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Ethno science fiction: Projective improvisations of future scenarios and environmental threat in the everyday life of British youth

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Introduction

It's me, James, from the future. The year is 2036. All the houses have gone. They've built some shops over the top of where the houses were. The only thing that is recognizable around here is the pub. The pub has stayed, which is incredibly impressive. They've built more and more units over the whole of Otley Road. It's like one big [commercial] park and it has taken over the whole side by the river. [...] Shipley is almost completely cut off now due to the frequent flooding. Everyone has to take the long road around Bingley to come to Baildon now. They've just ruined it: just ruined it. There are just so many things wrong with it, everybody is fighting for place with everybody. [...] It's horrible [...] It's nothing like it ever was and it'll never be the same again.

This dystopic vision of the future was recorded as part of my ongoing research project *Forward Play*, which commenced in 2014. The objective of the research is to apply and critically examine the use of 'ethno science fiction' as an ethnographic and anthropological film method. In the first of a

series of ethno science fictions, I ask English youth living in regions affected by drastic environmental change to improvise their own science fictions, especially with regard to climate change, in order to research and represent young people's perceptions and understandings of the future.

James Hudson-Wright is twenty years old. He lives with his grandmother in Shipley, a town near Leeds in West Yorkshire, in a rented Victorian house originally built to accommodate mill workers during the boom in wool production that took place in Yorkshire in the mid- to late 1800s. Their house is built on the water table of the River Aire, which resulted in the flooding of their house and the entire neighbourhood in 2000 and 2015. During recent years James has seen other drastic changes, including a major property development adjacent to his house. The Victorian textile mill next to his house was torn down and replaced with a parking lot and plans for a commercial development, radically changing the material and social environment of his neighbourhood.

There is ongoing speculation among the local population about the possibility of increasing flood risk from the River Aire. Previous estimates predicted major flooding in the area 'once every fifty years' based on the inundations of 1947 and 2000. However, December 2015 saw the worst flooding in the area in living memory, and climate change has very much been part of the local conversation following these events. Some of those at risk have begun embarking on major flood prevention measures, believing that another flood will happen sooner rather than later.

In July 2014, James and I started to make the film *Call Me Back* (2017) as part of my research into the future. It begins with eighteen-year-old James entering an old style red phone booth next to his house in Shipley (Figure 11.1). He phones his future self and asks a series of pressing questions about the future, including his own life, the local town and the world in general. Exactly one year later I filmed James, who is now nineteen years old, walking into the same phone booth and responding to his past self, revealing changed outlooks and perspectives in the process. Over the course of the year, the shopping centre continues to be constructed and its changing outline can be seen in the background of the phone booth. Documentary shots reveal the changes to the environment surrounding the phone booth and James's home, which he tries to relate to through his phone dialogues with his past and future selves.

In the summer of 2016, James enters the phone booth again. Twenty-year-old James responds to recent developments in his life, including the drastic events of the 2015 Boxing Day flooding of his neighbourhood, and other changes in his life and environment. The imagined forty-year-old James of 2036 also joins the phone calls to tell his previous incarnations about developments in the region over the past twenty years. Finally, sixty-year-old James of 2056 will enter the phone booth reporting back to his younger selves on another twenty years of changes to his life and old neighbourhood.



FIGURE 11.1 *James Hudson-Wright in Call Me Back (2017)*

The phone conversations between James and his future selves are intercut with documentary shots of James guiding us through his neighbourhood and scenes showing the drastic changes the area has gone through since 2014. James' greatest passion is music, and the film will be accompanied by songs that James has written and performs to express his vision of the future.

Ethno science fiction

The chapter explores how to apply projective improvisation in ethnographic film to understand how fieldwork informants relate to and imagine the future through a technique I call 'ethno science fiction'. More specifically, ethno science fiction is a co-creative genre of ethnographic film in which the

informants express their imagined future through improvisation and other forms of applied theatre and artistic practice.

The method I am proposing offers an alternative approach to ethnographic research on the imagination, and about the future. It is intended to complement existing methods in ethnographic film – such as interviews and participant observation – and combines the traditions of qualitative research in anthropology and creative practice in applied art, in order to challenge positivist research traditions and quantitative methods within Future Studies.

Ethno science fiction is also meant to provide a means of reflexive intervention, conducted with ethical care and anthropological critique in mind. The ethnographic film material is screened back to the participants to facilitate reflection and change, drawing on the film as a sounding board for innovation in times of crisis. I will ask if ethno science fictions could contribute to a 'temporal proximity', encouraging critical debate, speculation and sympathy in relation to the lives of future generations, similar to how ethnographic film traditionally has facilitated cultural proximity through a complex understanding of 'the other'.

The three words 'ethno', 'science' and 'fiction' that constitute the neologism, represent three very specific methodological claims and research interests that sets this film method apart from other science fiction genres. 'Ethno' suggests the same methodological rigour as other ethnographic film methods, including extended ethnographic fieldwork informed by anthropological theory. 'Science' refers to how fieldwork informants relate to scientific predictions of the future. Scientific progress has allowed researchers to predict changes in economy, politics, population, health, geography, climate, etc., with increased precision, and ethno science fiction allows fieldwork informants to critically and playfully engage with these predictions through their imagination. 'Fiction' refers to the human necessity to speculate, to fill the blank canvas of uncertainty with imagined utopias and dystopias.

However, unlike mainstream science fiction in literature and film that is written and produced for the commercial market, ethno science fiction is co-created with the participants to make an imagined future explicit and tangible through projective improvisations. The philosophy of fiction in the practice of everyday life suggests the close link between fictions about the future and how we conduct our lives. Ethno science fiction offers a practical means to reveal these links, not only showing how our imagined futures are realized, but also how they impact on our interpretation of past and present experiences.

Fiction in practice

Ethno science fiction is a development of the ethnofictions of pioneering visual anthropologist Jean Rouch. Rouch asked his West African and French friends and informants to act out and improvise their own and others' experiences in front of the camera, in order to show aspects of ethnographic research that could not be revealed and presented in any other way. Rouch regarded these films as surrealist games inspired by Songhay-Zerma culture. (Henley 2009; Rouch 2003; Sjöberg 2008, 2009a; Stoller 1992).

While contemporary French speaking film critics referred to these films as 'ethnofictions' (Fr), Rouch himself saw little value in labelling his film practice (Yakir 1978: 10). On occasion, he did however refer to the films as 'science fictions' (Marshall and Adams 1978: 1005). Rather than attempting to place his films within the pulp genre of science fiction, he used the term ironically and critically. He saw no difference between art and ethnography or fact and fiction in his practice. He regarded his films to be both social science and fiction (Rouch 2003: 185). The reference to science fiction played a part in Rouch's provocative and anti-authoritarian attitude towards positivist and other academic conventions that dominated contemporary anthropology. It was a humorous monkey-wrench intended for the machinery of a social science still grounded in the Cartesian divide between subjectivity and objectivity (Rouch with Fulchignoni 2003: 156; Rouch 2003: 185). Interestingly, similar hermeneutic ideas that would make the inter-subjectivity of fieldwork relationships transparent were later introduced to the discipline through Geertz's interpretative anthropology, which would revolutionize the social sciences more than a decade after Rouch's own forays.

Rouch explicitly encouraged the protagonists of his ethnofictions to act out possible scenarios of the future. In the film *Petit a Petit* (1970), two West African protagonists from his previous ethnographic films decide to fly to Paris to study high-rise buildings and to observe what use Parisians make of them. Rather than a science fiction these films draw on surrealist improvisation techniques. The imagination of the fieldwork informant is expressed through improvised acting. This approach was inspired by griot storytelling of West African culture, as well as surrealist art techniques such as automatic writing and drawing, in order to tap into the creative subconscious of the protagonists (Henley 2009; Rouch 2003; Sjöberg 2008, 2009a; Stoller 1992).

Jean Rouch and co-director Edgar Morin also compared their approach in *Chronique d'un été* (1961) to the psychodrama of Jacob Moreno (Morin in Rouch 2003: 233). Psychodrama is psychotherapeutic techniques developed by the Austrian physician Moreno in the United States from the 1920s and onwards. Rouch and Morin were influenced by their academic and artistic

environment, and obviously drew on contemporary ideas. In spite of their frequent references to psychodrama they never seemed to have applied the techniques of Moreno as a consciously preconceived methodology for their films, but rather as a product of the general zeitgeist of the time (Sjöberg forthcoming). The approach to improvised acting in Rouch's films does however recall Moreno's use of enactment in psychodrama: 'There are several forms of enactment – pretending to be in a role, re-enactment or acting out a past scene living out a problem presently pressing, or testing oneself for the future' (Fox 1987: 13). The ethnofictions of Jean Rouch provided a space where the protagonists of the films could live out their dreams and aspirations, as well as their anxieties about uncertain futures, in a surrealist and ethnographic game.

My previous use of Rouch's method of ethnofiction (Sjöberg 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2011) was in collaboration with transgendered Brazilians living in São Paulo, resulting in the film *Transfiction* (2007). One scene in the film is exclusively concerned with the future where the transgendered prostitute Zilda, played by Savana 'Bibi' Meirelles, meets Philippe, a Frenchman visiting São Paulo. Together they dream about living in Paris together and at the end of the film Zilda moves to Paris to live with Philippe. We follow her to the airport and enter into her utopian vision of her future life in Paris, as represented by dreamy shots of the Eiffel tower, French flags and sunny blue skies. While this 'happy ever after' ending was perceived as less authentic and more clichéd than the rest of the film, it nevertheless offered a faithful account of Bibi's dreams of going to Paris.

More specifically, the main protagonists of the film wanted to create a happy ending to critique and avoid reproducing the stereotypical, often negative, representations of transgendered Brazilians that reduce the complexity of their lived experience to images of suffering, poverty, discrimination and health problems. I asked them to try Rouch's enactments of dreams, similar to when Oumarou Ganda enacts his dreams of being a world champion boxer in *Moi un Noir* (1958). Rather than being presented as an object of study or offering a routine account of social identity, marginalization and his day-to-day life as a migrant worker, Oumarou Ganda tells us who he would like to be and how he would like to live (Sjöberg 2008, 2009a, 2009b). Similarly, Bibi came to use some of the improvisations in the film to paint an image of another life, happier than the reality she had to face as a transgendered prostitute in São Paulo.

The approach behind this filmed scene of the future was inspired by Moreno's psychodrama so as to offer the possibility of testing 'oneself for the future' (Fox 1987:13) through a series of performative and improvised enactments. While Moreno's motivation was to give his patients the courage to dream again, the enactment of the future as part of the ethnographic

process provides a possibility to tap into the imaginary world of the fieldwork informants. For Bibi and other trans people in São Paulo, Paris represents a combination of success and possibility. A city of glamour and chic where their female and/or feminine identity (Kulick 1998; Sjöberg 2011) would be accepted and affirmed, ideally in the protecting arms of a wealthy gentleman or handsome dreamy prince who offers unprejudiced and unconditional love. These glimpses of utopia that are created, enacted and reflected on by the fieldwork informants also provide ethnographic research data on their present lives and future existential concerns. For example, it provided me with a tangible and contextual understanding of some of the primary motivations among many transgendered prostitutes to participate in sex trafficking to Europe despite the substantial risks (ibid.).

The political activism of the transgendered fieldwork informants, encouraged me to turn to the techniques of Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal. Inspired by philosopher Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968, 1970), Boal created *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) a political form of applied theatre. I had participated in several of his workshops previously and recognized similarities between Boal's Forum Theatre, Moreno's psychodrama and Rouch's ethnofictions. They were all drawing on the process of dreaming to facilitate improvisations with different aims and objectives in mind (Sjöberg, forthcoming). One key technique involved Boal asking members of the audience to present a problem that was then enacted by the theatre ensemble. Other participants in the audience would then suggest solutions to the problem that they then also enacted with the ensemble. The Forum Theatre sparked debate, and also turned out to be particularly useful among illiterate participants that found a useful and effective medium to express and discuss political oppression.

The political documentary dramas of British filmmaker Peter Watkins were contemporary to Boal's theatre practice and were likewise inspired by the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. *The War Game* (1965) and *Punishment Park* (1971) are often referred to as science fictions about a near future. Watkins filmed his dramas with documentary techniques to challenge the media objectivism of the time. Through documentary aesthetics including, long shots and shaky hand-held cameras, on-location shooting, natural lighting, enactments by non-professional actors and interviews, his intention was to encourage the modernist audience of the time to be critical of facts and claims to objectivity and not take news and documentary media at face value (Watkins 2015).

The War Game depicts a nuclear war in Britain and its consequences. It is based on research that non-professional actors illustrate through scenes showing the repercussions of the nuclear blast. In contrast, the narrative content of *Punishment Park* is based on the improvisations of the participants

playing roles similar to their own lives. Like Rouch's films, *Punishment Park* has been compared to psychodrama (MacDonald 1993: 171). In the film, political activists who are opposed to the Vietnam War are arrested when Nixon proclaims a state of emergency. Under a new law they are given the choice of visiting Punishment Park in lieu of prison. The park is situated in the California desert, where they have a tribunal and the convicts are required to cross the desert without food and water in three days in order to avoid prison. The trial and punishment is covered by a European documentary team. The non-professional actors playing the convicts were all activists in real life and drew on their own experience when improvising, resulting in a number of powerful and emotionally resonant scenes. In doing so, a near and plausible future was played out and portrayed on the basis of the actors' own perceptions and experiences.

Moreno, Rouch, Boal and especially Watkins, encouraged participants to elaborate on their future through their imagination, and the participatory theatre and filmmaking allowed them a practical means to try out future scenarios and reflect on them on stage and screen with members of the audience. Peter Loizos calls the acting in Rouch's ethnofictions 'projective improvisation' (1993: 53). Based on his own experiences of psychotherapy, Loizos meant that the protagonists made 'implicit' information of ethnographic value 'explicit', through the improvisations. The fictional format allowed the protagonists to approach issues of their own life that they usually did not discuss. Rouch saw this as a result of his 'ciné-provocation' where the camera was used as a catalyst to reveal knowledge that usually is taken for granted. Implicit information, involved as part of the existence of the fieldwork informants, usually without being revealed, expressed, or developed (Sjöberg 2009a, 2009b). I distinguish between the descriptive and the expressive function of projective improvisation: the descriptive function is used to show the structure of events that cannot be told in any other way (such as historical or criminal events), while the expressive function of projective improvisation is more relevant for ethno science fictions since it draws on improvisations to get access to the subconscious world of the protagonists (Sjöberg 2008, 2009a, 2009b). Rouch used his surreal games to reveal 'hidden' or 'inner truths' (Morin and Rouch 2003), while Irving (2011) and Rapport (2008) have attempted to use other methods to access, elicit or exteriorize the interior life-worlds of fieldwork informants that exist beyond third-party observation or are rarely made public. In my own practice, I utilize creative improvisations and different modes of playmaking to trigger the imagination of the protagonists and provide insight into their lived experience and embodied understandings of the world through free associations.

Play and playmaking stand at the centre of the projective improvisations in ethno science fictions. In Huizinga's definition, play constitutes a 'magic

circle' (Huizinga 1938, 1955), while for Turner (1964), play creates a 'liminal space' that allows the participants to transgress their own realities.

In my own work, the protagonists of the film are provided with a personal testing ground, where they can play with and live out their own ideas in fictions about a possible future. Consequently, in a recollection of Oumarou Ganda's dream of winning a boxing championship or Zilda's dream about leaving Brazil for Paris, and when James calls himself from 2036 he has realized his dream to leave the town of Shipley to become an international rock star:

I'm working in music, I'm living elsewhere, I'm miles away. I'm [...] still in a Horror Punk band. We had a resurgence about fifteen years ago and it just catapulted into the limelight, which was like an overnight thing. The one thing we didn't do, we didn't sell out, we didn't sell out to a label. We did it on our own and it was hard work but we have the rewards now. The money, [...] the bits of fame. Not that it's the most important thing, it's just nice to know that I can live comfortably now and do the thing that I love. I could never ever complain about the way things have turned out so far and I just hope that the success just carries on, more for the fact that I love playing the crowds, see the crowds' reactions, the vibe that you get out of it really, the number of shows I've done for free purely because they were enjoying themselves. [...] We made our money, we made millions and millions as a group. We don't ever have to worry [...] about living, about where our next meal is coming from. [...] I'm loving it, absolutely loving it and I don't want it ever to stop. I will push the music, I will write music, I will release solo albums, things like that. [...] Nothing will ever, ever beat moving away from here, that was the thing that shot us to fame.

The liminal space of the ethno science fiction provides a possibility to play with and test boundaries. James's dystopian vision of Shipley in the future and his personal utopia as a rock star after a successful escape from his life in Shipley, represent two extremes that helps him navigate his own life. The fiction he creates allows him to explore and test his possibilities. It is thus important to acknowledge the links between fiction and lived experience. As it is important to recognize how we make our history (Kean 2010) it is also important to recognize the processes of how we make our future.

Fiction in theory

Crapanzano (2004) draws on literature and philosophy to show the structure and process of imagination and boundary formation, and how imagination plays an important role in exploring possibilities. While Crapanzano sets out the theoretical possibilities of the subject, there remains a lack of methods in the social sciences and anthropology to study imagination from an ethnographic, fieldwork based perspective (Harris and Rapport 2015). This is especially relevant when exploring the process of how these possibilities are imagined and created on a personal level in the lives of the fieldwork informants, and more specifically in relation to the future. Ethno science fiction provides one such alternative and acts as a complement to other methods in an attempt to expand the toolbox of ethnographic possibility. The validity of this method is however based on certain theoretical assumptions related to theoretical understanding of imagination and fiction.

The definition of science fiction, as a literary and film genre, is an ongoing and often contested project. The theoretical struggle to define science fiction, as with other genres, is nevertheless helpful in articulating and establishing the shared reality that is created between the author and the audience. Freedman draws on literary historian and critic Darko Suvin's definition of science fiction as determined by the dialectic between estrangement and cognition:

We may validly describe a particular text as science fiction if we understand the formulation to mean that cognitive estrangement is the dominant generic tendency within the over determined textual whole. (Freedman 2000: 20)

Moreover:

The first term [estrangement] refers to the creation of an alternative fictional world that, by refusing to take our mundane environment for granted, implicitly or explicitly performs an estranging critical interrogation of the latter. But the critical character of the interrogation is guaranteed by the operation of cognition, which enables the science-fictional text to account rationally for its imagined world and for the connections as well as the disconnections of the latter to our own empirical world.' (Ibid: 16–17)

In this interpretation of the genre, the text could be defined as realistic mundane fiction if there is cognitive account for the fiction without any estrangement, and fantasy if the text estranges without any rational and theoretical legitimacy. Freedman also emphasizes that texts are rarely that

clear cut. He means that a genre is a generic tendency that happens within a text, rather than a classification filed under a generic category (ibid.: 20).

James's ethno science fiction phone call from 2036 is based on his cognitive and critical perception of his current neighbourhood. The estrangement consists of his dystopic visions of its transformation into a gloomy place of poverty and exploitation. The ground where his old neighbourhood once stood is now entirely covered with commercial units. The population is poor and the people of Shipley either work in the commercial units or live off government support that they spend in the units:

Different developers trying to make money, different businesses trying to make money. [...] We're all to blame. Everyone living around here is to blame for not standing up when they we're doing it and realizing how wrong it was. It's everybody's fault from around here, more so the people that have built the units, but the people that weren't willing to stand up for what they believed in and what they believed was wrong. [...] Politicians are the same old, same old. [...] They say they [care], but clearly they don't, they give permission for all these units, all these units [where people] spend their hundred thousand pounds, emptying their wage on it, [...] so [that the politicians] can go on holiday three times a year. Most of the people [...] are struggling to eat, but yet they have a job, how does that work, how is that fair?

James's ethno science fiction has very strong cognitive links to his current world and worries, where the buildings he grew up with are torn down and replaced with a soulless commercial development, creating a new social environment that he perceives as hostile. He feels that he lacks power to influence the future of his environment, which is controlled by the developers and politicians he distrusts, but the science fiction allows him the freedom to develop and elaborate his critique towards them. In contrast to the cognitive aspects of his ethno science fiction, the 'estrangement' offers a liminal space where he can explore future scenarios without any limitations.

Crapanzano (2004) argues that the process of imagination allows us to explore what lies beyond the 'horizon' in the 'hinterland'. While the boundaries of possibilities usually are represented by cognition in science fiction, estrangement offers the means to also imagine possibilities and hope. In James's imaginative construction of the future, he comes back to Shipley to use the fortune that he has earned in the music business to help young people realize their dreams:

I know what it's like to be a musician and not earning money, feeling awful and nobody likes your music. [I want to make use of] all of those zeros at

the end of my bank account. I want to put some of that back into people and help more people get out there and do something they love. [I want to help them with] not even just the music, just their dreams, their aspirations, anything they want to do I'm willing to hear about it. You know, I don't see it as a loan, anything like that, I just hope that if I create one success story out of a million, I've succeeded, and I hope that if I ever find myself in trouble, monetary wise for some reason, that that person might do the same for me. [...] And yes, I might have earned a lot of money in what we did but I could have been in a totally different boat and I appreciate that, I think that's why I've come back, that's why I've come to make a difference, to come and show these people I am still the young lad from Shipley. I might have made my money, the money isn't important, the people are.

The ethno science fiction becomes a laboratory where James can try out different possibilities for the future, of how to save his world. James imagination of his future life is not that far from his current life. The imagined possibility presented in the ethno science fiction also becomes a plan and a model to act upon in James's life. In *The Philosophy of 'As If'* (1911) the German philosopher Vaihinger argued that we make up systems of thoughts, models that we treat 'as if' they correspond to our actual real world, to deal with the uncertainty of it; by establishing 'constructs that, from a practical point of view, are useful and necessary, though theoretically they are false' (Vaihinger 1924: 63). For example, Vaihinger observes how scientific models of atoms and molecules in physics can be regarded as figures of the imagination or as fictional, given that we cannot see them, but this does not make such models any less useful:

It is, of course, true that many fundamental scientific concepts are fictional and contradictory and are not a reflection of the world of reality—a world quite inaccessible to us—but this in no way renders them valueless. They are psychical constructs which not only give rise to the illusion that the world is being comprehended, but which make it possible, at the same time, for us to orient ourselves in the realm of actuality. (Ibid: 65)

Crapanzano argues along similar lines by quoting literary critic Starobinski to describe the power of imagination to distance oneself and speculate but also to deal with our real worlds:

Insinuated into perception itself, mixed with the operations of memory, opening up around us a horizon of the possible, escorting the project, the hope, the fear, speculations – the imagination is much more than a faculty for evoking images which double the world of our direct perceptions: it

is a distancing power thanks to which we represent to ourselves distant objects and we distance ourselves from present realities. Hence, the ambiguity that we discover everywhere: the imagination, because it anticipates and previews, views, serves action, draws before us the configuration of the realizable before it can be realized. (Starobinski 1970: 173–4, quoted in Crapanzano 2004: 19)

Not only does the imaginative consciousness allow us to transcend (depasser) the immediacy of the present instant in order to grasp a future that is at first indistinct, Starobinski argues, in turn it facilitates our 'practical domination over the real' or our breaking ties with it. (Crapanzano 2004: 19)

Intervention

The ethnographic value of ethno science fiction lies in that the method can contribute with data on (i) how future scenarios are tested and realized through a process of imagination in the present, and (ii) how fictional accounts of the future indicate how past and present experiences are interpreted. Other applications of ethno science fiction are more controversial from a traditional non-interventional point of view in anthropology. As ethno science fiction encourages participants to imagine their futures, the realization of these fictions is one step closer. It presents a potential for the participants to consider the prospect of realizing future possibilities explored in the ethno science fiction. This entails an interventionist fieldwork research and filmmaking that in turn, brings a range of epistemological and ethical problems. Even if we accept that fieldwork research is inter-subjective, there are limitations for how much anthropologists can impact on the contextual reality of the fieldwork, and still maintain their roles as researchers. And are we ready to shoulder the ethical responsibility for the intervention?

The film *Call Me Back* intersects with my colleague in Drama Stephen Bottoms', research in Shipley 'Towards Hydro-Citizenship' (2014–17) which explores how citizens and communities live with each other and their environment in relation to water (www.hydrocitizenship.com) and waterways (<http://multi-story-shipley.co.uk>). Intervention is less controversial in theatre and performance studies, and especially applied theatre that aims to facilitate positive change. My own work has thus been a careful balance between the different ethical frameworks of applied theatre and anthropology.

This interdisciplinary negotiation became apparent when the River Aire broke its banks on Boxing Day 2015. Since James's home and neighbourhood is built on the water table of the River Aire it is vulnerable to flooding in two

ways: water might enter the house from below the ground through rising groundwater, and also above ground when water from the river surrounds it. Groundwater entered the house in both the 2000 and 2015 floods, while in 2015 overground water from the river also almost reached inside the house. James and his grandmother had to move out of their home for several months and were both shaken by the experience, while the owners had to pay for flood damage to the house.

Scientific experts commenting on the 2015 floods in media emphasised the likely relationship between the recent heavy rain and the global problem of a changing climate. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) deputy director Professor Alan Jenkins did for example say that:

We are absolutely convinced that there is weighty scientific evidence that the recent extreme rainfall has been impacted by climate change. (Cookson 2016)

However, the James of 2036 reads the situation in terms of more local causes:

About ten years ago [...] they started building all the [commercial] units and it disturbs the land. It ruined the water table and it just causes more and more frequent flooding. Every time the river gets quite high because of the rain [...] it floods further down near Esholt, because they've just built big flood defenses behind the shops. It just pushes the water elsewhere. It has made Esholt a ghost town, everywhere else they've got flood defences to protect the commercial units, not to protect the houses of Esholt that were flooded and destroyed. And they wonder why people left. It's disgusting, it's wrong, it's immoral. That's what it is, it's immoral.

James 2036 sees a clear connection between the flooding and the commercial development that he despises so much. As might be the case with the rest of the world, it is difficult to consider economy and environmental concerns separately when debating the future of Shipley. James 2036 is however more positive with regards to the future of climate change:

Things have gotten a little warmer. [...] The actions that they've put in place are working. But it's like trying to stop a train down a big hill, you put the brakes on and it's not going to stop instantly. It's going to slow down and it's still slowing down but it's getting to an almost no change. It's almost like the train stopped on the hill. And soon we're going to pull it back up that hill and repair it and try to undo the damage.

The interventional function of ethno science fiction allows us to explore how we relate to scientific predictions of the future. Scientific progress has made it possible to predict changes with increased precision. Ethno science fiction provides an expression for how fieldwork informants relate to these predictions through their imagination. Scientific predictions on climate change and its impact on the population are usually based on statistical data collected over an extended period and are representative of large areas and groups of people. People's individual perceptions and moral understandings are often overlooked in these predictions. Anthropology provides the opposite perspective. The ethnographic tradition of qualitative research relies on methods that foreground people's lived experiences, whereby the life story or words of particular informants are used to stand for and represent a wider social perspective in a metonymic relation of part to whole.

In the production of ethno science fiction, imagined narratives of the future are generated in the tension between the personal imagination of the participants and the predictions of the scientists. In doing so, ethno science fiction films offer an individual perspective on the future that complements scientific predictions and conceptualizations of the future across a range of possible social and cultural scenarios. Environmental instability caused by climate change, including that of flooding, presents an especially interesting focal point in this context. Climate change is perceived as one of the main future threats to humanity among the vast majority of scientific experts and world leaders. This acknowledgement has spurred the release of international resources allowing scientists to predict the consequences of climate change over a long-term perspective with improved accuracy. But what do such predictions, for example in relation to rising water levels and increased flooding, mean locally? And how does this shape people's perceptions and imaginaries of the future among those living in areas prone to flooding whereby climate change threatens the livelihood, housing, health and safety of one's friends, neighbours, relatives and the local population?

Official and governmental reports on the effects of climate change are rarely read and do not play a significant part in the everyday life-worlds of most British people. More immediate concerns such as employment, the local neighbourhood, leisure activities and one's future job prospects are often prioritized. And yet, media coverage about environmental disasters and scientific predictions about future environmental threats still play on the imagination of individuals. Swedish reports, for example, show an increase of so-called 'climate change anxiety' (Lagerblad 2010), which affects the mental health of people and often centres on the responsibility they feel in relation to their own children and future generations. I refer to this relation as 'temporal proximity'. This is reflected in the documentary shots I recorded of James having a phone conversation with his past, present and future selves

between 2014 and 2056, which contains many traces of how he relates to change. The content and character of the questions he asks himself indicates that his primary concerns about the future not are about the abstract idea of climate change but rather the health and general well-being of his family, and his own dream of becoming a rock star. This informal ranking of his concerns is comparable to the hierarchy that controls the news presentation in media, depending on the cultural proximity the audience feels in relation to the news topic. Straubhaar explains cultural proximity as '[...] the tendency to prefer media products from one's own culture or the most similar possible culture' (Straubhaar 2003: 85). The media audience might for example be more interested in reading and watching news about a local matter rather than a more serious incident in another part of the world. Ethnographic films have traditionally contributed to cultural proximity among the audience by bridging the different with the familiar, and mediating complex cultural understanding. Similarly, ethno science fictions present the possibility to create complex understanding and sympathy for future generations – a temporal proximity. Abstract ideas about the future become concrete problems and possibilities as they are imagined and discussed with the audience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show how ethno science fiction film can be used as an ethnographic film method. From an interventionist perspective, it also provides a possibility for innovation and solution. Ethno science fiction can be applied as a sounding board for communities to watch and reflect on their imagined scenarios about the future. Often, the imagination of the individual is difficult to include in scientific predictions about the future. Yet, at least eight of the ideas that Jules Verne presented in his science fictions were later engineered, including electric submarines, newscasts, solar sails, lunar modules, skywriting, videoconferencing, tasers and splashdown space-ships (*National Geographic*, January 2011). While it is difficult to evidence the influence that Jules Verne had on the engineers of the above devices, it is also hard to deny the future impact of Verne's creative imagination. Based on similar principles, ethno science fiction facilitates the invention of new ideas in response to a range of subjects and social issues, including climate change and crisis, that are grounded in the individual imagination of the future. Screening the resulting film material back to the people involved, offers an additional practical means for shared reflexivity and dialogue, as the entire community may participate in the sounding board to give feedback and develop new ideas and solutions to problems in times of crisis.

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