

Working Title: Igniting the Practice - The Anti-Manifesto

May 24 - Revised version

History

In 2011, two visual methods conferences (The International Visual Sociology Association held in Vancouver B.C. and the International Visual Methodologies Conference held at Milton Keynes, UK) brought together our two research teams:

Professor Claudia Mitchell and doctoral students from the Participatory Cultures Lab at McGill University (<http://participatorycultureslab.wordpress.com/>); and,

Professors Wendy Luttrell and David Chapin and doctoral students from the Collaborative Seeing Studio at the Graduate Center, City University of New York (<http://collaborativeseeingstudio.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>)

Our encounters ignited a desire to explore the synergies of our visual research practices. As a result, we held two weekend seminars, the first at McGill University in November, 2011 and the second at the Graduate Center (CUNY) at the end of March 2012.

The purpose of these meetings was to present our individual projects, discuss visual research activities, and to imagine future visual research collaborations based on our commitment to these common core values:

- a. mutual responsibility
- b. negotiating voice/privilege/language
- c. positive outcomes
- d. reciprocity

(1) Legacies and traditions: Where and who are we drawing from?

We believe that it is important to situate our work within the historical context of how visual methodologies and participatory research have been positioned and practiced across multiple disciplines.

We value the collective memory of multiple traditions and fields as we cultivate new intellectual alliances.

As visual researchers, we ask the following critical questions about *our legacies and traditions that visual research and its' participatory nature is rooted from*:

- How do our predecessors inform and frame our work?
- Where do the legacies and traditions of participatory visual methodologies come from?
- How do we negotiate the legacies and traditions as visual researchers?

(2) Reflexivity: Who am I? Who are we? How do we locate ourselves in our work?

We think that reflexivity needs to be experienced on two different planes. First, as individual researchers, we question who, what, and where we are in relation to our work. Second, as a collective group, we engage with the reflexive process to consider how we represent/locate ourselves as visual researchers in various academic, research, and community settings. Additionally, this process enables us to critically examine the notion and

importance of transparency in our work. It requires us to think about how our work contributes to and shapes intellectual alliances with other researchers and the communities that we work with.

We acknowledge that studying how to be reflexive is as important to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities it brings to our work.

As visual researchers, we ask the following critical questions about *the meaning and place of reflexivity in our work*:

- How do we continuously maintain and value the reflexive practice in our work?
- What are some possible ways to take reflexivity up in your work?
- How do we define commitments related to participatory collaborative relationships in our research?
- How do we understand risk-taking, vulnerability, honesty, and transparency in how we work?
- How can we build intellectual alliances with other researchers and with the communities that we work with?
- How does our commitment to this research practice frame our place within the community? What is our ethical responsibility: To whom are we responsible? What are the ethical considerations?

(3) Technology and Visual Research: The Age of What?

We believe that our work is influenced by the technologies that we incorporate in our visual research. From pen and paper to digital interactive online media, each form of technology comes with possibilities and challenges.

We acknowledge that technology is constantly evolving and affecting our knowledge and practice as researchers as well as the communities that we work with.

As visual researchers, we ask the following critical questions in *the context of a changing technological landscape*:

- How do different technologies impact visual research?
- How do we capture the value of different types of technologies?
- Why do we privilege the use of a particular kind of technology in a given context?
- How does technology affect, enhance, or challenge the participatory or collaborative nature of our work?
- What research possibilities and ethical constraints exist when using digital technology in online environments? How should data be handled in the long-term?

Overall, we believe that it is important to acknowledge that each technological choice comes with ethical and ideological questions and responsibilities. In the contemporary landscape of digital interactive online media, we need to question how we embrace, create, and use it. How do we identify our responsibilities and address the constraints that result from the interplay between the virtual/online environments and the digital technology that we use as visual researchers?

(4) Fostering Dialogue

We know that among other things, our work is shaped by its dialogic nature, based on a process rooted in multiple interpretative communities; whereby, the visual element of our work does not stand alone, it is intimately tied to “voice”/dialogue across communities/audiences over time.

a. Dialogic position:

We believe that it is important to think about how the approaches and tools we choose can influence the dialogic process, fostering communication across time, space, different contexts and media. For example, some of us use archiving as a way of fostering dialogue between multiple interpretative communities over time.

b. Multiple interpretive communities:

In our work, we collect and use visual data within the contexts of multiple interpretive communities. We think it is important to maintain an ongoing dialogue about how these research practices raise questions, concerns, and challenges, and at the same time, create new possibilities for future work.

As visual researchers, we ask the following critical questions regarding the scope and reach visual research achieves throughout contexts and over time:

- What are the challenges and possibilities of working with multiple interpretative communities? What ethical issues arise when doing so?

c. The archive:

The term archive implies process, a returning to, a working with data or information overtime that is not implied by other terms (e.g., databank). We choose this term because it involves a place, space, location to store and share data. The archive changes how we think about research, while at the same time raises new concerns:

- What is the longevity of data itself?
- What ethical questions arise from the possibility of archiving data that can be accessed across time and space?
- How does the access to, ownership of, and control of data need to be discussed with the communities that we work with?