

## Picture Perfect (?): Ethical Considerations in Visual Representation

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, I consider the many ethical dilemmas facing visual anthropologists and those using visual representation material in their research. The issues are many and are complex. With this paper I scratch only the surface of how to confront and deal with some of them. The main purpose of this paper is not to provide solutions, as ethical questions are always unique to the situations in which they develop. What the paper does do is look at ways in which visual anthropologists, and documentary filmmakers have approached and dealt with a variety of these concerns. An extensive review of historical and contemporary works of visual representations are explored and analysed as examples of the types of ethical issues encountered. In our increasingly post-colonial era, issues of voice, co-authorship and copyright highlight just a few of the current topics covered herein. Techniques such as balanced multivocality, reflexivity, collaboration, and reciprocity are discussed with the aid of short case studies to offer examples of the types of ethical issues those using visual material might be faced with and how to possibly deal with (though not necessarily solve) them.

### **Introduction**

Ethical considerations should not be regarded as burdens or barriers to research. Instead, they should be “an integral part of the ordinary, day-to-day practice of our craft” (Fluehr-Lobban 1998: 174). The fact that our research is based on the lived-experiences of individuals — individuals whose lives can be variously impacted by our research conduct and presentation — fundamentally impels us to confront the myriad of ethical quandaries as intelligently and responsibly as possible (Pink 2001: 33). This paper will discuss current ethical issues of visual representations, critiques directed against their use, and potential

solutions developed in response to these discourses. Collaboration has been the ethical solution espoused by many visual ethnographers, yet, as will be presented below, it is not always a possibility. The methods of balanced multivocality and intelligent use of reflexivity, alone and in conjunction with collaboration will also be discussed in their roles as methods responding to ethical concerns. Finally, the topics of informed consent and reciprocity will be discussed, briefly highlighting some common and potentially harmful issues that have been encountered. Frankly, so many examples of ethical issues exist that they cannot be covered sufficiently herein. Therefore, this essay's achievement will be in asking many questions and partially answering some by examining select examples and experiences by a handful of visual ethnographers.

A picture is said to be worth a thousand words because of its ability to hold as much meaning in one frame as can only otherwise be expressed in that many words. However, the 'thousand words' do not always remain the same for a single image. Depending on the audience and the context in which the image is being viewed, the interpretations can be different. Further, through a matrix of editing, captioning and juxtaposing, the image can be made to 'mean' a thousand different words for particular audiences. Central to the ethics of representation, then, is the understanding that all photos and films are *made* not 'taken,' and their meanings are temporally and culturally contingent constructions. The constructed nature of visual representations is then subject to potential manipulations by the creator's biases and agendas, which can lead to damaging misrepresentations. As well, the setting and manner in which the representations are viewed can accomplish similar negative ends. For visual ethnographers, ethical dilemmas such as how to avoid creating misrepresentations and preventing harms, while still making engaging representations, need to be balanced and negotiated with personal and professional ethics, the ethics of the community, and the moment in which the image is being made. This is a process that is not unproblematic. Even if the process is accomplished, the representations can still be misinterpreted due

to unforeseen circumstances altering the viewers' context, such as new political developments. Yet, these possibilities should not silence ethical discussions.

At the foundation of the ethical discussions will be the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Code of Ethics' mandate of respect and responsibility to the people participating in the project. The Code states that "anthropological researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people, species and materials they study and to the people with whom they work.... the obligations include: to avoid harm or wrong...[and] the anthropological researchers [should not] knowingly misrepresent" research findings and subjects (AAA 1998: 3-5). However clear the mandate may appear, the AAA code is vague in its definition of 'harm' and how its avoidance should be implemented

As opposed to the physical damages possible in drug trials, 'harms' from visual ethnographies tend to take the form of embarrassment or anxiety over how representations will be interpreted (Pink 2001: 42). Yet, 'harms' from representations can also lead to political, economic, and physical harms depending on the situations and circumstances in which they exist. Imperative is the need to obtain a good understanding of what 'harm' means to the potential participants, and what 'harms' are conceivable outcomes of the proposed representation. The potential harms must also be held up next to the potential benefits, as the latter may override the risks. Still, these discussions are not without their problems, and will be discussed below.

Furthermore, application of the AAA code to research is meant to be fluid; that codes are written does not mean that they should be considered regulatory. It has been argued that for an anthropological ethical code to be effective it must be, as the AAA code states, a "framework... to foster discussion and education" (AAA 1998: 1; Fluehr-Lobban 1998: 191). Ethical concerns, and the situations that raise them, are not static and definitive, instead they are ever emergent. In order for an ethical code to be effective, then, it must be malleable to the situations at

hand. This essay will follow the spirit of the AAA code by not presenting a 'how-to' in creating ethical visual representations, but offer guidelines and points of discussion. The examples and topics discussed herein are meant as pedagogical tools rather than prescriptions.

### **Clarification of Terms**

In the above introduction I have tended to use the term 'visual ethnographer' when most people would deem visual anthropologist sufficient. However, a distinction must be made for visual anthropology is a broad field. While "most anthropologists associate visual anthropology with the production of a visual record, most likely in the medium of ethnographic film, ... many visual anthropologists do not solely produce, but examine, visual phenomena" (Wilks 1999). Visual anthropology is not only the creation of ethnographies using a visual medium, but is also the study of other 'visual phenomena' such as visual creations by non-anthropologists, primate art, and architecture.

Visual ethnography, by distinction, is the creation or presentation of ethnographic research via visual media, mainly film, video, photography, and increasingly, digital media, CD-ROMs and DVDs. Visual ethnography, therefore, includes ethnographic film, 'ethnophotography,' and digital multimedia in all their various collaborative, and multi- or single-authored incarnations. Anthropologists need not make visual ethnographies, and examples used in this essay will be documentary films and photojournalism.

Visual representation, on the other hand, is a broader term than visual ethnographies, but not as broad as visual anthropology. Although visual ethnographies are also visual representations, visual representations are not always visual ethnographies. Whereas the former are ethnographies that are image-based, the latter can be simply illustrations representing aspects of research, and are interspersed in a print-based ethnography.

**Ethics of visual representation: past into the present**

“[Photographs] cannot be called copies of nature, but portions of nature herself.” Samuel Morse, 1840

Though the above quote is from 1840, a year after the invention of photography (Gross, Katz and Ruby 1988: 3), it represents an understanding of the perceived reality of photographic images that still exists today. The ‘realism’ view of photographs that emerged with the development of the camera suited the positivist minded anthropology of the nineteenth century (de Brigard 1995: 15; Edwards 1992: 8). The media of photography and film (invented in the 1880s) were hailed as undeniably objective tools for systematic recording and creation of a body of anthropological data (Wright 1992: 19-20). The ethical issues of this time centred around the concern for creating an objective scientific database; an archive of images for the benefit of the anthropological sciences (Wright 1992: 19). This meant that for the sake of science, people could be taken out of context and made to pose for photographs, sometimes in various stages of undress in front of grids or next to rulers. Peoples’ rights to privacy or respect for their cultural values were overridden in the name of science, to measure difference, and construct a scientific object of the ‘exotic other’ (Pinney 1992: 77; Poignant 1992: 42). Images ethically usable for analysis were pure and untainted, created either in controlled settings where differences could be literally measured, or in settings where all items of ‘contact’ were edited. Images including European items, let alone European researchers, polluted and confounded the records, thereby rendering images unusable (figure 2) (Pinney 1992: 76).

The 1920s and 1930s saw anthropology increasingly concerning itself less with “subject matter from an observable world to the more abstract notions of social structure, and so forth” (Sapir 1994: 869). Such abstract phenomena were not easily accommodated by the photographic medium (de Brigard 1995: 17). Photographs fell out general favour, and tended to be used solely for illustration purposes. Also developing at this

time was a new fieldwork technique: participant-observation. The new method meant anthropologists were spending more time in the field, living alongside the subjects, and engaging more intensely with them.

Camera use is a much more public form of recording observations than note taking. So with the emphasis on rapport in this new field technique, if anthropologists were using film, no longer were they able to create visual representations without being questioned by the subjects (de Brigard 1995: 14). However, conscientious response to subject's concerns would not be for another decade. The majority of the visual representations created in the 1920s and 1930s, were still concerned with limiting exposure of the researcher's involvement in the research, and much less concerned about exposing the researcher's influence in the creation of the visual representations. If anthropologists were included in images, which they still generally were not, they tended to be in playful images of the researcher involved in the participant portion of participant-observer, while leaving unquestioned the role of the person recording the image (Clifford 1986: 1).

By the late 1930s, the objective nature and 'reality' of photographs and films were being questioned. Outside of anthropology, *avant-garde* artists such as Man-Ray and Alfred Steiglitz began experimenting with photography's ability to express abstract and metaphysical concepts, concepts that are only now influencing visual representations (Spaulding 1999: 237-8; MacDougall 1997: 287 & 293). Documentary filmmakers and photojournalists began concerning themselves with "social documentaries," using methods that responded to the needs of the individuals, and presented them not as objects, but subjects deserving attention and respect (de Brigard 1995: 23). Photographers such as Dorothea Langue and Eugene Smith were documenting the plight of the unemployed Americans during the Great Depression and the hardships faced by American country doctors in the 1940s, respectively (Spaulding 1999: 112; Sapir 1994: 878).

Within anthropology the response to the subjective nature of film and photography also generated much experimentation, out of which developed many of the techniques still used today. Within the discipline at the time, the anthropologist was still legitimately the unquestioned authority of the ethnographic process, although this perspective was slowly changing. Many anthropological images continued not to explicitly reveal the processes of creating the visual representations. However, subjectivity and potential influencing factors were acknowledged and responded to by developing techniques that were said to “control the subjective choice,” or biases, inherent in the researcher (Mead in Sullivan 1999: 16). Margaret Mead, and later, John Collier, Jr. and Malcolm Collier, introduced methods such as sequential photography whereby researcher biases was said to be reduced to insignificance (Sullivan 1999: 19; Collier, Jr. and Collier 1986: 10).

At the same time, as colonial powers diminished and voices of the colonized garnered attention, the techniques developed by Mead and Collier, Jr. were not accepted by many visual ethnographers as sufficiently responding to the emergent issues of the time. A number of visual ethnographers, contemporaries of Mead and Collier, began experimenting with visual techniques that would incorporate more voices of previously colonized people. Among others, John Marshall was making films of the !Kung in Africa, Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling were working in Alaska with the Yup'ik, Robert Gardner worked in Papua New Guinea, and Jean Rouch produced films in France and northwest Africa (de Brigard 1995: 36; Ruby 2000: 11; Tomaselli 1996: 169). Each of these filmmakers developed, used, and honed techniques such as *cinema-verite*, multivocality, reflexivity and collaboration as responses to the issues they faced.

For some, the techniques incorporated were explicitly in response to ethical dilemmas. Leonard Kamerling and Sarah Elder developed an intensive “lateral collaboration” with various Yup'ik community members in Alaska as a way of developing “an equal place of power” where everyone could benefit from the

productions (Elder 1995: 96). For others the techniques they used, though today seen as ethical, developed out of other personal goals. For Jean Rouch, the techniques he employed developed organically out of a personal goal to “have a visual anthology of ethnographic films” (Rouch 1995: 226). Rouch’s ultimate concern was to build a collection of ethnographic images, and in order to attain this aim, he taught others how to make their own visual representations. He fundamentally respected the ability in each person to create their own visual representations and respected their authority over their own culture. His stance was implicitly imbued with an ethic of respect not located in many popular ethnographies of the times that conformed to the traditional scientific model (Rouch 1995: 227; Ruby 2000: 13).

By the 1980s, it became generally accepted that ethnographies, textual or otherwise, were “inherently *partial* - committed and incomplete,” and that any form of presenting “cultural descriptions is properly experimental and ethical” (Clifford 1986: 7 and 2). Concerns were over politics of representation, that anthropologists could no longer claim unbiased authority, and that certain representations (or misrepresentations) could lead to serious political, social, economic and even physical harms. Anthropologists were encouraged to be aware of the constructed nature of representations so as not to dehistoricize people, present them as static, or deny their ability to speak for themselves.

During the “experimental moment” (Marcus and Fisher 1999: 40), techniques such as multivocality, reflexivity, collaboration and co-authorship found in some earlier forms of visual ethnographies and non-anthropological documentaries gained legitimacy (Clifford 1986: 15-17; Pink 2001: 7-8). This was not because visuals were seen to represent the ‘reality’ of difference, but because some of the visual ethnographies created by Rouch, Marshall, Gardner and others, were examples of how reflexivity, voice, and collaboration could be incorporated into a more ethically and politically conscious anthropology. Anthropologists began to accept the subjectivity of writing, and



were experimenting with poetry and narrative in order to explore the new awakenings in text, they were also able to legitimately explore the use of visuals (Pink 2001: 9).

### **Current ethics of visual representation**

Taking a picture in anthropology is never simply 'taking a picture,' there is always ethical baggage attached. We are in a post-colonial atmosphere, where people, traditionally the subjects of visual ethnographies, are making their own representations. Subsequently, it is growing difficult (and becoming an ethical *faux-pas*) to make visual representations without including extensive dialogue with all the people involved or associated with the production (Ruby 2000: 139). Concerns over these "multiple layers of responsibility" are increasingly being dealt with in the field by a more engaged visual ethnography encouraging dialogue and cooperation on the part of participants and their communities, broadcasters and filmmakers, and other academics (Fluehr-Lobban 1998: 190). Three questions figure prominently in the current ethical discourses. Can we still ethically make visual representations? What makes a visual representation an ethical one? And, are truly ethical visual representations possible?

The response to the question of whether outsiders can still ethically make visual representations, the answer, very broadly, is yes. Three reasons, by way of explanation, must be noted. First, just because individuals are able to intellectually represent themselves, does not mean they are physically able to do so. Situations exist where people, though no longer colonial subjects, are still marginalized. It is conceivable that if they were to make their own visual representations they may cause themselves more harms, or may not be able to generate support as the representation would be dismissed as being overly biased.

Second, some people are genuinely not interested in what anthropologists think are important topics and issues. Even if the anthropologist is interested in advocating or assisting in a project that may benefit the community, some people are not interested in taking up the task. This does not mean that informed consent

and other ethical issues need not be broached, rather it means that a project may not be able to go ahead, or may need to be done without their assistance.

Third, some issues and events may be deemed too important not to be reported and represented. The people involved in the event may not be able to make their own representations as it may cause more harm, or they are too busy trying to stay alive to worry about making visual representations of their situations. Despite risks of causing harm to some people represented, it can be argued that it is our ethical duty to report these events or situations, visually or otherwise, in order to inform others (Bourgois 1991: 112). Such actions may counter the AAA code's mandate of avoiding harm, however, these complex situations may be a reason why the code is not regulatory.

Responding to the second discourse question, the characteristics of ethical visual representations depend on the times and context in which the representations are being made. In the nineteenth century when film and photography were just invented, ethical visual representations meant images that were 'unsoiled' by European presences. Today, it would mean representations that have fundamentally respected the rights of the participants. Their rights to privacy and confidentiality (if they so choose), their rights to have their voices and perspectives heard, and their rights to claim authority over areas pertaining to their lives and cultures. Despite the semblance of simplicity in this response, the full force of the question must be accompanied by the response to the third question.

According to Jay Ruby, it is impossible to make completely ethical productions at all, because there is always someone who is going to be unhappy with the final representation (Ruby 2000: 138). Rather than attempting the impossible of trying to please everyone, the goal should be of following the AAA code of ethics' mandate of avoiding potential harm to the subjects. Avoiding harm does not mean 'whitewashing' representations in order to please everyone. By being silent on issues that are potentially controversial, "we run

the risk of producing diminished, analytically atrophied, and misleading ethnography,” which can be argued as harms in themselves (Dyck 1993: 197). Dyck, although writing about textual representations of Native North Americans, presents a solution whereby we must recognize and make explicit the heterogeneity of concerns in the situations, cultures, and communities we represent (Dyck 1993: 201). At the same time we must make known that similar heterogeneity exists in all cultures, so as not to misrepresent these participants as being the only ones with internal tensions. Therefore, the creation of visual representations is possible, though not without many ethical dilemmas exemplified above. Next, I will present some of the criticisms of visuals.

### **Visual representation critiques**

Statements levied against the use of visuals in anthropology have not changed a great deal in the last few decades, even with the introduction of Indigenous image making projects. The criticisms range from critiquing any form of visuals, even for illustration purposes, to collaborative and Indigenous filmmaking projects. In general the arguments centre around visuals, photographs in particular, being symbols of dominance and paternalism. Susan Sontag argues photography inherently embodies the Foucaultian nightmare of control and surveillance (Sontag 1989: 5). For Sontag, “to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed” and thereby control that which is photographed (Sontag 1989: 4). To be ‘captured’ on film, accomplishes the same brutal ends as if being physically captured. Considering photographers, searching for the perfect picture, “are always imposing standards on their subjects,” those photographed (and those not), can be harmed for not conforming to the standard, by not appearing ‘authentic’ enough to be treated like their peers (Sontag 1989: 6). She further argues that the camera is a passive observation tool that creates distance, perpetuating cultural rifts (Sontag 1989: 12). Moreover, the photograph always hides more than it reveals in an attempt to regulate the interpretations by the audience, thereby it controls

not only those photographed, but also those viewing (Sontag 1989: 23).

James Faris argues that film and photos continue colonization by using indigenous people for 'our' purposes, be they for advocacy or academic research. Additionally, the fact that it is more often the anthropologist initiating the research, the power structures remain (Faris 1992: 172). Visuals, Faris charges, continue the construction of the "subaltern," 'authentic' or not, that Westerners have been consuming for over a century (Faris 1992: 172). Even in the hands of indigenous people, or the hands of advocating anthropologists, Faris argues, visuals continue to feed into Western ideals of indigenous people being the 'exotic' in need of protection and assistance. Particularly arguing about the Kayapo, though well versed in the use of video technology, Faris states they are only allowed to enter "the global village... on [Westerners'] terms," with using our visual grammar (Faris 1992: 176).

With the introduction of cheaper and simplified technology, the Internet, and specialty cable and satellite channels, some of the criticisms above aptly apply to recent visual representations created without these ethical considerations in mind<sup>1</sup>. The issues of distance and paternalism are not new, and their criticisms are likely to remain, for good reason. Having such criticisms reminds visual ethnographers that they are *creating* rather than representing cultures, and that the products variously impact those represented (Clifford 1986: 2). The arguments that visuals perpetuate distance and power imbalances are not applicable in all cases. By using methods such as collaboration and balanced multivocality, the distance, it will be demonstrated, can be bridged.

The larger argument for indigenous use of visual technologies is one that cannot be discussed at length herein. Suffice it to say, regardless of having learned to use Western technology from Westerners, indigenous people have enough agency and creativity to use media to their own advantage. The Kayapo of Brazil ingeniously used video technology in their negotiations with the Brazilian government, replaying video-

tapped meetings to catch officials in the midst of trying to bluff Kayapo leaders (Tomaselli 1996: 108-9). Another example of creative use of Western media technology is the creation of broadcasting channels by Canadian and Australian aboriginals. In Canada, the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN), and the Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU) in Australia, provide educational and entertainment programming for an aboriginally targeted audience (Ginsburg 1994: 11). Indigenous people may be more media-savvy than Faris gives them credit, however, that does not mean that we can ignore the power imbalances that can still be exploited by the use of these media. Therefore, the following section is imperative in ethics of visual representation discussions.

### **Techniques and topics responding to ethical and critical discourses**

In order to use the techniques herein discussed to their full potential, the researcher should, first and foremost, get to know the people, community, and culture they are working with. To get to know the people being represented would seem to be a 'given' to many anthropologists, but it is still worth discussing in relation to visual representations. 'Getting to know' does not simply mean to read monographs by other anthropologists on the people/community you are interested in working with. Rather, this means talking to them, living with them and socializing with them over a period of months, if not more. Visual ethnographers cite three main reasons as to why this building of knowledge is important.

The first goal in getting to know potential participants is to develop rapport. Rapport does not happen in an instant, but develops through a commitment of time and interactions (Asch 1992: 197; Pink 2001: 31). The fostering of this relationship adds previously inconceivable dimensions to the research, dimensions that can lead to richer and thicker descriptions otherwise impossible to attain. This development moment can also be the perfect time in which the community and researcher can discuss issues of research topics, collaboration, informed

consent, harms/benefits, and reciprocity. It may also come to light during this process that no rapport can be built, and the research project must be abandoned (Elder 1995: 98).

Second, it is important for the anthropologist to get a sense of how people in the locality understand and interpret visual material, and how they read and internalize images or sequences of images (Pink 2001: 31). Past and present interpretations from individuals within a community are relevant as they can provide researchers with a sense of possible interpretative ranges. It is important to obtain this information as it may impact the length of the informed consent process.

Third, in order to discuss informed consent with the potential participants, potential harms can be located and discussed while getting to know the participants. It should also be noted that participants can perceive harm differently, and they may locate other unforeseen harms (Pink 2001: 42-3). As stated earlier with respect to the AAA code, harms are hard to define. Yet this does not preclude discussions of this nature. It is important to be able to locate as many potential harms and benefits in order to inform all those concerned prior to their consent being given.

Many of the points raised in getting to know the potential subjects overlap with other issues presently being discussed. What is demonstrated above is the complex interrelationship of concerns that must be taken into consideration in order to effectively address ethical dilemmas. Ethical concerns do not happen by accident or without consequences. They each affect the other, and, as will be demonstrated below, the response to one ethical issue effects other issues, and may even present new ones.

### *Balanced Multivocality*

During the 1940s, visual ethnographers began experimenting by including and highlighting more of the participants' voices than their own. Instead of voice-over narrations from the anthropologists, filmmakers such as Jean Rouch and John Marshall, began exploring *cinema-verite* in their

ethnographic representations. Although much of this methods' credit must be owed to the development of new simultaneous sound technology (invented in 1927), *cinema-verite* styles were incorporated to give participants the authority to "express and explain themselves through their own actions without direction or interference" (Tomaselli 1996: 165). This method is much utilized today in order to replace the "usual production hierarchy... [with] a more horizontal relationship between crew and subjects" (Toamselli 1996: 165).

That being said, it must be clear that the goal of multivocality is to include as many voices and perspectives as possible. In post-modern ethnographic and documentary filmmaking, the logic behind this move toward multivocality is not only to demonstrate an equalizing, or shift, in who has the authority. It is also important to allow participants and audiences to know that visual ethnographers "are striving to speak with or along side" and not 'for' or 'about' people (Ruby 1991: 80). For filmmakers Barbara Meyerhoff and David MacDougall this meant the creation of "the third voice" and "intertextual cinema," respectively. Shortly before her death in 1986, Myerhoff, an American anthropologist filmmaker, stated that seeking a 'third voice' in all film productions should be filmmakers' goal. The third voice, "an amalgam of the maker's voice and the voice[s] of the subject[s], blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work," would be able to level the traditional hierarchies (Ruby 1991: 62). "Intertextual cinema" for MacDougall means an inclusion of multiple voices not only to share or relinquish authority, but also to demonstrate that "filmmakers [sic] are less likely to claim a spurious oneness with their subjects;" to demonstrate some of the constructed and negotiated elements of these productions (MacDougall 1992: 97).

It may seem that multivocality would need extensive collaboration in order to amalgamate voices and develop a strong enough rapport. However, in some cases, a multivocality of the 'third voice' or 'intertextual' kind is difficult to achieve due to the power imbalances inherent in the situations and communities

being represented. In a more recent visual ethnography, *A Place Called Chiapas* (1998), Netti Wild used a balanced multivocality in which she obtained as many perspectives as possible from the Zapatista uprising. Wild had to avoid collaboration in order to not seem as prejudiced and to be able to obtain as many voices from the multiple perspectives she located. Her production ends up with representations that are not 'whitewashed,' to the point that even the Zapatistas did not seem so valorous at times.

Multivocality need not only be in films. In the process of creating image captions, visual ethnographers can include the voices of those photographed. Though not a photographic example, this process has been employed by Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling in translating subtitles for their films with Yup'ik natives in Alaska. Instead of translating the voices themselves, to the extent possible, Elder and Kamerling brought the films to the speakers in order to obtain the translation they felt best represented their words (Elder 1995: 99).

### *Reflexivity*

One of the most important outcomes of being reflexive in visual representations is to dispel the myth of reality. Despite the decades of experimentation and demonstrations of the manipulable nature of these media, the myth of 'film-as-reality' still remains (Ruby 1991: 53). In being reflexive, the author should not be 'navel-gazing,' but should be demonstrating to the viewers that the production is a cultural (or multi-cultural) construct, and that the voice of the creator is not the Voice of the Creator with an "inside track to truth and reality" (Ruby 1991: 53). An intelligent use of reflexivity is advocated, one that is clearly not autobiography, as the participants are then in danger of being lost.

An intelligent use of reflexivity is also important in giving the viewers information about the visual ethnographer and their relationship with the participants. Whereas prior to the crisis of representation the inclusion of the researcher potentially polluted the representations, today it is important for these interactions to be recorded in order for the audience to see how the researcher's



biases and/or the relationship with the participants may be influencing the representations. Whether the influences be positive or negative, it is imperative to make them explicit if not for the sake of balancing authority, then for the duty of reminding the audience, yet again, that the representations are constructions; representations of *a* reality envisioned through negotiations, not *the* reality.

### *Collaboration*

For some filmmakers “the process of filmmaking [is] a collaborative one, that is [they] cannot film at, but only with, people” (Freudenthal 1988: 124). As a response to the multiple layers of ethical responsibilities, many visual ethnographers have turned to collaboration as the only solution to making ethical visual representations. There are many degrees of collaboration, though according to Jay Ruby there are only a handful of ‘truly’ collaborative projects that share all aspects of production, control of funding, ownership of equipment, and the rights to royalties and distributions (Ruby 1991: 80-81). Despite the degrees of collaboration, those that espouse it in any form agree that collaboration makes for more “intimate and politically responsible” products (Elder 1995: 98).

In general, collaborative projects mean ones with extensive interaction between the visual ethnographer and the participants throughout the entire representation construction process. Through intensive collaboration, which take months, if not years to build up a rapport for, “a space [is created] for filmmakers to learn to pose the questions they do not originally know to ask, a place where film subjects select the fragments of their reality they deem significant to document, and a moral place where subjects and image makers can mediate their own representations” (Elder 1995: 94). Elder and Kamerling, who produced some twenty films with the Yuk’ip as part of the Alaska Native Heritage Film Project (which they founded in 1972) view collaboration as including community members in choosing topics, assisting with editing, translations, and being a part of the copyright and distribution processes (Elder 1995: 97).

According to Faye Ginsburg, “media made by people occupying a range of cultural positions, from insider to outsider, can provide a kind of parallax effect, offering us a fuller sense of the complexity of perspectives on what we have come to call culture” (Ginsburg 1994: 6). Although found in a variety of film productions, this parallax effect can also be found in collaborative photography as exemplified by Marcus Banks. He, being the outsider, allowed his insider participants to guide him. Whereas his photos tended to be of a wide-angled sort in order to incorporate perspectives, when guided by his participants, the images became more focused and specific. Though not to the point of losing context, the resultant images reflected the elements of the represented cultural event that were deemed of most importance to the participants of the event (Banks 1995: 16). The resultant images are richer and ‘fuller’ in their representations.

Another issue of collaboration occurs when working with non-anthropological production companies or broadcasters. Different interests may be guiding these groups to undertake a project. For television broadcasters, for example, the goals may be more about ratings and profits, than dissemination of anthropological knowledge or presenting issues of concern to other cultures. In such cases, the employer/client may not have the same ethical concerns as held by the anthropologist. It is the researcher’s responsibility to not partake in, or discontinue work on a project where the goals of the employers/clients override the researcher’s goals of avoiding harm to the subjects.

However, it is not always possible to know beforehand how those with or for whom you may be working will use the material in their final products. Such is the case with James Farris. He was hired as an anthropological consultant on the film *Southeast Nuba* (1982). He was consulted for his knowledge and previous research with the Nuba, and was hired to conduct some interviews for the film. Farris conducted the interviews, but, and whether he was asked to or not is never revealed, was not part of the editing process. The final version juxtaposes images that “strike [Farris] as violent, unpleasant in the extreme and, ...

ultimately irrelevant” (Faris 1992: note 5). The lesson learned from this experience is the importance of being more involved with the producers, creators and editors in the entire project, from inception to distribution, while making clear one’s concerns about issues of representation.

#### *Co-authorship and Indigenous media*

Collaborative projects can lead to coauthored works, and also to indigenous productions without the assistance of outsiders. Finding examples of coauthored work was in vain. Elder and Kamerling have always maintained their “aesthetic and technical control,” and because of that their work can only be considered as collaborative. Even out of the over 110 films by Jean Rouch, and the extensive collaboration he obtained, they are still under his name (Rouch 1995: 231). However, Rouch does provide an example of how collaboration can lead to indigenous productions. For Rouch, training others to make their own films was not so much out of ethical responsibility, but because of his interests in creating an anthology of films (Rouch 1995: 226). That the process of teaching people to create their own visual representations became ethical, developed more organically.

Film Dalarou was a production company formed by Damoure Zika, Lam Ibrahim Dia and Rouch, the former two being filmmakers who were previously subjects in Rouch’s films (Ruby 1991: 57). The production company was equally controlled by each member, developed out of a mutual interest in promoting, producing and making possible visual representations of their cultures. It was Rouch’s implicit ethic of respect of individuals’ abilities to create their own visual representations that instigated the formation of the production company.

#### *Informed consent*

For some visual ethnographers the informed consent process has rarely met controversy. Such is the case for Sarah Pink, who has worked on visual ethnographies about female bullfighters in Spain, and found that most of her “permission” issues were from bullfight organizers (Pink 2001: 41). Her

ability to photograph bullfighters and audience members without explicit written permission was due to her knowledge of what was considered 'public' or 'private' spaces and events by the culture in which she worked (Pink 2001: 41). Interpretations of what are public and private events can differ, depending on the culture, and even the event being performed. It should not always be assumed that because an event is occurring on a city street, or in a public square that it is alright to photograph without consent (Pink 2001: 41). Knowledge of these definitions and limits can be obtained in the process discussed above in 'getting to know' potential participants.

The 'spirit' of informed consent, and its inclusion into the AAA Code of Ethics, is to foster research based on "openness and disclosure" whereby the researcher discusses the goals, processes, possible outcomes, and harms and benefits (Fluehr-Lobban 1998: 185). The intent is to prevent deceitful and covert research, however, the procedure has raised concern over how 'informed' informed consent should or can really be. According to Denis O'Rourke, best known for his film *Cannibal Tours*, informed consent is a "myth" (Lutkehaus 1989: 431). For O'Rourke, and others, informed consent can never be fully 'informed' for two reasons. First, at the time of creation the visual ethnographer may not yet know what messages are going to be presented, or how the representation is going to appear in its final version. The editing, translations and captioning stages are where much representation construction occurs, and it may be impossible to include everyone into this process. Most of the films created for the Alaska Native Heritage Film Project took over two years for the editing alone, which is not an uncommon length of time (Elder 1995: 95). Elder and Kamerling took the effort to include the community throughout this entire process. In other cases, such as with Wild's representation of the Zapatista uprising, such a process is unrealistic. Second, the polysemous nature of images makes preconceiving potential reactions or interpretations of final pieces impossible. Informed consent, then, can be understood as problematical in that interpretations are ever emergent and contingent. However, this knowledge

should not prevent 'spirit' of informed consent discussions from occurring.

### *Reciprocity*

Although reciprocity is a concept well known to anthropologists, issues of payment, or repayment, to the participants and collaborators has gone relatively unnoticed in ethical discourses (Tomaselli 1996: 115). The researcher generally stands to gain much from the final product such as a PhD, publications, tenure and should, according to the AAA Code of Ethics, "recognize their debt to the societies in which they work and their obligation to reciprocate with people studied in appropriate ways" (AAA 1998: 5). Again, the AAA is clear in its mandate, but not so in its implementations. 'Appropriate ways' means that the anthropologist, after having developed a relationship with the participants, should be able to decide on a repayment suitable to their cultural context. Still, enactment is not as simple as it appears in the Code.

In most cases negotiation processes are relatively innocuous and easily handled in a way that does not negatively alter relationships. However, there is one case where negotiations over payment did impact the relationship and almost prevented the film being made. The payment negotiation process for Granada television's *Disappearing World Series* film *The Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea* (1990) turned so ugly that the project was nearly abandoned (Tomaselli 1996: 117). The situation was such that the participants in the film refused to take part until particular cash demands were met (Tomaselli 1996: 115-6). The negotiations deeply affected the relationship between the crew and participants, resulting in mistrust and tension. Yet, the negotiations were never recorded on film and the final representation has no impression of the controversial negotiation process. It can be argued that the negotiations need not be included in a film about Trobriand Island life. It can also be said that the resulting representation becomes a misrepresentation as it does not recognize the complexity of

ethnographers' relationships with participants (Tomaselli 1996: 116).

Another example demonstrates that the form of repayment can possibly lead to negative consequences. In the 1980 film *N!Ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*, the main character, N!Ai, was paid 14\$ US a day by John Marshall, the filmmaker. According to some this low amount of money discounted the level of commitment on the part of N!Ai (Tomaselli 1996: 116). It could also be argued as being a culturally inappropriate gift. The influx of American money can lead to power imbalances in the community, though there is no mention of this being the result in this case. Nonetheless, most reciprocity processes are clearer, though it all depends on the relationship and level of communication between the researcher and participants.

In terms of collaborative projects, reciprocity develops as the project develops. When productions are created in conjunction with goals of the community members, reciprocity is the fruit of the completed project. For Elder and Kamerling, reciprocity in collaborative projects means "each collaborator has been able to satisfy enough of their own goals in the design of the films to make them valuable for their own needs," be it for education, historical record, advocacy, or academic fulfilment (Elder 1995: 98). Consequently, by virtue of our making a living off other people's lives, reciprocity is a process that anthropologists have a moral duty to observe. The repayment should take into consideration how it may alter and impact the individuals and communities, it should be negotiated with them, and it should materialize in culturally appropriate forms.

### **Conclusion**

Ethics have become increasingly important in the creation of visual representations. No longer are we able to enter into a community and photograph or film without considering the power imbalances and potential harms that can be created through misrepresentations. Current ethical discourses encompass topics of avoiding harms, and respecting individuals' authority over their own culture. An ethical production,

therefore, must include relinquishing some authority, making explicit the constructed nature of visual representations, and including authoritative voices of those being represented. Visual representation methods developed in response to the multiple layers of ethical responsibilities have been able to address certain issues. Though not hard and fast solutions, at the very least, these methods acknowledge the dangers inherent in creating visual representations, and offer guidance to those facing similar situations.

As for the future of visual representations, with the increased ease in use of new digital technology, more productions, rather than less, are likely. This ability to create more visual representations, coupled with the increased vocalicity of marginalized groups, will undoubtedly raise new ethical concerns that will be dealt with through further experimentation of the visual mediums. Finally, re-examining the past experiences of visual ethnographers will always be important for seeking insight and possible solutions to ever emergent ethical dilemmas.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>The 1994 film *Treehouse People, Cannibal Justice* has been criticized for misrepresentating the Korowai of New Guinea. Through the soundtrack and editing process, the Korowai are represented as being violent cannibals while no anthropophagous actions are ever captured on film (Holden 1994: 922).