagination should be intentionally focused toward imagining and generating a better society.

Because the primary concern of ethnography is culture and society, we must first foreground the imaginative, creative, and generative aspects of modern global society. Within a reimagined global space we can centralize imagination for the field of ethnography. Rather than imagination as characteristic of an individual mind, we follow Cornelius Castoriadis (2002) in suggesting that imagination is the energy through which consciousness and the material world are integrated and society is generated. Our historical, and distinctly modern, understanding of an individual/society dichotomy disintegrates so that acts of imagination are simultaneously acts of social generation. Imagination offers the potential of ethnographic work to generate a particular kind of society rather than simply describing it. It is our hope that a reimagined form of ethnography can be brought into the service of generating a more abundant, just, and connected planet.

The Global Socius

To remain consistent with the perspective we are building in this article, we will not attempt to describe a set of circumstances that obtain objectively, but imagine a possibility. We offer a set of ideas about how one can possibly understand the nature of the global and imagine the individual's place within in it. We suggest that the social space of the global acquires characteristics that are very different from those of the nation-state model. The imaginary that attempts to capture the nature of this space implies a much more fluid, dynamic, and inventive kind of geography in which the contemporary model of bounded sovereign spaces is losing its imaginative and practical power. In *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization* (1989) Appadurai

believes that the nation-state model of society is on its last legs and that the global is emerging as a system of fluctuating social networks articulated through the imaginative labor of migration and media. He suggests a global model of flows and scapes through which political, economic, and cultural goods traverse the planet and form a diverse and constantly shifting agglomeration of social networks. Similarly, in *Sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century* (2000) Urry argues that the nation-state model of society, which has served as the foundation of sociology, is not valid in the age of the global. For Urry, the global is constituted by an overlapping series of mobilities that are generated by the flows, transitions, and movements of people, objects, and ideas across planetary boundaries. Mobilities define the social as aggregates of movement. The people who constitute these fluid aggregates are less like the coherent polis of the Greek city-state or the people of American constitutionalism, and more like Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) postmodern intentional political networks that are constantly in the process of being formed, dissolved, and reformed in response to the prevailing socio-political landscape, social movements, and human desires.

Given that the very idea of the global relies on the imaginative and figurative transgression of boundaries that have traditionally marked society and culture, we follow certain scholars who argue that the concepts of society and culture that have been foundational in sociology and anthropology are forms of existence that do not work for understanding the nature of human sociality in the global (McGrew, 1992). Rather than society, we have developed the term socius. Definitions of socius foreground intentional social relationships and groupings such as "companions" or "allies" that are articulated by "joining in" or "sharing". The social geography of the socius is, thus, generated only by the intentional groupings or networks that are by their very nature ephemeral. As a consequence, the socius is a constantly shifting and moving agglomeration of networks. In a global socius, networks of people, ideas, and goods are always held together by the shear will and force of the participants. These networks arise through a set of linked interests (social, political, and cultural) that disperse when these are exhausted for the moment and reform in another time and space (Latour, 2005).

The intentional groupings that constitute the socius acquire a self-organizing and emergent quality in which participants in the network are not always aware of their inclusion into the network. Hawken (2007), for example, shows how a linked and intersecting global environmental movement emerged largely without participants being aware of their inclusion in the broader movement. They became a network and formed a social movement, not through a visible leader, an organizational bureaucracy, or some agreed upon mission statement but through a consciousness built around the diffusion of fundamental principles articulated in concrete action. It is a self-organized, rhizomatic, and leaderless global movement organized from the ground up and made manifest through actions and ideas generated within a particular place. It is only through these intentional, yet constantly reshaping groupings and networks that the global socius takes form.

The global socius exists as, and is nothing more than, concrete human imaginative generativity. In the global socius there are no institutions to protect and define the internal or external limits of society or coalesce a normative identity as "citizen," there are no juridical bodies that compel compliance or mete out justice, there are no mechanisms of redress; there are only the people acting, doing, and being. The global socius, while existing on a plane of immanence is entirely virtual.

Too often the idea of the virtual has been co-opted into discourses of computer generated virtual reality. The global socius is a virtual poiesis that generates an imaginative and creative geography of being and action that both exceeds and intertwines the stuff of direct human experience. Hardt and Negri (2000) define the virtual as human action constituted in the space articulated outside the disciplinary and regulatory forces of the corporate state:

> Whereas "outside measure" refers to the impossibility of power's ordering and calculating production at the global level. "Beyond measure" refers to the vitality of the productive context the expression of labor as desire, and its capacities to constitute the biopolitical fabric of empire from below. (p. 357)

Here the virtual is generated through the excess energies of human existence (consciousness, desires, needs) that extends and deterritorializes the fixed Cartesian bourgeois individual as they are merged into rhizomatic assemblages of the ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological components of human life. Being, consciousness, experience, and the material body are enmeshed within phenomenological states that extend and merge the self into an intricate and constantly mutating social geography.

Imaginary

It is here that the social imaginary flares into full view as the generative force by which the global socius comes into being. Imagination is not just a cognitive process that exists within the mind, but the creative energy that links consciousness and its concrete manifestation in the world. For Castoriadis (2002) the imagination is the tool through which society articulates itself at any given moment in history: "The imaginary of the society ... creates for each historical period its singular way of living, seeing, and making its own existence" (p. 128). A positivist, post positivist, or critical social science that merely strives to describe a contemporary reality ultimately does little more than mystify the root cause of a slowly disintegrating system. Even work of a "critical" bent simply reflects these problems back to the audience, thus enclosing consciousness and possibility within the frame of these problems and stifling an imaginary that offers a potential way through.

Castoriadis fears that the creative exhaustion evident in postmodern art, science, politics, and philosophy has led to the stagnation of an imaginary intended to generate autonomy and liberty. The people are being compelled to succumb to a vision of society that is generated and controlled by forces that are not concerned with justice and liberty but narrow versions of consumption. This can be countered only by a grand awakening of the social imagination in which society is renewed and rejuvenated into the practice of freedom. This is made possible as the imagination extends people into the social space, thus generating concrete social effects, where "the radical imagination of a singular human being can henceforth become a source of creation on the collective and 'real' level" (p. 166). Imagination is social generation.

Because the imagination generates the global socius, it must be intentionally focused and directed to achieve desired outcomes. Our hope is that the imagination can be directed to generating a more abundant, just, and connected planet. By directing the energy of the imagination to this purpose, it is nurtured and expanded so that it encompasses our consciousness, our ways of being in the world, and our work as ethnographers. The imaginative and generative become the life force through which a more abundant, just, and connected planet emerges from our daily activity. Ethnography is just one of those activities by which the life force of imagination can be directed to this purpose.

By replacing traditional notions of society with a socius that is generated through imagination, ethnography and the ethnographer are placed in an invigorated relationship to social forms that is marked by generativity and possibility. Rather than standing outside the objects of social and cultural inquiry, the ethnographer is sculpting social and cultural relationships from the inside into a particular form.

Methodologies/Epistemologies

> "Sometimes you have to show people the world you want them to see before they can believe it's possible" (Blake, 2014, Frankenstein vs X-men section, para 2).

By using imagination in this manner, we are suggesting that imagination is not just one component of ethnographic work that can be compartmentalized into a specific component of inquiry, but is its very foundational organizing principle. Imagination can be the method of ethnographic work, but it requires us to think a bit differently about the nature of method.

Method is typically understood as the strategies or techniques that are employed for conducting ethnographic inquiry. Historically, the methods and epistemologies of ethnography have been guided by a mythos situated in the scientific tradition. The myth unfolds something like this. The life-world is transformed into "data" (signs) using techniques of observation, interview, and document collection, which are rigorously analyzed through rational strategies that separate, bound, and order. The results are placed into a rational narrative that organizes data into interpretive and explanatory schemes. This is a positivist sequencing that attempts to deploy language to establish rational links between the object of study, data collection, analysis, and finally, to the representation. While this is often a compelling story that carries significant weight in the ethnographic imagination, it has been creatively disrupted and challenged in a variety of ways.

The sociology of science has shown that, far from the positivist fantasy of a rational order, the work of scientists must also be understood as a socio-political act (Harding, 1991; Latour, 2005). Practitioners in the ethnographic, qualitative, and naturalistic traditions, such as Laurel Richardson and Ernest Lockridge (2004) have challenged the boundaries that divide ethnographic from creative nonfiction forms of research by dissolving the scientific/aesthetic divide. Traditions of ethnographic practice, such as performance ethnography, arts-based research, life-writing, narrative inquiry, and autoethnography have emerged as counter narratives for ethnographic inquiry. These traditions have challenged the unquestioned hegemony of the scientific narrative, and have generated a terrain upon which new directions for ethnographic inquiry can be explored.

Yet, even with the emergence of ideas and practices that challenge the hegemony of the scientific, what has not been challenged is realism: The desire to understand things "as they are." Whether submerged in research that is scientific, performative, or aesthetic, the drive is to generate an understanding of the way things are or have been, rather than the way they could be. For this reason, ethnography remains confined to "the desert of the real": The reductive peeling off of layers of obfuscation to reveal the tragedy of what is (Zizek, 2002). Just as Morpheus showed Neo the ugly reality of a desolate landscape hidden away by the layered fantasy of *The Matrix* (Silver & Wachowski, 1999), it has been the ethnographer's job to reveal the world as it is. Although contemporary articulations of ethnographic research are rife with possibility for moving in a direction that foregrounds promise over fact and the possible over the real, ethnographic research remains largely tied to a persistent realism.

In an imagination as method, methodological and epistemological concerns collapse and become indistinguishable. Accepted methods that prescribe techniques and strategies for gathering, organizing, analyzing, and reporting data tend to differentiate, separate, and rationally order the various components of an ethnography, such as the social grouping, the researcher, strategies, and techniques of data collection and analysis, and representation. The goal in this understanding of method is to tether the signifier to the sign (implying that the signified is always the same). In the imagination these differences fade to the background, as the world of experience that encompasses a social setting, participants, researchers, artifacts and knowledge co-emerge. The desire for the static sign is replaced with what could possibly be, and the signified is unmoored from an acculturated understanding of the sign. In the following section, we discuss methods of the imagination, not as separate techniques and strategies that must be sequestered and ordered, but as a ferment of the ways of being in the world that are unique to ethnography.

The Play of Signs

We call the play of signs the phenomenon by which the sign and the signified integrate consciousness with the material world, through a playfulness that is incorporated into the relationship between the sign and its signified. Signs are the very foundation of meaning, because meaning is derived from the ways in which signs are linked to the object or phenomena experienced in the material world. A sign is made up of two parts—a signifier (i.e., the word OPEN) and a signified (i.e., that the shop is OPEN for business). The signifier and signified together create a sign. There is, however, a slippage or play that exists between the signifier and the signified that offers the possibility for multiple interpretations. For example, when the word OPEN (signifier) is at the top of a food carton, the signified concept has nothing to do with a business being open. When the signified is changed, then the sign (both the signifier and the signified) has a different meaning (Chandler, 2013).

Ethnography constitutes the liminal space of play through the generation and organization of signs. The sign is a reduction of being, the life-world of experience, into symbols (image, language) that are rationally categorized and organized. Often, the play that is infused into all of these activities is hidden behind a rhetoric of serious, rational science, of certainty and the real. Derrida (1978) suggests that being, or the understanding of being, begins with play. Data (a particular kind of sign) are generated and their analysis, articulation, and ordering can be the object of a rationally contained imagination. Rather, freeplay should be conceived of as the activity of origination and generation for the sign.

The study of play as a social phenomenon is often coarticulated with the imagination, in which play is a form of imaginative activity. It is the play/imagination nexus through which individuals are loosened from their moorings in narratives of verisimilitude, and which allows for what Brian Sutton-Smith (2001) conceptualizes as "the effacement of the boundaries between the real and the make believe" (p. 138). Play is conducted in a liminal space constructed through the constant negotiation between the supposed certainty of the real and the ambiguity of the imagination.

Working in the imaginary demands playing through rhizomatic passageways searching for thresholds and liminal spaces of generativity. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose that the metaphor of the rhizome plant's system (such as crabgrass or a spider plant) offers an appropriate visual of a linked dynamic system with no originary point. The rhizome is a means to visualize ways in which movements of differentiation, linearity of beginnings and endings, and seeming contradictions coexist in complex relation (Wiebe et al., 2008). Badiou's (1988) work contends that innovation occurs when an "event," a break from the status quo, unbounded by time but specific to place (on the edge of what is considered "void"), elicits an individual's conviction to develop a truth that is born out of the eventual site. These commitments to new truths are ephemeral as they are distinguished through an intensity of differences (Daignault, 1992; De Landa, 1999; Deleuze, 1994). The intensity of differences can be best understood by thinking about how one thing blends into another when mixed. Imagine a helium balloon. The intensity of difference is seen in the floating of the balloon. Once the helium is let out into the air, the intensity is lost. Once the "difference" is assimilated, the event is no longer new. In attempting to articulate the liminal passage, Daignault (1992) writes, "I am trying to save difference itself . . . the passage itself (p. 196). It is thus by wandering, and playing in the rhizomatic liminal passageways, that encounters of experiencing difference mark the birth of newness.

In a method of the imaginary, play moves to the foreground in all activities related to the generation and organization of signs. With the sign no longer anchored directly to the signified, an imaginative reworking and rearticulation of signs is encouraged. By treating the sign as an inherent component of play, the ethnographer is open to infusing with imagination her or his activities related to the generation, organization, and representation of signs. This means that,

rather than establishing the reality of an already existing phenomenon, play allows the ethnographer to imagine ways in which the signs constructed from everyday experience can be rearticulated into promise and possibility.

Mythopoiesis

The purpose and outcome of the play of signs is a mythopoiesis: The generation of ethnographic narratives that have an impact on the way the world can be. It is the potential to generate new mythologies that offer the promise of a world that is abundant, just, and connected. Ethnographic work traditionally relies on the construction of narratives: stories used to make sense of and to give meaning to lived experience. By freeing the sign from the chain of positivist reasoning in which it is anchored to the signifier, the play of signs allows for a projection into a place-not-yet, a place of possibility, or a place in emergence.

Mythopoiesis is the creation of a new mythos that can guide and focus the work of the ethnographer. Leonard and Willis (2008) define mythopoiesis as the active construction of stories and narratives that "give us a place to stand in this world" (p. 2) by activating the imagination within an ethical movement to define and provide meaning to our place in the world. In this sense, a myth is more than a narrative or a story; it is the employment of signs (language, artifacts, bodies) in the generation of a place not yet, or a space other than but intimately connected to the here and now. Myths are "emplaced," meaning that knowledge and story emerge from within a particular geography, while creating the place as it could be (Weiner, 2001).

A mythos is more than its Western cultural variant that treats myth only as a story sequestered in language. Myth acquires an importance for human existence that is beyond the realm of the fantastic. A myth begins with the ethical and cosmological component of human existence to form a place across dimensions of space and time. In myth, place is much more than a geography that exists outside human consciousness and crosses the boundary between past, present, and future, between self and world, and between external and internal forms of life experience. Myths generate a geography where "our life experiences on a purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive" (Campbell, 2011, p. 5). Mythopoiesis is a generative activity co-creating the life-worlds of consciousness and the material conditions of experience.

Unfortunately we are all aware of the dystopic and sick versions of the future that populate the media (Hedges, 2013). This can be clearly seen in the paucity of imagination that infects our students. In a conversation the first author had with a colleague, he was dismayed over his students' inability to imagine a hopeful future. They seemed to always turn to a Hollywood version of an apocalyptic future in which hope is submerged in violence. Rather than generating myths of a democratic, egalitarian, nurturing, or joyful society, we seem stuck in narrow dystopic visions of what our society could be. New myths are required that can help us to envision and work toward a society that is hopeful, abundant, vibrant, and just, and ethnography can be brought into the service of creating such myths.

Values

Myths are ethical structures and ethnographers clearly bring a set of values to their work. Rather than trying to create an imaginary, "value free" ethnography, the standard is for researchers to understand the values they bring to their research and the bias this will inevitably generate (Hegelund, 2005). The values brought to the ethnographic project will reflect and lead to the desired outcome. Some ethnographers may choose to bring a set of positivist values, such as objectivism, reliability, and validity, to their work and engage in a quest for "certain" knowledge about the cultures and societies that people inhabit. Others want their research to work in the service of social justice and they start with values such as equity, activism, and solidarity that

guide their work (Madison, 2011). Ethnography has clearly been able to subsume a variety of values and goals into its theories and methods.

Ethnography, when practiced through a methodology of imagination, is much more than just an exercise in interpretation because it can be brought into the service of imagining and generating the kind of world we would wish ourselves to live in. Imagination is fundamentally generative and creative and not contained to acts of interpretation. This means that the values brought to the endeavor must reflect this goal. There does not exist a clear set of values that is most appropriate to the task of generating a better society. However, we believe values that are conducive to a just, abundant, hopeful, and vibrant society can be found throughout the ethnographic and imaginative spectrum. Critical ethnography proceeds from values of social justice, activism, equity, and solidarity (Thomas, 1993). Castoriadis believes that autonomy, liberty, and freedom should be the focus of imagination. Ivan Illich (1973) suggests friendship, conviviality, and community as guiding principles for the constitution of society. The documentary filmmaker Velcrow Ripper organizes his films around love, spirituality, compassion, and activism.

By adopting and intentionally employing values that reach across domains of human existence to affirm life, foment connection, and enhance well-being, ethnography becomes a vehicle for imaging and generating a more abundant, just, and connected planet. Wendel Berry (1994) offers a musing on the importance of certain values to a flowering imagination, and on making connections to other people and to our environment.

> It is by imagination, that we cross over the differences between ourselves and other beings and thus learn compassion, forbearance, mercy, forgiveness, sympathy, and love—the virtues without which neither we nor the world can live. (p. 143)

There are many possible choices, but it is essential that an ethnographer of the imagination intentionally adopt values and ethical commitments she or he believes will encourage the imaginative generation of a world in which we would wish to live.

What kinds of projects might an ethnographer of the imagination conduct? As with the many different aspects of ethnography we have discussed thus far, we hope that this question is answered in an imaginative manner, and that a multiplicity of types and kinds of projects can emerge. In the following section, each of the authors discusses research projects from their own work that fall within the parameters of our reimagined ethnography. These examples illustrate how ethnography can be wrested from a realism that seeks only to describe the world, and how to employ an imaginary that visualizes and generates new possibilities for ethnography, the ethnographer, and global society.

The Global Creative: Michael Hayes

The global creative is a project started by the first author. In fact, the subject of this current article emerged from the development of the global creative project. The purpose of the global creative is to articulate a version of a global citizen who would exist within the emerging articulations of the global, as described at the beginning of this this article. Within the imaginative, mobile, and virtual quality of the global socius, I argue that the global citizen is an impossibility because the idea of citizenship emerged from and is defined by the nation-state. With a global that exists beyond the assumptions of the nation-state, the idea of citizen loses any meaning. Rather than citizens who participate in the established institutions of the nation-state, the global creative engages in acts of cultural, political, and economic generativity.

The global creative is simultaneously an image of an individual and a social movement. Without the nation-state to serve as a model of bounded social relations, the global creative extends beyond identity to Heidegger's (1962) notion of "being-in-the-world." The global creative engages in a form of dwelling where the self emerges from and folds back into the world in

mutual regeneration (Bachelard, 1964). The global creative does participate in preexisting institutions but constitutes the global socius through the imaginative generation of cultural, political, and economic activities. Taking some liberties with Hardt and Negri (2000) the global creative "calls the global socius into being."

My work is ethnographic because I work to articulate the global creative as a particular kind of being who maneuvers through social space; no different than what would be expected of a more traditional ethnography. I imagine an individual and a movement that I would like to see emerge into our ever expanding present. My imaginative activity, in conjunction with that of others, rearticulates phenomenological experiences with a diverse group of people across the planet. Some I have met and formed close relationships with (Hayes, Saul, & Sawyer, 2012), others I have seen only through TED talks or videos posted on YouTube. For example, Hamed works tirelessly in the Jordan Valley of the Occupied Palestinian Territories building mud brick homes and schools in contravention to Israeli policies against Palestinian building. Quillisascut Farms in Northern Washington invite people to their organic goat cheese farm to learn about and experience sustainable community-based methods of growing and cooking food. These individuals and groups work to generate forms of living within their own communities. Moreover, they engender certain qualities like situating their work in a particular place but always exerting a global consciousness. They live lives and conduct work that is for the purpose of building a socius that is infused with the values of community, hope, and possibility. Friendship, love, beauty, and compassion are the values that drive their work and my imagination of them. To call them citizens or global citizens does not capture the depth, beauty, and social force of their work and their lives.

As I imagine and write the global creative into being, I am offering the potentiality of a particular kind of person, a movement, and a socius that is in the act of becoming. Imagination rearticulates the essential characteristics of individuals I have encountered and with whom I have worked. I extrapolate the central concrete features of individuals and groups into a mythical space, where these can be sculpted into something other than what they are at this moment. My ethnographic work folds phenomenological experience into a virtual world through which these experiences are reimagined. The global creative emerges at the nexus of our life experience and consciousness.

My experiences with and my imaginings of the global creative are intended to offer a fragment of potentiality that can exist in the world. The global creative intentionally employs a creative and generative imagination to articulating a more just, abundant, and connected planet.

What the River Says: Francene Watson

> "Around the world, we are turning to the nature we have hidden. … The power of nature will generate the power of people" (Soukup & Bacle, 2013).

This on-going river ethnographic project emerges from a commitment to enliven the fullness of relationship in education—a much-needed endeavor in response to education's steepening compartmentalization and standardization. One of the many gifts of meandering in a post-positivistic era is that we are continually compelled to search the landscape for new guides for support. This is all the more important for those of us working through ethnography to restory education, environment, and culture (McKenzie, Hart, Bai, & Jickling, 2009) toward a more just, fulfilling, and sustainable world. Concrete and constructed notions connected to the rhetoric of "pillars" (e.g., institutional vision foci) for example, are too rigid and don't allow for the flex, fluidity, and flow needed to expand in an already-always changing global and interconnected world. Over time, even the most solid of foundations give way and crack and crumble. Put another way, no life responds well over time to being bound or straightened. This understanding, however nimble, is a beginning and strengthening orientation in an ethnographic endeavor to shift from describing and fixing meaning and quite literally, going with the flow.

"Going with the flow" may seem, at first blush, too simple, obvious, or cliché a phenomenon and/or theoretical framework for the somewhat serious work of ethnographic research. But let us playfully look again at the way of water (Eppert, 2009). For water, action is not characterized as "taking action" because movement is simply what is so (p. 198). This "way" is not disconnected from the movement inherent to our own in-the-flesh bodies. Reflecting the earth's land–water composition, our human bodies weigh in at approximately two-thirds water. Coursing through our cells rivers of water enable our being-ness in the world.

In calling the global socius into being, water—the river in particular—affirms and activates a critical imaginary needed to free us up so as to reconstitute and reclaim the full potential of participation in our interwoven biotic communities. In other words, like the river's way, we see the global socius as a collective being where, expansion and free flow are always possible. For the river, the removal of barriers to allow for the free flow of water is, always and already, only a matter of time. As artist Andy Goldsworthy and his ephemeral work attests in the documentary *Rivers and Tides* (Reidelsheimer, 2001), there is a lot to be learned about time by the river. In differentiated ways, the global socius is realizing a more true authority and breaking from the bamboozlement of modern mechanistic guise and reclaiming life's inherent and dynamic flow.

Moving imagination and generativity to the forefront of ethnographic research, then, purposes us to partake in particular kinds of action that unblocks the ways being inscribed by scientific/enlightenment-era discourses and dominant narratives. In this way, freeing story—a new mythos—could be seen in parallel with networks of people freeing rivers. The beginning quote for this section, for instance, comes from a French-Canadian film documenting present tunneling to uncover "lost rivers"—the rivers we built our city centers on throughout modern, industrial era. Well understood, but perhaps not obvious, is that despite our essential dependency on the river's fresh water flow, we increasingly reduced, pushed out, concretized, dammed, diked, straightened, covered, managed, and blocked access to the very thing that makes life possible. Resilient, flow remains, and finding lost rivers is like finding possibility and potential from an age of mechanism back or toward, life.

Could imagination as method inside of ethnographic research create this kind of being? If so, it would respond to Gough's (2009) call to "encourage forms of storytelling that move beyond the conceptual and linguistic binaries, objectifications, and separations that are so deeply part of English language and identity, and invite a sense of kinship with the earth" (p. 197) and create the much called for "myths and metaphors that 'sing' the earth into existence" (p. 197). What can we learn from such songs? In relationship with land/scapes for many millennia, indigenous knowledge and language systems continue to hold a dynamic quality much needed for our times, a cultural evolution where "biodiversity and linguistic diversity are intertwined" (Rasmussen & Akulukjuk, 2009, p. 286). We can simultaneously look toward the future for expansion and imagine a return to relational complexity

"Being" the river—and over time, a watershed—teaches us to first view things whole and act accordingly, despite what may not be easily understand in the moment. It does not allow me to cut myself, or anything, or anyone, out. The river teaches ways to be response/able over merely re/acting to/with a broken up, reductive, disposable, and compartmentalized world. Creating an ability to respond is an emerging life-sustaining worldview (Macy & Brown, 1998), which might be best illustrated through the recent undamming of rivers in the place where I live. Resilient, on a different trajectory of time and always bending toward life, the White Salmon River withstood 100 years of colonial/power harnessing. As the deconstruction of the Condit dam began, a steelhead trout found a hole in the concrete wall, swam through, and began swimming upstream to the river's headwaters. This slight, ecological moment inspires me to then ask what we can learn from this base, symbiotic relationship—one working to mirror that we are a part of nature, not on top of it, and this has always been so. We are as capable as our more-than-human partners

to create a world that reflects the truth of just how interconnected and interdependent we are; science is catching up to myth (Berry, 1994).

As a researcher, the interplay of these events connected to "undamming" provides an image and lens for what is both needed and possible in both education and our local communities, all ecosystems. As we have expressed in various parts of this article, imagining the river has increasingly become a way of being and is wholly integrated in the work that I do. As a teacher-educator, especially in an era where the blocking and straightening of children (and teachers) have reached new levels of absurdity, imagining what is possible through this image of freeing the river generates profound and audacious hope.

Ethnographic Fiction: Pauline Sameshima

Jeanette Winterson (1995) posits "The fiction, the poem, is not a version of the facts, it is an entirely different way of seeing" (p. 28). Robert Fulford (1999) notes that "stories are how we explain, how we teach, how we entertain ourselves, and how we often do all three at once. They are the juncture where facts and feelings meet" (p. 9).

A work I have been exploring consists of prose and poetic diary entries by Désirée, a character from feminist author Kate Chopin's 1893 short story, *Desiree's Baby*. The original short story is about Desiree, an adopted white skinned woman, who marries Armand, a plantation owner in Louisiana. Their baby appears to be of mixed ethnicity and thus questions ensue. Armand disowns Desiree and she disappears into the Bayou with the baby. At the end of the short story, Armand finds a letter from his deceased mother revealing his black ancestry. Using fiction, life writing, and poetic inquiry, Desiree's Diary provides a creative opportunity to challenge conceptions of power, truth, history, time, and fiction. Foucault (1980) suggests, "Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth" (p. 93). Finding "truths" to trouble personal stories and historical contexts through fiction are essential for helping researchers and readers reflect on canonical thought, and reflexively contest our ways in the world. Smith (2013), explaining life writing, and here used to describe ethnographic fiction, suggests the following:

> Practiced in a disciplined way [life writing] allows for the "coming through" of life experiences that don't count in conventional registers of value, mainly because those registers (status ideologies of intelligence, beauty, etc.) can't allow for the true complexity and interdependence of all of life. (p. xv)

The diary entries focus on critical, feminist, post-modern, hermeneutic, phenomenological, autobiographical, and micropolitical thought. The micropolitical is the human living curriculum as aesthetic text, which "questions the everyday, the conventional, and asks us to view knowledge, teaching, and learning from multiple perspectives . . . and see as if for the first time" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 605). One of the guiding questions of this work includes the following: How might poetic research honor Strong, Silver, and Perini's (2001) definition of rigor as determined by complexity, ambiguity, provocation, and emotional challenge? This work challenges established forms of research through form itself (Sameshima, 2007), encourages subjectivity, heartens lived experiences as theory and knowledge, and presents alternatives for viewing the world, and thus opens potential differences for new "becomings" in the world.

Ethnographic fiction, when practiced through a methodology of imagination, imagines a world we wish for ourselves to live in. The imagination suggests a way of living that values an "embodied wholeness" (Sameshima, 2008), entwining Merleau-Ponty's (1968) "flesh" of the world with Amelia Jones' (1998) process of "reversibility."

> The relation to the self, the relation to the world, the relation to the other, all are constituted through a reversibility of seeing and being seen, perceiving and being

perceived, and this entails a reciprocity and contingency for the subject(s) in the world. (p. 41)

Embodied wholeness requires living inside and outside—living a hopeful, joyful, open esthetic, moving with courage and conviction, away from the safety of conformity, to the new, and to the open spaces where the impossible becomes possible (Sameshima, 2007, p. 33). One layer of embodied wholeness development is to attempt to improve "receptivity" or openness to learning. To do this reiterates Paulo Freire's (1997) position that "the more rooted I am in my location, the more I extend myself to other places so as to become a citizen of the world" (p. 39). Rootedness thus reiterates that the ethnographer who employs imagination as method "lives" a way of being, not simply performs an ethnographic method and thereby seeks to produce forms of knowledge that do not exist yet (Freire, 1997, p. 31).

> [The] movement in creative approaches to research is gaining ground, stretching from New Zealand to Australia to the USA and countries in between, from social sciences to health care practice to business to music and the arts, and disciplines in between. (Ellis & Bochner, 2008, p. 3)

Various international communities of researchers and practitioners have been established to support experimentation connecting scholarship and lived experience. Ellis and Bochner (2008), both ethnographers, suggest, "the heart is as important as the mind, the imagination as important as rigour, and meanings as important as facts" (p. 1). Bochner (2012) explains that the fictional conversation he has with his now deceased father is not the concluding conversation he never had, rather is it an opening, "a web of relations to be rewoven" (Rorty, 1989, p. 43), a way "to reshape a past which the past he never knew" (Rorty, 1989, p. 29). Leggo (2008) astutely distinguishes Cobley's (2001) notion that the quotidian experiences of our lives are meaningless until a narrative form is imposed upon them: Leggo (2008) observes that mundane events are already stories but their significance only come about in the ways those stories are told. In our opening, we describe how the sign can be freed from an automatic signifier and signified depending on how the story is told. In the method of imagination, the researcher stills a moment, captures and invests a particular meaning to an experience others are familiar with, and draws attention to it, hoping the reader may be opened to seeing anew (Greene, 1995).

Conclusion

There are many possibilities for ethnographers to explore when highlighting imagination in their work; yet, great care must be taken. We are not suggesting a modernist normative utopian project that is to be imagined whole and attainable in the future or another place, such as that proposed by Thomas More's *Utopia* or Karl Marx's communist society. We also do not believe that ethnographers or other intellectuals are the vanguard leading us to their imagined better world. Instead, we follow David Graeber (2004) in suggesting that ethnography can be brought into the service of imagining a better world by offering "gifts," fragments of possibilities that encourage dialogue and action concerning our shared prospects on the planet. There will not be one best image of society, because the imagination thrives on multiplicity and diversity and the opening of possibilities.

> When employing imagination as an ethnographic method, researchers must also be vigilant in understanding the subtle ways in which their imagination is framed by their current experience with and understandings of society. Levinson (2001) states: The world does not simply precede us, but effectively constitutes us as particular kinds of people. This puts us in the difficult position of being simultaneously heirs to particular history and new to it, with the peculiar result that we experience ourselves as "belated" even though we are newcomers. (p. 13)

We cannot disassociate ourselves from the forces that continue to shape our society. We are immersed in cultures infected with racist, sexist, intolerant, competitive, violent, and acquisitive ideologies. Our imaginations do not allow us to escape these, and we must be vigilant in how they frame our thoughts and our actions. Although these ideologies may not be removed from our imaginations, they can be recognized and addressed.

The imagination is a powerful method for envisioning and generating the good, and the field of ethnography can apply its considerable intellectual, practical, and political resources to the task. However, imagination must be intentionally directed for this purpose; it is a necessary but not sufficient tool for addressing the many challenges facing the planet. As ethnographers redirect their work to imaginative purposes the field of ethnography, and our understandings of society must change and grow in the direction of a more just, abundant, and connected planet.

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