

## Response

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### Calling for Creative Ethnography

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While there is an expectation that academic research is driven by some level of creativity, often referred to as “originality,” it tends in fact to be restricted to certain formats when it comes to research methodology, and writing style, as well as ways of conveying results. There is a reluctance in academia to push boundaries and break rules, even though this is how research truly develops. In this mouthwatering issue of *Cultural Analysis* on “Creative ethnographic methodologies,” editors Jenni Rinne and Kim Silow Kallenberg and their contributors are taking the quest for creative ethnography into new terrains: at stake are instances of imagination released by poetic inquiry, collaborative creative writing, visual arts and emerging technologies. Here academic endeavours are guided by artistic creativity which can be different from everyday creativity (Narayan 2016), but also overlapping, whether you are an academic, an artist or both.

So how does creativity happen? As the editors rightly point out in their Editorial, creativity can be defined as “making something or the ability to perceive the world in new ways.” This, they go on, entails applying methods and theories “in your own way.” In my ethnographic work on firstly, contemporary dance and ballet, and secondly, creative writing, creativity sprung up when practitioners put

together existing elements in new combinations, often adding one or two novel parts (Wulff 1998, 2017). These parts could come from other modalities, such as when spoken word is included in dance productions, or a novel is organized in rhythmical sections like a piece of music. But the point that everyone I interviewed and observed insisted on, from dancers and choreographers to writers, was that creativity does not happen without technique. In other words, you have to know the rules, or the technique in dance and writing—just as in research—to break them. Then you can let go. And, my interlocutors explained, a sudden zone of artistry can appear, unexpectedly, for dancers in performance or rehearsal, and for writers at the desk while they are writing away. Key is the insight that there is no point to wait for inspiration—you have to start choreographing, dancing or writing before this force is released: it strikes during the process. This has famously been conceptualized in terms of a state of flow (Csíkszentmihályi 1996), an epiphany or a revelation as it captures a feeling of freedom and control, of lightness, when the technique is there but can be forgotten as new dance, text or ethnographic methodology is created (Rethmann and Wulff forthcoming, 2023).

To the discussion of how creativity happens belongs the question of training. To what extent can an artist and an ethnographer learn to be creative? Is this a sensibility that some people have more of than others, and if so, can it be taught to those who might be short of it? When I asked Irish writer John Banville in an interview if creative writing can be taught, his reply was honest: “You can be taught what *not* to do. But not what is needed – dedication, ruthlessness, love of lan-

Cultural Analysis 21.1 (2023): 56–58  
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guage, insights of tips you don't really think about" (Wulff 2017, 1). There was agreement among the writers in my study that formal technique can be taught, and be useful also for those with a natural talent for writing. The editors and contributors to this issue all demonstrate convincingly that they have what it takes to be creative.

Having started out by identifying a reluctance to push boundaries in research, it is time to acknowledge a growing acceptance of more flexible forms of fieldwork, including sensorial (Stoller 1997), multi-sited (Hannerz 2001), digital (Uimonen 2012), and visual (Favero 2021) ethnography. This openness to new strategies has generated a palpable interest in "writing otherwise" as suggested by Ulf Hannerz (2016, 256). He is making "a plea for experimenting with a greater diversity in styles of writing, more ways of using (anthropological) ideas and materials, perhaps developing new genres" and engaging more with synthesis and comparison of various materials in new ways. The usefulness for academics of writing in different genres ranging from creative nonfiction to memoirs, journalism and travel writing, and bringing back stylistic traits to academic prose is at the centre in *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century* (Wulff 2016). And in the article "Writing Anthropology" (Wulff 2001), I draw on the idea that experimental ethnographic writing "might convey social life more accurately than conventional academic writing." Two of the articles in this issue discuss creative writing as method. The first one, by Ann-Charlotte Palmgren, is a lyrical explanation of how she carried out poetic inquiry by writing poems about her field, referred to as autoethnographic

poetry, and thereby was able to combine different layers of understanding in one analysis.

Though not completely new (Schneider and Wright 2010, 2013 among others), working across academia and the arts is a quickly growing approach. It is also increasingly diversified as there is a multitude of ways to do it, and more keep appearing. An academic-cum-artist, Robert Willim, describes in his article an intriguing engagement in both art and academic research, calling it a "more-than-academic practice." The ethnographic focus is on the unexpected and explosive everyday use of emerging technologies, such as digital media, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden, referred to as Mundania by Willim and developed further with sound and sound art. This can be fruitfully related to how Petra Rethmann (2021) includes sound files in order to illustrate the sound of ice breaking in an essay in the digital journal *Edge Effects*. Just like Willim, Cecilia Fredriksson is an academic *and* a practicing artist, a watercolorist in her case. In her inspiring article, she explores ethnographic drawing as a method while drawing people and their milieux in her field. This is in line with an emerging graphic anthropology, investigated also by Alisse Waterston in *Light in Dark Times* (2020) with drawings by Charlotte Corden. Together with the drawings and the accessible writing style, this book has been successfully marketed to a wider public. This is one way of conveying research results more broadly, which Fredriksson did when she posted her field drawings on Instagram. Willim's audiovisual research also works well as output.

One more point before I end: creative ethnography is thriving in many places.

Yet, there is a lingering reluctance to accept publications and various creative textual, visual, aural and digital formats as academic qualifications. How can, and should, creative ethnography be evaluated, and by whom? While creative ethnography is challenging certain academic traditions, it is bringing much-needed vitality to what can be a rather stuffy academic world. So we note with pleasure that creative ethnography is moving onwards and upwards—now also strengthened by this set of articles.

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