# A Creative Ethnography Approach: Reconstructing the Socio-Material Remains of the Ghost Ships of Suva

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# DISCUSSION

# A Creative Ethnography Approach: Reconstructing the Socio-Material Remains of the Ghost Ships of Suva

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Drawing on visual elements, this article uses creative ethnography as a method of visualizing imaginative elements and observations. Generating improvised dialogues based on the visual prompts of the author's video entitled *Ghost Ships of Suva*, the technique explores and speculates on the imagined lives of sailors and workers who once inhabited the abandoned fishing vessels that were filmed in the Fijian island of Viti Levu. The material life of the vessels and their socio-material relationship with the past inhabitants are explored with the idea that even the discarded material world is full of subjectivities with which we can connect. As a discussion on the socio-material "lives" of these ships, as a meeting-point of socio-material subjectivities, the article employs an approach driven by Donna Haraway's concept of speculative fabulation. Through the reconstruction of dialogues, the article engages with Tim Ingold's paradigm of aliveness and improvization, part of the processes involved in making images and videos with the Creative Ethnography Network (CEN). The conclusion acknowledges the complexities of socio-material entanglement: where elements of intersubjectivity between researcher and subject become vital agents in producing ethnographic knowledge.

## THE GHOST SHIPS *IN SITU*

The chance discovery of a group of around twenty abandoned and rusting fishing vessels in the Suva harbor is the starting-point for this article, which uses the creative processes of video-making to peer beneath the layers of rust into the imagined worlds of the sailors and workers who would once have inhabited these vessels. Theatrical improvizations are used to construct

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*Figure 1  Abandoned vessels decomposing into their material elements of metal, rust and memory. (Screenshot from* Ghost Ships of Suva, *2020; photo by the author.)*

articulations of my own distant seafaring ancestors, via a blending of fictional elements aiming to capture unrecorded histories: a process that incorporates Donna Haraway's idea of "speculative fabulation" (2007, 4), a method of visualization which incorporates both imaginative elements and observation. Visuals captured on location are combined with reconstructions of the ships' interiors, leading to speculations of the material life of the vessels: a socio-material study embracing relational ethnography and the view that "the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with [these] others" (Harvey 2005, xi). Visuals from the author's ethnographic video *Ghost Ships of Suva* are the starting-point for speculations about the effects of decomposition on the socio-material elements of technology, rust, and memory: drawing from the improvized narratives which unfolded during the making of the video and, later in the article, contextualizing findings within the larger body of work produced by the Creative Ethnography Network (CEN 2021; Figure 1).

The *Ghost Ships of Suva* is a video documenting about 20 sea-going vessels abandoned to rust on a sandbank in a back harbor of Suva, the capital city of Fiji. I first came across this ship graveyard during a stormy downpour at the end of the hurricane season. Located some two kilometers offshore, the site compelled me to wait for a break in the downpour, sheltering in a local cafe whose owner unexpectedly offered to lend me his kayak. The impromptu video was filmed, during a short sunny spell between downpours, in slow motion, using a Panasonic GH5 at 180 frames per second, with the gliding motion of the kayak adding to the ethereal qualities of the experience of floating amongst these ghostly metal wrecks. Amongst my first impressions were the multiple names on SEAKA (Figure 2): remnants of a past held by faint, ghostly names which immediately drew my interest to the intangible memories

*Figure 2 SEAKA/KOHINE MARU no. 31, multiple names written on abandoned vessels. (Screenshot from* Ghost Ships of Suva, *2020; photo by the author.)*

behind the presence of the physical materials. Later I was surprised to find that some limited information was readily available on SEAKA: a fishing vessel built in 1973 by the Kesennuma Shipbuilding Company in Kesennuma, Japan; Length 30 m, width 7 m; gross tonnage 146. The original name, KOMINE MARU no. 31, was changed in 1997 to OAHU, and two years later to SEAKA (Maritime Connector 2020), when the ship became a permanent fixture on a sandbank in Suva harbor. However informative as this avenue of research was, I realized that I was looking for a different form of knowledge about the Ghost Ships: a more visceral investigation, generating an impressionistic sketch as a "heuristic through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world" (Barone and Eisner 2012, 3). The Ghost Ships heuristic, an imperfect approximation guided by speculative imaginings, follows a research paradigm that engages the "provision of a new perspective[s]" (*ibid.*), guided by a method of Creative Ethnography using improvized performance by an actor who attempts to express what it would be like to work and live on those ships. A creative approach to research is a method of rendering experiences that acknowledges murky realms of speculation: "extend[ing] beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (*ibid.*, 1). Seeking the "ineffable" amongst the material remains of 140-tonne sea vessels, the *Ghost Ships of Suva* aims to express the socio-material "lives" of the ships: the enmeshed entanglement of human and non-human elements; as a "whole system of people, practices, values, and technologies in a particular situatedness [… indicating] the way artifacts are included in the study of an individual" (Enquist 2008, 123–124). Creative Ethnography (CEN 2017) is a method that incorporates ideas from the material turn in social sciences, where the intra-actions of human and nonhuman actants (Barad 2007) form a socio-material meshwork of knowing

(Ingold 2008, 2011, 2014). The connection between social and material is inspired by Estrid Sørensen's observations about "how different materials contribute to constituting different forms of knowledge" (2009, 92): and this was a creative trigger for my encounters with the decaying ships as a meeting-point of socio-material subjectivities.

This study also draws on Bilge Merve Aktaş and Maarit Mäkelä's description of the socio-material as "a collaborative practice between the human and non-human participants, in which agency is distributed among the maker and the material [… as] a negotiation between the human and nonhuman entities, resulting in the artifact" (2019, 57). In the context of this article, there is a sense that the non-living entities of both ships and the spirits of their past inhabitants are being articulated through creative means. In Fiji, the location of this study, the socio-material is expressed in the indigenous Vanua framing of knowledge which, according to Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, embraces the idea of the relational self, not as an individual but as an expanded subjectivity that includes "the interconnectedness of people to their land, environment, cultures, relationships, spirit world, beliefs, knowledge systems, values and God(s)" (2008, 143). As a project that draws on "relationships, [in the] spirit world[s]" (*ibid.*) of ancestors, the *Ghost Ships of Suva* articulates some of the multiple "voices" of the relational self of the sea-bound "midden," where traces of human activity are held in their rusting socio-material hulls. The use of ancient midden sites has a very long tradition in anthropological research, indicating the social behavior of bygone cultures through "'anthropic sediment' formed by the transportation or deposition of materials by humans" (Shillito and Matthews 2013, 62). Amongst this "anthropic sediment" the researcher found ancestors and distant family relations whose unfortunate lives had been cast upon the waves of the maritime industries, discarded souls who lived and died on poorly maintained vessels, such as these hulks.

## SOCIO-MATERIAL DOCU-FICTION: VOICING THROUGH DRAMA AND IMPROVIZATION

Figure 3, a video still, reveals an encounter up-close with the processes of material decay that was a prominent feature of the overall impression of abandonment. Pitted by extensive marks and stains, the shiply presence of past inhabitants was acutely felt, as innumerable voices emerged from the layers of rusting metal. This impression was later reflected in an improvized voice-over as if spoken by the spirits of the ship, to express the discarded feeling of the location:

Not much you'd say about us, we don't normally get to tell this story. Somehow when you go paddling amongst the ghost ships, you start to hear the voices of the ghosts in there, in those ships. Anyway, you go down there paddling about, you're gonna hear stories, someone's gonna tell you a story or two about this or that. (Dialogue from the film *Ghost Ships of Suva*, Snake-Beings 2021, 07:08–07:50 min)

*Figure 3 Water-line oxidation suggesting layers of decay. (Screenshot from* Ghost ships of Suva, *2020; photo by the author.)*

With the promise of articulating the lost stories of both the material ship and the human worker, the above dialogue forms an introduction to the actor's intention to draw out narratives from the rotting ship: speculations on the experiences embedded within the encounter between researcher, camera, and materials. This method builds upon the tradition of performance ethnography, where dramatized dialogues are constructed from sometimes faint impressions of real-life events and objects. The use of improvized voice employs the expressive forces of the actor, where subtle nuances in tone, accent, and iteration are captured on video, the type of data "best represented, not through the page, but through embodied presentation" (Pelias 2007, 189, quoted in Bird 2020, 3). The process of generating these ghostly impressions might indicate that some kind of "spiritual method" has been appropriated from an earlier Creative Ethnography video made by the author in Vietnam, one in which the Lên Đồng medium becomes "possessed" by ancestors (Lauser 2018), as stated in the narrative of the on-screen (fictionalized) researcher: in that video

I took a few tips from the [Lên Đồng] medium, particularly in covering the face. For this I used an old piece of glass covered in oil [ … ] My ancestors would have been working on ships exactly like this, so I decided that I would channel them to find out the old stories.

(Voice of the researcher in *Ghost ships of Suva*, Snake-Beings 2021, 01:15–02:12 min).

Although the fictionalized-screen researcher is claiming some form of spiritual method "the actual process employs drama and improvization," well-established traits of video ethnography ever since Robert J. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922); a film made using a method of staged scenes and rehearsed actions which formed the basis of the documentary genre (Canet

2016, 149), but which has since been labeled "docufiction" (Rhodes and Springer 2006, 5). Often avoiding acknowledging the process of dramatic reconstruction, the history of ethnographic film, it can be said, has been engaged with a battle between the problems involved in capturing authentic events and the need for communicating effective representations of cultural actions. The proposal presented by the Ghost Ship project is that researchers acknowledge the dramatized construction of ethnographic video and embrace the idea that "performance is a way of knowing, and performance is a way of staking claims about that creation or knowledge" (Bell 2008, 18; also Coetzee 2018, 1). The theatrical improvization includes the onscreen researcher and the character that he claims to be "channeling," both of which are "fictional" or dramatized elements in the film: indicating the constructivist paradigm of the research and the employment of co-creative elements of fiction and nonfiction. Performed ethnography provides an entry into knowing what it would have been like on those ships by—according to Jane Bird—creatively enmeshing "dramatic action, nuances of speech and visual images" through which "the intellectual, emotional and embodied experiences of human events can be explored and communicated" (2020, 4).

## MULTIPLE SUBJECTIVITIES AND MULTI-AUTHORED ARTIFACTS

"To be one is always to become with many" (Haraway 2007, 4)

The experience of these multiple subjectivities takes the form of voices, situated not as the work of a solitary artist, but "constructed in action; not as an individual but as placed in the 'lived-in world'" (Sørensen 2009, 89). By viewing these ships as "multi-authored" artifacts (Snake-Beings 2013), bearing the marks and stains of numerous makers, and processes which unmake, they become the entrance-points to articulating the socio-material voices within a space where parallel authors, human and non-human, construct a line of what Donna Haraway calls "speculative fabulation" as narratives of "intra-active" subjectivity (2007, 4, quoted in Carstens 2020, 76). Speculative fabulation, according to Delphi Carstens, is a process of rendering an "embodied response to materiality and its affective conditions" which may produce kinships and "'uncomfortable affinities' with the more-than-human world with which humans are inseparably co-constituted" (2020, 75–76). "Uncomfortable affinities" and kinships are the sources of dialogue featured in *Ghost Ships of Suva*, where the author uses a form of speculative fabulation to give voice to distant genealogical affinities: channeling through dramatic improvization of the voices of ancestors; uncomfortably blurring the boundaries between ethnographer and subject of study:

My distant ancestors were sailors, immersed in the materials of these rusting ships for months and years on end, the smell of salt-bitten iron and steel permeating their nasal-brain interface and, in imaginative speculation, changing the ways they thought. It gave them an outlook on life, I imagine, which would be at odds with land-livers. The

unfixed prospect of itinerant workers floating in a giant metal world, breathing, tasting and smelling the ironwork amidst the clangs and clatter of ship life. (Author's fieldnotes 2020)

Investigating the "outlook on life" of the ship's inhabitants is a challenging task, given that the only empirical evidence is the remains of rusting metal hulls. A solution is to engage in the socio-material knots of these abandoned ships, entangling researcher and the socio-material elements and, as Staffan Appelgren says, "to adopt posthumanist perspectives on waste as traces of life" (2019, 65): to bring life across from the ghostly kinship of the ships:

"we're a dying breed, what I mean is, like, there ain't going to be people to do this kind of work. They'll come up with some kind of thing about health and safety" (04:10–04:20 min).

In this way, the voice of the actor also speaks for the decaying materials of the ship, as a way of voicing the non-human elements as multiple voices lurking amongst the rust and the imagination. This inevitably draws the researcher away from the safe ground of disengaged observation and suggests a creative departure from the naturalistic into the dynamic: escaping the static properties of the ruined Suva ships and the interplay of "uncomfortable affinities;" paths of "aliveness" as trajectories of improvization and creative speculation, which Tim Ingold describes as "drawing together or binding the trajectories of life. [ … ] describing the lives we observe and with which we participate, both in movement and at rest, in what is sometimes called the 'ethnographic encounter'" (2011, 221).

Such is the "ethnographic encounter" (*ibid*.) of this article, improvizing beyond the individual researcher paddling with a camera amongst countless tonnes of creaking, leaking, rusting metal, and requiring a process of "drawing together" (*ibid*.) multiple voices from far-flung corners and distant realms: a joining of various lines and incomplete sketches: "binding the trajectories of life" (*ibid*.) enmeshed within the iron seawater and forgotten pasts.

My distant family members worked and spent their entire lives on similar seagoing vessels where the rusting metals of the ships would have sustained them and their family units financially and materially. In turn, their lives and experiences would have permeated the materials of the ships: as a symbiotic relationship with the substances of shipping, through daily routines and familiar sensations. This closeness of biological and rusting machinery, as Haraway's cyborg kinships of "diverse bodies and meanings [which] co-shape one another" (2007, 4), focus on the "beyond human" qualities of our affinities. Connecting with the multiple voices of materials reminds us of our more-than-individual nature of consciousness, where we are "vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions" and where "to be one is always to become with many" (*idem*). These affinities also bring theory and practice into a similarly entangled space, acknowledging that "the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work" (Ingold 2014, 6; cited in Jackson 2018, 319).

EVOCATIVE REPRESENTATIONS

The main technique of building the character of the ancestor is through nuances of speech, drawing on the vocal traits of family members and their rough seafaring way of speaking: improvised as "a theatrical representation of ethnographic inquiry" (Bird 2020, 1)

they realized they… you can't get people who don't smoke to work on these rust buckets. These rust buckets don't come with a health warning, you know. (03:12–03:30 min)

Rather than expressing specific information, the dialogue of the channeled seafaring character, as above, articulates the expression of attitudes and context from which the researcher has come, a kind of self-reflective scorn for language in which the ancestor refuses to play the game or follow sensible life paths. The spluttering and coughing that accompany the loose theme of the joys of smoking, despite health warnings from doctors, is positioned against the dangers of the "rust buckets": the unhealthy conditions of life at sea in an unmaintained rusty iron ship. Linking the more abstract dangers of smoking with the visually obvious conditions of the ship is a way in which "excerpts of data enhanced the nuances of character interactions and the structuring of the invented dialogue combined to form an 'expression of a reality'" (Richardson 2000, 253) which was not apparent until filming the improvized characterization began.

The character of the ancestor (right side of the image in Figure 4) draws upon a sketchy image built from family-related stories, in much the way that an actor will try to get inside the motivations of their character, building on known traits toward a more intuitive, improvised understanding. The power of the imagination is often an intrinsic feature of ethnographic studies, not fully verbalized, but built into the capture of what Clifford Geertz called "thick descriptions" (1973, 6; Ryle 1971), as a recording of impressions, sketches, and sensations of the researcher as he or she edges toward some understanding of the ethnographic encounter. In this way the visuals and the dialogue work together through explicit and tacit knowing:
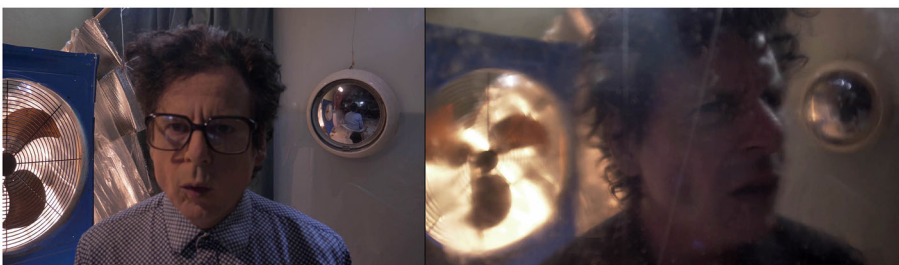


*Figure 4 Composite of two video stills showing fictional researcher (on left) and the "channeled" ancestor, behind the glass screen (right of image). (Screenshot from* Ghost Ships of Suva, *2020; photo by the author.)*

As humans, our understandings are built on explicit information via objects or information we can see, the words we use to describe what it is we see or is happening, and the tacit knowledge we use to fill the gap between these two areas because each of these areas is deficient in communicating fully on their own. (Budge 2016, 434)

These improvized aspects require the researcher or actors to become so immersed within their character, through taking on the verbal traits, character-istics, and personality of the witnesses, that improvized actions can become part of the narrative, adding an extended depth to the subject and adding to the thickness of descriptions as "evocative representations" (Richardson 2000, 931).

Splashing about amongst the sounds of creaking hulls and strained ropes, my thoughts were drawn to the imagined audio-environment of life on such ships, particularly the radio room. The sounds of morse code during the long 18-hour shifts would have immersed my ancestors in electronic sine waves of repetitive short and long pulses, in imaginative speculation, changing the ways they thought. I speculate on the disembodied communication of morse code, in contrast to our current digital world, as a bringer of news across the waters:

[we] heard it on the morse code, they were talking about it, and someone was reading out a book or something, I don't know, [they] morse coded it across. Yeah, all that stuff, we pick it up still, we've still got the morse code going on: even though no one uses it, we still use it. (03:51–04:10 min)

Another aspect of reconstruction and speculation involves the artifacts of a ship's radio room, generating incessant sounds of morse code that reprogram the bodily resonance—an electronic and industrial material version of an aud-ible environment, as lines along which character improvizations could provide a spoken text of the experiences of living and working on these Ghost Ships of Suva.

In the later parts of the film shots of the radio room are reconstructed, using a second actor as the morse code operator (Figure 5). These sections of specula-tion reach further away from the main visual "data" experienced in the ori-ginal rusty hulls of the ships, adding a further layer of fiction to the narrative. Speculations about the character of the immersive experiences of the radio room revolve around the repetitive nature of the sound of morse code and the transformation of harsh-sounding electrical bleeps into human voices and words, which occurs within the subjective experience of the radio operator. An important aspect of constructing the experiences of the ghost ships has been the immersive qualities of sound—itself a vibration of materials transmitted through the air—as a socio-material artifact that evokes impressions. This has also been recorded in the creaking of metal and the lap of water around the rusting hulls as if the processes of decay are audibly present. Sound, both human and material, is a way of tangible knowing: to hear is to know, to feel the material force of the environment. The vibrations of materials, such as sound, resonate through us. We vibrate in time with the sound of the immer-sive environment we are occupied by. The workspace sounds are the
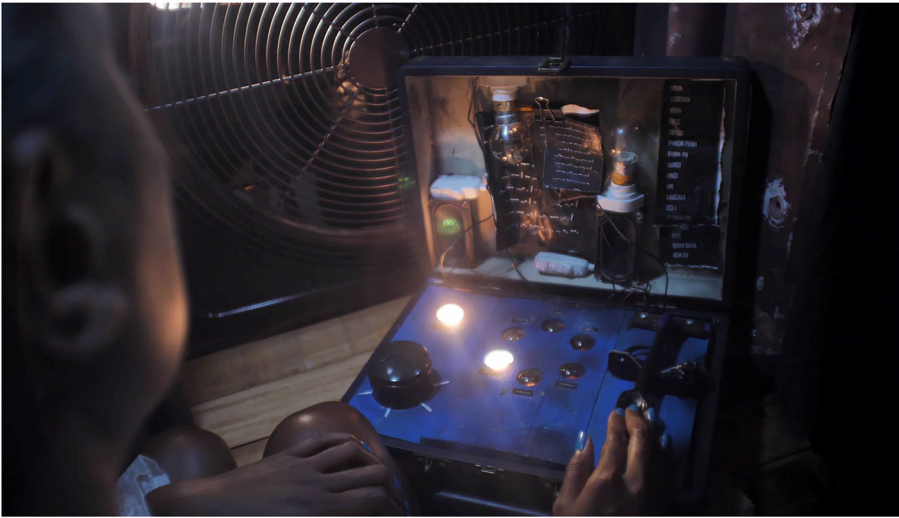
*Figure 5 Radio room reconstruction, where sound is a vital element. (Reconstructed radio room with local Fijian actor as radio operator. Screenshot from* Ghost ships of Suva, *2020; photo by the author.)*

vibrations of material nurturing that support our lives and wear us down, influencing the character of the human inhabitant.

## THE CREATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY NETWORK

Participant observation, a standard ethnographic tool, has, it seems, customarily situated observation as oppositional to participation: the less one participates the better the quality of observation; that action in the field prevents clear observation. The approach of the Creative Ethnography Network is situated in a paradigm of socio-material constructivism: reflecting an ontological view based on the "aliveness" of the material environment, in which human and non-human elements are closely enmeshed (Ingold 2008, 2011, 2014; Harvey 2014; Bird-David 1999; also Snake-Beings 2018a, 2018b). In this sense, the "network" of Creative Ethnography is a dynamic space consisting of materials, filmmaking technology, and the various agendas and aims of both researchers and collaborators. Generally conceived as non-cartesian collaborative ethnography (Puke and Lowe 2020; Morrison 2014), the "aliveness" of the research space can be likened to Henrik Enquist's idea of situated knowledge emerging from "the creation of meaningful relations within an ecosystem [which] is the result of an ongoing and dynamic interaction between people, artifacts, and the environment" (2008, 127). Creative Ethnography belongs to a long history of collaborative video ethnography as a focus away from recording naturalistic and reproducible data toward recognition of situated knowledge emerging from the specific collaboration of filmmaker and subject. The socio-material aspect of the Creative Ethnography Network aims to explore the

potentials which the anthropologist Mark Westmoreland identifies as the "generative possibilities enabled by crossing disciplinary boundaries between art and anthropology" (2013, 723, cited in Culhane 2016, 6), asking the question: what if media production forms the basis of a set of research tools in the co-construction of ethnographic knowledge, engaging in the "relational processes of knowledge co-creation, and re-circulation" emerging from video enhanced "observant participation"? (CIE 2020, cited in Culhane 2016, 9).

When I first started to make what I now call Creative Ethnographies, the initial project was a series of portraits of local artists, peers, and friends, making collaborative videos that explored their studio practices. Although I took the key role of filmmaker and editor, the creative boundaries between researcher and artist were fluid and never particularly formalized. There is also a self-reflexive element to the project which places the filmmaker within the picture, as an active element of collaboration. Interviewed in their workshops and their surroundings, the idea was to explore the socio-material processes of creative artists. "Socio-material" is a term used broadly in this study to describe the interactions of humans and materials: the influence of materials on the social, and in the case of these documentaries, the way that artists interact with their material environment through processes that make it difficult to separate creative influences of either human or material. The socio-material is visualized as a deeply entangled space of ideas, influenced by Estrid Sørensen's approach to "situated knowledge [that] view[s] knowledge not as essential but as constructed in action; not as individual but as placed in the 'lived-in world'" (2009, 89). As a filmmaker I, along with my camera and editing laptop, became a part of the "lived-in world" of the artist whom I was researching: as part of a network of creativity situated within the socio-material context of the collaborative ethnographic video.

One of the first projects for the Creative Ethnography Network was *Portrait of James Robinson* (CEN 2017), made for the Te Manawa—Museum of Art Science and History (in Palmerston North, New Zealand), as a continuous video loop played in that gallery between December 2017 and June 2018.

Exploring material processes the artist used during the making of a body of work for the exhibition, this image of James Robinson (Figure 6) shows the artist demonstrating his way of interacting with the painting canvas as if it were "a skin" of something living (CEN 2017). The voice-over, recorded during an interview in his studio, describes the experience of "piercing the surface" of the painting canvas as a "visceral process of self-archaeology." Through interviewing the artist as he was working, some of the tacit knowledge of the making process was used in influencing the improvized direction of the video, as described below.

Entangled in our common histories of art-making and as a filmmaker, I felt that the most natural way to interact with the subject(s) was to do so from a "maker" perspective, using making as a productive tool through which the subject could emerge. In this way, collaborative filmmaking formed a common space, a so-called third space where improvization could take place to reveal something of the artist's tacit working processes. The third space, that which is

*Figure 6 Creative and material processes of joining canvas as if it were the skin of an animal. (Screenshot from* A Portrait of James Robinson, *2017; photo by the author.)*

neither completely research nor subject, is described by Wiremu Puke and Sebastian Lowe as "working within the generative flow of ideas, rather than working to ideas that have already been preconceived" (2020, 256), allowing the "aliveness" of the space to direct improvized actions. Following this approach, during filming, we decided on an improvized reenactment of the "skin" of the canvas visualized as an anthropomorphic creature.

The movement of the canvas-beast-human (Figure 7), while not reflecting a material process of the artist, represents an attempt to visualize the tacit experience entangled in Robinson's close association with the materials of his artworks, as a performance-based speculation on the process. This is reflected in Robinson's voice-over, suggesting the vital role of performance in the creative process: "That's the problem of art, you're performing all the time and then you're trying to undo the performer to get into a personal deep process that isn't self-conscious" (CEN 2017). As an expression of the subject fighting against the self-consciousness inherent in video ethnography, this goes together with the affecting presence of the camera, crew, and assorted technology, which seems to encourage the frequently observed human trait of "playing up" to the camera, performing for an audience. These items of technology, it seemed, can also be seen as "the pathways or trajectories along which improvisatory practice unfolds" (Ingold 2014, 214), as active elements which work toward constructing the type of situated knowledge outcomes of Creative Ethnography. Following these lines of improvization becomes a method of video ethnography: whereby pathways become "alive," as actants, drawing the collaborators along both creative and technical pathways. In this sense, the network aspect of Creative Ethnography is built from lines of influence emerging from the creative-technical components of filmmaking: components, such as cameras, microphones, interviews, sound levels, scripting, improvization,

*Figure 7 Creative and material processes, anthropomorphic play with materials. Still from a CEN video. (The painter is seen walking, covered in the canvas as if it were the skin of an animal—screenshot from* A Portrait of James Robinson, *2017; photo by the author.)*

re-construction, and cinematography. Creative Ethnography in this way contains the influences of technical materials and tools, creative strategies and technologies, as well as the social elements of researcher and human subjects: suggesting that objects are not separated from living "things." Network "aliveness" runs contrary to claims of Jonathan Potter's process for obtaining naturalistic data, claiming objectivity of recording events which would have still happened had "the researcher not been born" (1996, 135). By denying the "aliveness" of the researcher we evoke a specter of objectivity in ethnographic research which is, according to Kenneth M. Morrison, firmly entrenched within the Cartesian dualisms underpinning an "anthropological position, [whereby] Descartes engendered the dualisms that atomize what should be understood as the unified modalities of human life: objectivity/subjectivity, matter/spirit, science/religion (among many others)" (2014, 39). Traditionally situating nature and culture as being opposed, the unborn observer enacts the either/or thinking of "Cartesian science [which] always values the first term of each dualism, and marginalizes the second" (*idem*); a cartesian performance implying that the more mediated, constructed forms of video ethnography are inferior to the "authenticity" captured by naturalistic data.

CONCLUSION

Although not suited to all forms of research, using speculative fabulation to break down perceived boundaries between fictional and naturalistic data

suggests a way in which the researcher and the field of study can enter into "aliveness" as a research paradigm: recognizing the impressions and imaginations of the researcher, as well as the materials of research, as active agents in the generation of knowledge. Ethnography has a long history of being situated within a Cartesian science which subtly presumes the opposition of researcher and object of study: promoting the objectivity of the researcher as the primary dualism set against the authentic "other" it wishes to study (*ibid.*). In Creative Ethnography, subjectivity is distributed over an interconnected meshwork of humans, materials, artifacts, and technologies, the lines along which improvized action occurs: meaning that all aspects of the socio-material mesh are alive with possibilities for improvization. The intersubjectivity of Creative Ethnography, which draws focus away from the central objectivity of the researcher, is suggested here as a relational framework from which knowledge emerges: bringing the researcher back from Potter's "unborn" status of naturalistic data and into the ecological meshwork of aliveness and knowledge which is situated within the physical materials of the socio-material environment.

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