Collaborating in Visual Consumer Research

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Collaborative research is both a pragmatic and a moral choice for the ethnographic consumer researcher. It often produces better insights as well as strives to overcome issues of representation in anthropology. This review looks at both traditional collaborations and collaborations enabled by digital technologies, with a focus on visual collaborative methods, benefits, and difficulties. I review a variety of such consumer research methods and contexts involving the co-production of meaning with research participants. And I consider the issues facing ethnographers in attempting to engage their audiences in a visually compelling manner with the spirit of openness and transparency that is inherent in such research.

INTRODUCTION

The saturation of visual representations in our lives has never been greater. As Jonathan Schroeder (2002) notes, "We live in a visual information culture. [At] no other time in history has there been such an explosion of visual images" (p. 3). Raised with a background of television, the Internet, video games, PowerPoint presentations, YouTube, Facebook, multi-platform movies and TV episodes, and ubiquitous smartphone-captured photos and videos, the current generation of "born digital" consumers have come to expect visual images and quickly become bored with purely textual information. Stephens (1998) argues that sometime during the last third of the twentieth century images began to dominate words in terms of their power to capture and hold our attention. He explains the attraction of video in terms of its versatility, engaging techniques, and ability to provide more information in a time of shrinking attention spans:

> Moving images use our senses more effectively than do black lines of type stacked on white pages. In a video there is so much more to see, not to mention hear. Moving images can cut in, cut away, dance around, superimpose, switch tone, or otherwise change perspective (Stephens 1998, p. xi).

Pink (2007, 2011b) adds that collaboratively produced images can also yield a multisensory sense of movement and place. But it is not only the power of video that is driving the shift from text to video, it is also increasing demand from clients, students, and consumers (Belk and Kozinets 2005; Kozinets and Belk 2006), to the extent that Sunderland and Denny (2007) once worried that videotaping was becoming synonymous with "doing ethnography." However, times have changed and Patti Sunderland observes that "Now in 2014, salient issues include online ethnography, photos on mobile phone ethnography, webnography, netnography, and ethnography being left in the dust in the era of Big Data" (personal correspondence). My perspective is somewhat different; despite the explosion of scanner data, the

sophistication of web analytics, and the power of Big Data, their sterility and distance from the consumer creates an even greater need for penetrating ethnographic analysis and use of visual data.

During approximately the same time frame as the rise of the image – the last third of the twentieth century – there arose a crisis of representation that Clifford (1988) called the "breakup of ethnographic authority in twentieth-century social anthropology" (p. 22). He went on to conclude that "the West can no longer present itself as the unique purveyor of generalized ethnography. With expanded communication and intercultural influence, people interpret others, and themselves, in a bewildering array of idioms" (p. 22) and called for continued experiments in ethnographic representation to try to overcome neo-colonialist power imbalances in the ethnographic project (see also Clifford and Marcus 1986; Lassiter 2005; Marcus and Fisher 1986; Ruby 2000). One result has been collaborative "paraethnographies" (Holmes and Marcus 2006, 2008; Marcus 2012; Mills and Radcliff 2012). Other experimental outcomes include critical ethnographies to empower the disempowered (Fortun 2012), reflexive ethnographies that critique the role of the researcher (Malefyt 2009; Marcus 2012), and distancing techniques such as "Observing the observers observing" (Marcus 2012). As Fortun (2012) explains, doing collaborative ethnography is not the same as fully democratizing the research process:

> The goal is not to give everyone a chance to speak, as a matter of fairness. The model is not the town hall meeting or the talk show. But it is about being open to intervention and foreigners, about hospitality, and solicitude. The goal is to come together – to literally collaborate, performing the labor of difference, to articulate something that could not be said, could not be brought together before (p. 453).

Pink (2001, p. 44) notes that this sometimes empowers informants to challenge existing power structures, although this isn't necessarily the outcome. Pink further emphasizes that collaborative research should not be construed as being about giving something back in that this implies "hit and run" ethnography rather than making the informant more properly a participant in a joint research process.

Another of the continuing experiments is the move toward collaborative image-making. As MacDougal (1991) describes this shift in perspectives within visual anthropology:

> About twenty years ago anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers began to feel uneasy about the unchallenged dominance of the author's voice in ethnographic descriptions. Both began to open their work more fully to the voices of their indigenous subjects. The intervening years have seen a tendency towards dialogic and polyphonic construction in ethnography….If we keep writing anthropology or making films today, we do so with greater awareness of the politics and ethics of representation (p. 2).

It should be noted that not all videographers, photographers, and visual ethnographers have been equally impacted by such calls for empowering informants through collaborative image-making (e.g., see Burnett 2004; Emmison and Smith 2000; Gardner and Östör 2001; Heider 1997; Jackson and Ives 1996; Schirato and Webb 2004). At the other end of the continuum from collaborative image-making is the auteurial school which holds that all images are theatrical and that there is nothing wrong with the director staging action and creating specific meanings (e.g., Braester 2011). There are also advocacy films and photo collections which are also dominated by the vision of the image-maker. For example, Jacob Riis's (1890/1986) impactful *How the Other Half Lives* calling for action to improve living conditions in New York City slums (Jensen 2004), Dorothea Lange's (1981; Hagen 1985) photos of America's Great Depression, Robert Flaherty's (1922) *Nanook of the North* (Rabiger 2009), and Agee and Evans' (1941) *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* all staged shots for greater impact.

I would not insist that all ethnographic image-making must be naturalistic and collaborative. And naturalistic collaborative image-making is not without its own problems. But in this paper I look at some of the benefits of collaborative images, give examples of when they have been successfully employed in consumer research, and discuss some of the problems to be overcome in using this approach. I also try to expand the scope of what we mean by collaborative visual consumer research, especially within the framework of our digital age. For digital empowerment greatly changes the situation and does much to mitigate the concerns of the crisis of representation.

THE CHANGING SCOPE OF COLLABORATIVE VISUAL CONSUMER RESEARCH

There are many types of collaboration in visual consumer research, yet all remain the exception rather than the rule. In 2001, shortly after the September 11th attack on the Twin Trade Towers in New York, Rob Kozinets and I initiated a film festival at the annual conference of the Association for Consumer Research. We co-chaired it for 10 years before passing it on to other very capable hands. During that time more than 100 films aired at the festival. Only a handful involved collaborative research. Those that did either negotiated with those represented what would be included, showed the film to those portrayed in order to get their approval, or included clips shot by those portrayed in the film. For example, a film by Robert Aitken and Adriana Campelo entitled *Distant Voices*, had indigenous inhabitants of an island in New Zealand create videos of what the land means to them. The editors compiled these videos, organized them, and let the voices of the inhabitants speak to one another and to the film's audience. A further step would have been to have involved the island inhabitants in conceptualizing and editing the video or helping them become independent in order to make their own films. Nevertheless, within the ACR Film Festival catalogue (some of which is archived at http://vimeo.com/groups/136972), this film is exemplary of the best practices of collaborative research.

In commercial consumer research, however, Sunderland and Denny (2007) often give the camcorder to the participants in order to get a more candid and personal point of view (POV) in their corporate research. For example, they have given small camcorders to college students going out for an evening of drinking and learned that those selected make it a policy to drink the "good" beers first, while they can still appreciate their taste and drink the less expensive beers later in the evening when they have already had a few and are less able to appreciate the difference. Since the researcher would be a "fifth wheel" in this context, this is not so much a moral effort to empower the participants as it is a practical effort to get better and more naturalistic data. It also allows the clients to feel that they get a richer picture of consumption practices by watching the resulting edited video. I also found that in studying the new black elite in Zimbabwe, that the best way to get them to feel truly comfortable in front of the camera in a post-colonial environment was to have pairs of other new black elites who were younger than them conducting and filming the interviews (Belk 2000).

A related method of visual collaboration in consumer research is to give the participants the (still) camera. Kelly Tian and I (Tian and Belk 2005) for example wanted to study the meaning of personal possessions in a workplace. We gave employees of a high tech firm disposable cameras and instructions to photograph the 12 most meaningful possessions in their office, cubicle, or area. After developing the photos we used them to "auto drive" (Heisley and Levy 1991) or visually elicit comments during interviews conducted at an off-site restaurant. This method has several advantages. It vividly brings absent objects into the discussion at a place where workmates cannot overhear. It typically elicits much richer data than unaided discussion. And it is often a more comfortable interaction because both interviewer and interviewee are looking at the photos instead of looking at each other. Furthermore, as Pink (2001) notes, "Ethnographer and informant will be able to discuss their different understandings of images, thus collaborating to determine each other's views" (p. 68). And we were subsequently able to reproduce some of the photographs in the resulting journal article analyzing the "extended self in the workplace" so that readers/viewers could better appreciate the objects and context to which the paper's text refers. Visual elicitation can also be done with visual materials other than photographs, including drawings, video, audio recordings, collages, and the natural environment (Drew and Guillemin 2014; Guillemin and Drew 2010, Pink 2011a; Pink, Hubbard, O'Neill, and Radley 2010).

As is evident with the use of disposable film cameras in the study of office possessions, that study used old school technology (Murthy 2008). Today it would be more feasible and expedient to have people use their smart phones and e-mail the photos to the researchers (Lapenta 2011). Or we could sample various times of day by calling or messaging informants to photograph what they are doing at that moment. Another example of old school visual technology that can be updated is having informants

physically construct visual collages. When colleagues and I studied consumer desire in the U.S., Turkey, and Denmark (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003), we had participants in each country cut images from magazines and paste them on posterboard. They were to represent "desire" in these collages and after completion we had them discuss their compositions and choices of images. This was a very rich projective elicitation exercise which again resulted in reproducing some of these images in the journal in which our work was published (with color versions on their online website). But today it is more effective to have participants do collages by dragging, dropping, tilting, and resizing images and words in a program like the collage feature of Google's *Picasa*. A commercial counterpart is the eCollage™ of Buzzback (http://www.buzzback.com/ecollage/freeform/index.html). While in the desire study we had trouble providing participants in three different locations similar source material, by using digital images it is easy to share the same set of images with everyone. Using a laptop or tablet computer works very well for such tasks and informants find these collages fun and easy to do.

Likewise, rather than the paternalistic task of teaching participants to make their own photos and videos, with smart phones (e.g., Vicente, Reis and Santos 2009; Wesolowski and Eagle 2012) and inexpensive digital cameras and camcorders, as well web pages, video blogs, photo upload sites like Flickr, and video upload sites like YouTube, people in communities in a variety of world locations are already doing so on their own. Collaborations between patients and ethnographers have proved valuable for producing video diaries about cystic fibrosis (http://www.cmch.tv/via/ourwork/lisaz.asp) and asthma (http://cmch.tv/via/ourwork/asthma.asp). In other cases like Etsy, iCraft, and ezebee, they are also using similar sites to sell their arts and crafts. Patti Sunderland (personal corresponidence) notes that:

> Commercial ethnographic research (including that of Practica Group) has – out of interest and necessity – moved into offering online ethnographic research, which can be powerfully visual in that participants use their webcams as a forum to both talk about and show their worlds; photographs and visual images (drawn from elsewhere on the web) are posted by participants and discussed; videos of experiences when away from webcams are also uploaded. In practice online ethnographic research panels are highly visual mediums.

Malefyt (2009) and Suchman (2007) also point to the increasing use of visual collaborative online research in commercial ethnography.

On a grand scale, projects like "Life in a Day" demonstrate what can be done with global collaboration (e.g., http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaFVr_cJJIY). The opportunity for research using such naturally occurring visual and verbal material is enormous. Techniques of "netnography" are still emerging and keeping pace with changing technologies and applications (e.g., Best and Krueger 2002; Johns, Chen, and Hall 2004; Kozinets 2010). Ethnographic research has also been conducted in online virtual worlds (e.g., Boellstorf 2008; Martin 2008), Massively Multiple Online Role playing Games (MMORPGs) (e.g., Corneilussen and Rettberg 2008; Pearce and Artemesia 2009), blogs (e.g., Dean 2010; Rettberg 1988; Serfaty 2004), YouTube (e.g., Burgess and Green 2009; Pace 2011; Strangelove 2010; Wesch 2008), and Facebook (e.g., Drenton 2012; Miller 2011). Many of these important sources of self-presentation are automatically archived through sources like the Way Back Machine, while others are being archived by various secondary archivers. For example, the U.S. Library of Congress has been archiving all public Twitter messages tweeted since the start of this social medium in 2006. By October, 2012 it was archiving more than half a billion tweets each day (Allen 2013).

Just what may be analyzed through such archives is open to the imagination. For example, a recent analysis of YouTube videos found that men were twice as likely as women to be the subject of stigmatization due to fatness, while men were ten times as likely as women to be the ones doing the stigmatizing and ridiculing (Hussin, Frazier, and Thompson 2011). Drenton (2012) found that a group of teenage girls uploading an average of over 150 photos a month each to Facebook, used posting on each other's walls and tagging others in their uploaded photos to help "co-construct" their individual and aggregate senses of self. For example, one group of 3 girls were in a clothing shop dressing room trying on sequin-covered dresses. One snapped a joint photo of them in the dressing room mirror and instantly uploaded it to Facebook. Before they even left the dressing room others were posting back messages like "Cute dress! You should get it." In other cases, one of them would post a self-disparaging message on

their photo, like “I really look terrible here,” prompting others to post reinforcing messages like “You look hot! I wish I looked that good on a bad day” (Belk 2013). Because these messages look like uninvited endorsements, they enhance self-image without seeming narcissistic. LinkedIn is used in a similar fashion with specific skill endorsements from others, often followed by reciprocal endorsements of the endorser by the original target person.

Another naturally occurring form of empowered visual expression is found in some forms of urban graffiti or street art (Alvelos 2004; Emmanuel 2007; Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, and Anderson 2010). As a sign of resistance, such visual graffiti differ in nature from gangs tagging boundaries of their claimed urban territories, although aesthetic expression in street art can itself be a form of resistance to urban banality (Banksy 2006, 2010). Resistance has a long history ranging from disaffected urban youth to disenfranchised indigenous groups (David and Wilson 2002; Ferrell 1995). Hocking’s (2012) study of murals and graffiti in Belfast show how graffiti of religious protest have changed to murals for peace, only to be defaced with further graffiti of protest.

ANALYZING NEW MEDIA SELF-REPRESENTATION

Full self-presentation is the norm in blogs, personal web pages, and social media. In such cases the role of the anthropologist changes from visual interpreter of consumer culture to interpreter of consumers’ visual culture. In analyzing informant-produced self-representations we first need to consider what makes digitally mediated images and artifacts different from their analogue counterparts (Belk 2013; Lister 1995; Shove, Watson, Hand, and Ingram 2007). The vast proliferation of such representations shows that digital images and films are quite easy to make and post online. In so doing, what were once private home photo albums (Chalfen 1987, 1998; Hirsch 1981; King 1984) or the personal archives of commercial photographers (Lesy 1973; Pinney 1997) are transformed into posted photographs for “friends” or the general public to see. Nevertheless, some of the same biases occur and the photos posted are likely to show happy people on celebratory occasions with new possessions (Belk 2010, 2011). However, whereas in analogue photography the photographer was seldom in the photo (Mendelson and Papacharissi 2011), with the advent of camera phones and arm’s length “selfies,” it has become normal for the photographer to appear in digital photos.

Like home mode photography, home mode films and videos have also become a valuable means of unobtrusively acquiring movie footage of home life (e.g., Chalfen 1988; Izhizuka and Zimmermann 2008; Rook 1985). The same advantages and biases that apply to home mode photography also apply to home movies. Contemporary archives of such films are found on YouTube and Vimeo as previously noted, along with a number of other film genres. But they do not contain the majority of older (or even current) home films and compiling an archive of footage in their many different historical formats remains a challenge.

With the tendency to “share” photos online via social media, it also becomes increasingly difficult for users to segregate different audiences for these representations (Belk forthcoming; John 2012). Children are often embarrassed if their friends see posts from their families and may get in trouble if their families see posts from their friends (Odom, Zimmerman, and Forlizzi 2011). When images are posted instead on an open blog or web site, the audience is potentially anyone. While filters of social desirability and flattering self-portrayal are also evident in these cases, the online disinhibition effect (Suler 2004) and the desire to gain a large number of viewers and “followers” (Belk 2013), means that there is a tendency to admit foibles and faux pas in what sometimes becomes a “confessional” mode (Belk 2013; Holiday 2007; Renov 1996). Nevertheless, some of the photographer’s or videographer’s biases and intent seem to operate beneath their awareness but are evident in the images they post. For example, Nguyen and Belk (2007) found that veterans of America’s Vietnamese War photographed smiling American subjects in dominant positions with heroic upward camera angles, and fearful Vietnamese subjects in submissive positions with infantalizing downward camera angles. Another good example of analyzing photo biases is the analysis of *National Geographic* portrayals of subaltern consumers by Lutz and Collins (1993). These are just the sorts of power imbalances that collaborative ethnography is intended to redress.

With the shift to self-representation in digital online photography and videography, we should also be aware that our empowered inadvertent informants are telling stories about themselves (Furlong 1985; Walker 1985). Just as we ethnographers tell different sorts of stories through our ethnographies (Cayla and Arnould 2013; Cayla, Beers, and Arnould 2014; Van Maanen 1988), so do the collaborators. These range from confessional tales as noted above, to realist tales (especially in the travel genre emphasizing "I was there"), to impressionist tales of a more artistic nature. Although traditionally narrative analysis focuses primarily on text (e.g., Bruner 2002; Elliott 2005; Riessman 1993), recent treatments have begun to consider the unique features of visual narratives (e.g., Keats 2009; Page 2005; Pimenta and Poovaiha 2010; Riessman 2008). Given the easier possibilities of altering digital photos, we need to be more cautious not to believe everything we see. Through what Barthes (1977) terms mythology, there is often a deeper level of implicit meaning in an image than that of language or its literal meanings. For example, in advertising, implausible claims that using a product will make you attractive, beautiful, and admired cannot legally be made explicitly in language. But they can be implied by choice of the actors, actions, and *mise en scène*. Such semiotic properties of images require a more careful narrative analysis than words, which operate primarily at the level of language.

ISSUES IN VISUAL COLLABORATION AND NEW MEDIA

In specifically visual collaborations in print, online, and visual outlets additional issues arise in safeguarding informant identity since their image and perhaps their voice are a part of the research output. Besides the usual moral concerns about giving textual "voice" to informants, when the research is partly or wholly visual there are added concerns because of the difficulty of disguising participants' images and voices. These are concerns that do not occur in textual representation where pseudonyms may suffice to provide anonymity. And although editors of photos and videos may pixelate or blur faces and alter voices, this takes away a key benefit of visual media in helping the audience to put a human "face" to informants. Collaboration does not necessarily solve these problems, but puts issues of representation more fully in the hands of the collaborators.

Locations are also often difficult to disguise. There is also the need to negotiate what may be shown with collaborators, including what may be shown to whom and under what conditions. These issues become especially contentious when harm may potentially befall research participants if they are seen by certain others saying or doing the things that are included in an audio-visual research output. For example, Rana Sobh and I have done several visual research projects in Qatar and United Arab Emirates that were threatening both because of our desire to show images of covered Arab women outside of their *mahrem* (the circle of family who may gaze upon a woman) and our need to reveal negative attitudes that certain non-citizen residents hold toward the privileges of the dominant culture citizens and their rulers. The former images could bring shame on a family, while the latter critiques could result in informant expulsion from the countries of their birth where the research took place.

In the case of images of the abaya (gown) and shayla (headscarf) coverings, we agreed only to show these outfits if they were modelled by a non-citizen resident or on a mannequin. Because different Muslim cultures have different cultural understandings of proper Muslim female dress, guest workers such as maids were less conflicted about such modelling. In a related research project we were able to show female informants only when they wore a full facial covering (burka) in addition to an abaya and shayla. And in the case of the critical comments about local citizens and rulers, we agreed to get permission each time we wanted to show the resulting video to a specific professional audience and not to post the video to the web. These were workable compromises, but they did result in less transparent and visually engaging research outputs than is usually expected in visual research (see Sobh and Belk 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; forthcoming). But without collaboration, these projects would not have been possible at all.

Collaborative research can also be more difficult when the researcher and informants live in distant places and budgets constrain repeat visits. For example Joyce Yeh and I studied tourist photography by North American tourists in a variety of Asian, Antarctic, African, and Polynesian locations. As a part of

this project I obtained the consent of one group of North American tourists to follow and videotape them as they toured Vietnam and Cambodia. My involvement during the tour was primarily that of participant observer and my camcorder was relatively invisible among normal tourist photography and videography being done at these sites. When we I returned to North America I had informants e-mail me their trip photos and I interviewed them about their subsequent uses of these images. However, I could not afford to go to their various scattered locations to record these interviews. Instead, I transcribed the interviews and hired actors to enact their lines verbatim. As a result the resulting video and paper use these re-enactments, but the video is much heavier in voice-over interpretation than would have ideally been the case (Belk and Yeh 2011). Today capturing a Skype video interview could help overcome these problems.

Even though visual image making has become ubiquitous, there is also an issue of people "acting" when they know that they are being photographed or filmed. Sunderland and Denny (2007) do not find this to be much of a problem:

> From our point of view, the performance of routines—including those associated with the act of movie-making—do not in any way impede possibilities of cultural analysis. To consider that because something is performed it does not convey "real" information is to force oneself into a needlessly confining box. …as ethnomethodology and ethnography of communication research made abundantly clear many years ago, culturally specified, learned, rehearsed, performative routines (in physical and verbal actions) are part of what make life both predictable and intelligible. … Performances *are* culturally telling and revealing (p. 255).

But there are other potential problems as well. As MacDougal (1991) has noted, in many cultures a person's name and image should not be uttered or shown after his or her death. In other cases there is secret sacred knowledge that is not to be shared with the uninitiated or with one gender or the other. This can often be respected by taking down or restricting or forbidding access in museum displays, but it is a more troublesome issue with open Internet access to digitized representations (Belk and Groves 1999). Even if a representation is taken down from the Internet, this is no guarantee that it has not been copied and re-distributed by someone else.

ADDITIONAL TYPES OF VISUAL COLLABORATIONS

Most of the preceding discussion has focused on visual collaborations with informants. But there are other stakeholders with whom researchers may collaborate. Chief among them are the audiences or clients who consume the research output. In both academic and corporate research, attention has increasingly turned to business, consumers, and the digital world that is so much a part of contemporary consumption (e.g., Coleman 2009, 2010; Fortun 2012; Horst and Miller 2006; Humphrey 2009; Malefyt 2009; Miller and Horst 2012; Miller and Slater 2000; Mills and Ratcliffe 2012; Pink 2004; Suchman 2007)). These shifts have resulted from following the growing part of our lives spent with digital consumption as well from pressures within academia (Mills and Radcliffe 2012) and employment and funding opportunities for both academic and commercial ethnographers (Malefyt 2009; Pink 2004). Further visual ethnographic collaborations have been found with the field of design (Attfield 2000; Crabtree 2003; Crabtree and Rodden 2002; Crabtree, Rouncefield, and Tolmie 2012; Gunn and Donovan 2012). One result for commercial ethnographers has been a shift in methods toward the visual and "fast ethnography" as well as a shift in the unit of analysis from society and culture to the individual (Malefyt 2009). Whether this demand-driven change weakens the value of resulting ethnographies and leads to an over-reliance on the visual is an important topic, but one which is too complex to be considered here.

Greater attention to audiences has also resulted in new, more collaborative forms of sharing information. As Oliveira (2013) emphasizes, it is important to engage corporate clients in the field by inviting their presence at field sites as well as enlisting them to help interpret edited presentations of visual and other ethnographic data. This creates client "buy-in" to findings as well as active participation in deriving implications. It is also useful to create interactive media presentations of results on DVD or the Internet (Belk 1998; Kershenboom 1995) as well as in "graphic facilitation" in which PowerPoints are

replaced by interactive live drawing of visual representations (McGinn 2010). Drawing on Fiske (1994), Rose (2001) calls this "audiencing," meaning "…the process by which a visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in specific circumstances" (p. 55).

Even when the indigenous audience is in another part of the world, such sharing can also virtually repatriate collected objects. An example is the British Museum's online interactive presentation of an Australian bark shield obtained by Captain Cook in 1770. A remote audience of Aboriginal Australians performed an interpretive dance and discussion in response once the shield was "released from its glass case" where it was physically stored (Hogsden and Poulter 2012). A number of other examples of virtually repatriating collected objects can be found in Christen (2011).

CONCLUSIONS

This has necessarily been an incomplete look at the imperatives for and challenges with using collaborative visual research in a consumption context. Additional issues include how to stimulate polyvocal dialogic representations (for a good discussion in the context of Dennis O'Rourke's *Cannibal Tours* see MacCannell 1990). There are also questions of who is in front of and who is behind the camera, as in some of Jean Rouch's films (see Ruby 2000 for a discussion). We should also consider the fact that empowering the subjects of a project to engage in self-representation creates another truth, but not necessarily a "truer" truth. We found in showing our account of a flea market ethnography (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988) to a subset of participants, that they insisted that the stolen merchandise that we found present was extremely rare. Our experience suggested otherwise, but we wound up leaving such evidence out of our published account. Men's perspectives may also dominate women's or dominant social classes may shut out subordinate social class representations in a number of cultures (Banks 2001). That is, self-depictions can also be problematic. Nevertheless, as Pink (2001) points out, we still learn something about how people wish to represent themselves.

Even with good collaborative research intentions, some of the same power imbalances that operate in non-collaborative research may still be present. For example, powerful groups are more likely to deny access to researchers or to be willing to represent themselves, for they are often already well represented and may wish to keep a low profile from outsiders whom they know may have a critical perspective (Low 2004; Marcus 1983; Prosser and Schwartz 1998). This does not mean that it is impossible to study "upward," but it can be more difficult than studying "downward." Gaining access is still possible, but it often takes additional work and cleverness (e.g., see Goldberg 1985). Janeen Costa and I (Costa and Belk 1990) found that we had to continuously adjust appointments in order to study an extended nouveau riche family and that while our video equipment might impress poorer consumers, it was critiqued as not being the very latest thing by members of this family. There are many technical issues in visual studies including what to film, how to frame shots, how to film, how to edit, and many other key decisions that affect what the audience sees in the images we create, co-create, and present (e.g, see Barbash and Taylor 1997; Marion and Crowder 2013). However, space does not allow a discussion of these key decision here.

Representation can never be and should never be an objective and value-free project (Hamilton 1997). Even with the flood of available images from CCTV cameras around the world, we must still choose images and decide what we will do with them. There are also further ethical issues to consider as new technologies make possible new data collection techniques. For example, it is legal, but clearly unethical, for retailers to use their in-store surveillance video recorders to identify shoppers using facial recognition software, to instantly tie people into their purchase and credit histories, and to feed this information to store clerks who can try to upsell customers the merchandise these records suggest they may find most appealing (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013). Stores can also trace shopper in-store shopping patterns using traces from their mobile phones, even when they are not on. This can provide unobtrusive evidence of how long they spend in various aisles and parts of the store, but it also raises new ethical questions. Some of the same advanced technologies that potentially empower marginalized

groups can also be used to disempower and exploit them. These are among the deeper issues that we need to consider in a digital age.

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