

Research Tools or Collaborative Toys?

Cameras and Participatory Research with Youth

by

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Abstract

My participatory photography and video project with a First Nations teen drop in center in Northern British Columbia has revealed the benefits of viewing cameras as toys through which community-based research projects can actively engage the world rather than as tools for authoritative observers. The interactive play between the instant feed back of digital cameras placed in youths' hands creates relationships that allow for the exploration of delicate subjects and intimate moments captured on video. The display of meanings constructed through visual images reveal powerful possibilities for visual research methodologies used in collaborative research.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis and film to the amazing teens of Planet Youth. You welcomed me with open arms, a few water fights and food fights, lazy afternoons munching on fry bread, and long walks throughout Prince Rupert. Your acceptance, strength, and resilience constantly astound me.

Life seems to keep throwing difficult challenges in your path, and while you may make mistakes, you also recognize those mistakes and think about change. You still find infinite ways to smile and laugh despite mountains of turmoil. You are always there to help each other—you are a family.

You all have shared with me your pain and your joy; your darkest moments as well as your brightest. For this I offer my deepest thanks and my utmost respect.



Introducing Cameras As Toys



Evan had been ill all day. He sat slouched at the table for hours, his head resting on his arms as swarms of teenagers bustled around him. Every few moments a noise or a friend would call Evan's attention. He would lift his head and look around listlessly before returning to his isolated misery. And yet he still refused to go home.

Towards the end of the evening I approached Evan. I handed him my SLR digital camera with a smile and a nod. He delicately and almost fearfully took the tool in his hands, and without a word slipped the strap around his neck. After a thirty second lesson on how to look through the viewfinder, use the manual zoom, and activate the shutter, I told him to "just have fun." He nodded, got up from the table and slowly moved outside, clutching the new treasure to his chest.

He went outside, leaned against the wall and began to take a few tentative pictures of his friends smoking on the curb. As the moments passed, his fingers began to quicken and dance over the camera. His thin, 16-year-old fingers explored all the buttons and what they would do, constantly clicking the shutter with each new photograph. And then, while he looked down at the results on the digital screen, I saw Evan smile for the first time and a youthful spark appeared in his eyes.

I met Evan during my first evening at Planet Youth as I introduced myself to those at the center and suggested a participatory youth-based photography and video project.¹ As I watched Evan with the camera that evening, I saw it transform in his hands from a tool he was hesitant to accept to a toy he took ownership over. That evening and during the days that followed Evan spent countless hours playing with taking pictures. The exchange also began a relationship that would last the course of the project as Evan invited me to see his world through his pictures and later shared his opinions through our many conversations. For Evan the camera was always fun--“something to do,” but never something to be taken too seriously.

This ethnographic vignette displays the possibilities for the camera’s role as a provocateur in my research project and its central role in how relationships were created, maintained, and used to explore the worlds of the youth I worked with. The visual was the medium of research and cameras mediated topics of discrimination, poverty, abuse, foster care, alcoholism, and suicide. The cameras allowed us to approach these topics through laughter and play that energized the project and empowered the youths’ perspectives.

Traditionally, the tools of the anthropologist engaged in ethnographic research have been the pen and paper. As cameras accompanied notebooks into the field, cameras became additional tools for documentation and analysis controlled by the researcher. As anthropology moves from observing the “other” to collaborating with communities however, new approaches towards cameras are needed. Instead of tools of research that

¹ The photography and video portions of this project captured the identity of the individuals I collaborated with. Thus I have decided to use their real names throughout the written thesis, since their individual agency also impacted the project.

intimidate collaborators, approaching cameras as toys helps build relationships and augments the research process. A non-authoritarian approach of viewing the cameras as entertaining toys allowed the teens I worked with the opportunity to explore their world and perspectives through images. Their images then shaped the direction of research allowing the youth greater control over the project. As a result, the products produced, such as film and photographs, become powerful tools for communities to communicate their perspectives.

The current trend of shared participatory anthropology creates collaborations between researchers and communities for outcomes that benefit the communities. Envisioning cameras as toys, encourages participation, creativity, and expands the role of collaborators in projects that are ultimately about themselves. This also produces visual products that are useful and wanted by the community.

My project began in August 2007 with a photographic group self-portrait created by the teens who attend Planet Youth and expanded into a documentary film about the youths' lives that finished in July 2008. It concludes with the production of this written thesis. Engaging in the different media reveals how using cameras in a non-authoritative manner removes the anthropologist's unanimous control over the project and builds the relationships needed to explore delicate issues with collaborators. I found, approaching teenagers with cameras as toys empowers youth to explore their world, play with creating self-representations, and elicits dynamic conversations about their experiences. Cameras were the reason for the youths' enthusiastic participation, and their photographs provided the exploratory themes of research that was then expanded in the documentary film. The

exchange of photographs also created the trust needed to explore delicate topics and gave the youth authority over the project.

Authority and trust formed through the playful photography project translated to intimate moments captured by the video camera. While I controlled the majority of the filmmaking process the collaborative relationships developed between the teens and myself allowed the youth to to empower their own individual agency and determine how the film should be shot and what topics would be covered. Their acceptance of my presense and the play surrounding the filmmaking process allowed for the creation of a film that shares the youths' powerful stories of foster care and discrimination. This also allowed for the exploitation of the youth's fictive kinship network they call their "Street Family," which I will describe later. The power of visual media to manipulate audience emotions however, also means careful selection must be made regarding when and when not to capture particular representations on film- a matter made even more challenging when working with youth.

Despite these ethical challenges, I argue that cameras offer enormous potential to anthropological and social science research. Participatory photogography places the cameras in participants' hands as tools for reaching a specific research goal and is a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR).² By adapting this process, partipatory photography can also be gateway through which anthropologists enter collaborative

² An example of this form of participatory research can be found in the work of Michael Rich and Richard Chalfen where adolescents were instructed in the use of video camcorders and directed to make visual narratives of living with asthma to create a better understanding of illness experience for doctors and researchers (Rich et al 2000).

ethnographies³. Using cameras as toys allows participants to determine what those research goals will be and gives them control over the project. This produces visual media that reflect their perspectives and offers them a medium to communicate in an increasingly visual world (Turner 1991). When engaging in ethnographic research, playing with cameras has the power to form relationships that engage and empower research participants in ways that visually reveal perspectives and communicate ideas to broad audiences.



³ Timothy Asch realized the potential of these collaborations after decades of work as an authoritative video ethnographer. In his article “The Story We Now Want To Hear Is Not Ours To Tell” (1991) explores the potential for relinquishing control over representation on indigenous people.

Prince Rupert and the Youth



Walking past a small park near city hall, I recognized the faces of teens that attended Planet Youth. With a quick trip to the dollar store I approached the herd of teenagers with a box of cookies. While I had only met the teens once or twice before, I was greeted by name and the ravenous dive of dozens of hands towards the cookies in my arms.

I sat down with them on the grass after nothing was left of the cookies except crumbs. Most returned to gazing off into space or to their hacky sack game. A few looked at me curiously, wondering why I was still there. Then two girls asked, "do you have your cameras?"

I handed the cameras to the girls and the pictures began. Snapshots of shoes, pictures of the park, and portraits of their friends captured the lazy summer afternoon.

Suddenly there was a splash, followed by a squeal, and the park erupted into a waterfight. Water hit my back and for a moment the park froze as the youth waited for my response. I grabbed a half filled water bottle and flung its contents towards my attacker. Laughter and nods of approval surrounded me as the war resumed and I was quickly soaked from head to toe.

"Wait! Camera!" was yelled a few times and to my surprise it instantly stopped any water attack. Those with the cameras stayed bone dry as they took dozens of photographs. The youth respected the cameras and the photographers' roles in recording the playful afternoon.

With a population of about 13,000, Prince Rupert rests at the margin between land and sea. Everywhere you look, enormous steep green mountains crash into the dark deep waters along the rocky shores. At the end of a winding highway, this small community provides the interior of Northern British Columbia with access to the ocean and the many islands along the beautiful inside passage. Prince Rupert's fishing boats quietly dot the harbor, meandering between a few enormous shipping tankers resting in its waters. Walking along the town's main street, "For Rent" signs and empty storefronts alternate between brightly decorated mom and pop shops. Engaged in fishing, logging, import and export, as well as a growing tourist industry, the town evokes the effect of recent resource economy downturns and the resilient friendliness of a small town where no matter where you walk you are bound to bump into someone you know, or a stranger interested in starting a conversation.

Resting on traditional Tsimshian territory, approximately a third of Prince Rupert actively identifies as Aboriginal (2006 BC Census). The town acts as a gathering and supply center for ten different First Nations communities dotting the surrounding waterways. Float planes constantly criss-cross the area connecting the region, while local ferries carry passengers and their groceries back to these small communities whose histories and cultures stretch more than 10,000 years into the past.

"Where are the Indians?" is the most common question asked at the visitor information center by people stepping off the visiting cruise ships, a volunteer told me. It is hard not to notice the "white" faces gathering in the upscale shopping block of Cow Bay compared to the "brown" faces shopping in the lower levels of the central shopping mall that make up 35% of the town's population. The Tim Hortons coffee shop is Prince

Rupert's neutral center where those of every age and ethnicity gather for coffee, treats, and the opportunity to bump into friends. Inside, fishermen swap stories for hours and Elders sit sharing news from the surrounding area as they wait for the next ferry, while the town's teenagers laugh over French Vanillas and inhale cigarettes just outside.

Among those outside are the First Nations teens who wander about the town. They gather at Tim Hortons, the park, or parking lots, looking for their peers. Constantly plugged into their I-pods, they meander wearily along the sidewalk or sit on the steps of businesses for hours under the hoods of their oversized sweatshirts. However, at about 3pm in the afternoon a migration of these youth begins that is often invisible to the rest of the town.

At this time, the youth vacate their other hangouts and find their way across the small town to Fraser Street. Walking in small groups or alone, they cross the quiet streets and wind through shortcuts to gather at a building three doors up from the Friendship House, a First Nations community center. There they wait, no matter what the weather, in front of a building with no sign. Soon at least a dozen teenagers gather to lounge on the steps, or smoke on the curb, as they wait for the doors of their teen center, Planet Youth and its sister program Street Spirits, to open.

The Friendship House of Prince Rupert began and continues to operate Planet Youth for teens aged 13-18. Open from 3-10pm Tuesday through Sunday, the center gives youth access to a pool table, computers, video games, a TV, and engages the youth in the shopping, cooking, serving, and cleaning up of nightly dinners. The center serves approximately 150 of the town's 2000 youth in this age group. Activities include trips to the local aquatic center, expeditions to nearby lakes for kayaking, a softball team, and fry

bread nights that cause the center's kitchen to overflow with teens stuffing their mouths with the sweet homemade bread. The center houses its own youth council and the Street Spirits Team volunteers at community events in town. Funded by the Ministry of Child and Family Services two full time employees run Planet Youth and two more direct the Street Spirits Programs.

Located directly upstairs from Planet Youth, Street Spirits is an outreach program connecting youth with services they may want or need. Its one male and one female worker offer friendly ears to youth in need, providing wisdom and advice based on their own similar experiences. They connect youth to counsellors, escort them to the hospital, pay for cabs home, and walk around town to invite youth to the center's activities. The youth often take advantage of the workers as mentors. Each week as part of the boys' or girls' group, the youth sit in patient silence, eating potato chips as a worker goes into detail about his or her own childhood, and then facilitates discussions relevant to the youths' experiences. The silence and respect shown during these sessions may seem surprising for youth often labeled as delinquents or troublemakers by the rest of town.⁴

These youth gather at Planet Youth and Street Spirits because everyone has the same story, as described by 17-year-old Augusta:

Like the foster care system, how people in school treat them. How, they were in white homes too and how they were treated in the white homes. And that's where we go. We talk to one another. It's where everyone is comfortable to be there cause they don't have to wear expensive clothing or anything to impress people. You just got to go there and act like yourself.

⁴ This thesis is written from the perspective of the youth I collaborated with throughout the year long project. I am aware the social contexts of Prince Rupert may be more complicated and diverse than the opinions expressed by Planet Youths' teenager, but it is important to share these youths' perspectives as they are an ingrained part of these young peoples' lived experience.

Most of the youth attending the center have had experience with the Ministry of Child and Family Services. They can tell stories of foster homes or of being removed from biological parents to live with other relatives. Many often find themselves floating about town, staying on couches of friends. The street is their space; Planet Youth their second home when some don't sleep in their own beds for weeks on end.

Crystal describes the experience of her peers this way:

Well some of them can feel neglected. Some of them can feel emotionally abused. Some of them- depending on what home and where you are at, you can be sexually abused, physically abused, emotionally, spiritually. Like it's really harsh out there. If you don't have the right people there.

Connections to the tragic deaths of friends or family are also a universal experience these youth share. These teenagers are members of a generation that experiences some of the highest rates of suicide in the world (Chandler and Lalonde 1998). While these statistics vary considerably from band to band, "over a third of all deaths among Aboriginal youth are attributable to suicide" (Kirmayer 1994:2). Finding the resiliency to move past thoughts of suicide during dark moments is often a struggle for these teens—one made even more difficult by the youths' taste for hard liquor as their self-medicating therapy of choice. While most struggles are hidden behind stoic faces, some leave a physical mark. Hidden underneath almost all of the teens' sweatshirts, wrists and forearms bear the painful scars of numerous late nights spent carving into skin and drawing blood to create distractions from emotional pain.

Planet Youth embraces visitors with youthful play rather than melancholy faces and tortured souls. When youth pass through the doors of the center, a haunting weight visibly slides from their shoulders and sparks of joy appear in their eyes. Toothy smiles

replace bored frowns and a cacophony of laughter crescendos, replacing the listless quiet of the youths' street experiences. Laughter, hugs, teasing, and tickling infuse the chaos of the center with a positive energy often unseen outside Planet Youth's doors.

Outside Planet Youth the teenagers often feel discriminated against. They share stories of racist teasing at school by other classmates or feeling alone because they are a minority. They also endure the negative stereotypes that people place upon the teen center as Jerri describes:

A lot of people have a lot of negative stories about Planet Youth like people saying that we're alcoholics. That we steal, that we break into places and all this other crap. But I think it's the same anywhere you go. Like you can go to any youth group and find that there's a few people that do give that whole group a bad name, but what I'd like people to know about Planet Youth is that it's really supportive and it's like I said, a second home for a lot of people.

Shoplifting and vandalism is common around town and the youth often experience the brunt of the shopkeepers' frustrations. Several of the teens are banned from certain shops around town. On several occasions I observed security guards at the mall yell, "go away" to loitering teens and shooing them away like stray dogs. .

Inside the doors of Planet Youth and Street Spirits however, the youth are accepting of newcomers and respectful of their space and the people within the center. The youth themselves enforce common rules upon each other. It's common for echos of "no swearing" or "stop running" to travel across the room when a peer has forgotten the rules. Though the workers are always present, they float in the background; available without being overbearing. Workers step in only when needed, either to disperse youth looking for trouble, mentoring the youth council, or offering one on one advice.

Each day, forty to sixty teens pass through the doors of Planet Youth and Street Spirits to do homework, crash on couches, lounge on the sidewalk and chat with their friends. The herd of teens that gathers outside constantly grows and splinters throughout the evening as some disappear to wander around town and others move inside. Buzzing with hip hop music and the chatter of numerous youth, the center welcomes anyone who steps inside with curiosity and friendship. Then at 10pm the lights of this beacon are turned off and the youth must move to the street as the center closes its doors and the teens are left to fill the long hours of the night on their own.



Cameras and Play



Beatrice was the first to ask for a camera. She was also the first to test my relationship with the youth by soaking me during the water fight. When I didn't get angry but joined in on the fun, she later told me she knew "I was cool."

Smiles and laughter, shoes and necklaces, as well as the outcomes of the water fight were saved on her camera. Her photographs evolved with the project to capture expressions and insights into the experiences of herself and her friends. She told me of past behaviors and how the teen center helped change her habits. Later, she sat and contemplated how to use our project to exchange ideas about the teen center with a patience and wisdom well beyond her 15 years.

She took control of the video camera at times, meandering through the center, capturing candid actions and posing reflective questions to her friends. She then sat for hours, reviewing the footage, intrigued with how editing can reshape what had been captured.

She participated, learned, and advised throughout the project. For her, "It was fun, because usually adults tell you what to do. For this we just got to take photographs of whatever we wanted."

Beatrice was one of a few teens at Planet Youth who became my principal collaborators. She took an active interest in the research project and in me. She not only participated but also helped advise and shape the outcomes of both the film and photography project. Her playful attitude towards the cameras helped redefine the project and how I approached the youth with the cameras. Her willingness to share her experiences while she took photographs also revealed how the cameras provided a gateway to discussing these issues. Beatrice often embraced the video camera as well. Although she expressed a reluctance to be in the film during its production, she smiled during a screening when she heard her voice in the narration and saw her face in the background of film.

After obtaining Bachelor of Art degrees in cinema production and anthropology, I wanted to focus my Masters degree in visual anthropology. Expanding on my Bachelor's work I wanted to engage youth in visual media productions about issues that affected them. Enrolling in the UBC ethnographic field school run by Charles Menzies, I wanted to design a project that could expand into a video project for my thesis work, but would also fit into the timeframe of the field school. The time constraints prevented an initial film production, but provided an opportunity to use still photography. Suggestions from teachers and contacts at the Friendship House in Prince Rupert led to my approaching Planet Youth with the project. The teens and staff of Planet Youth and Street Spirits were excited by the idea of a collaborative street photography project, providing an excellent opportunity to establish relationships, explore the youths' life experiences, and create a product that gave back to the community.

After the photography project, I returned to create a film with the youth. Sitting down with several of the teens, we brainstormed topics they wanted to talk about including discrimination and foster care. The photography project also inspired the youth and I to explore the peer support network the youth created with each other. The youth also wanted to promote the center and let people see what happened inside its doors. Thus the film was built around using the youths' experiences to explain why they would create a peer network they call their "street family." The film would let people to see that Planet Youth was a safe place for the youth to just be teenagers and escape several of the challenges in their lives

Taking Pictures

For most of the teens at Planet Youth, the cameras were something to play with and taking pictures was something to do when they were bored. The teens at Planet Youth filled and refilled memory cards with hundreds of photographs and burned through dozens of batteries during the two-week photography stage of the project. They floated around the center snapping posed and candid photographs of their friends, constructing their representations of themselves, their peers, and Planet Youth in the process.

Viewing cameras as toys may position them as trifles instead of tools and thus unappropriate for academic research. However, viewing cameras as toys allowed for the possibility of greater discovery, partnerships and ultimately more powerful results. This is part of a growing trend in visual anthropology called Participatory Action Research (PAR) which collaborates with participants to determine the direction of research for social change. Faye Ginsburg wrote that media can act as "conduits for imposing the

values and language of the dominant culture on minoritized people” but it “also offer[s] possibilities for ‘talking back’ to and through the categories that have been created to contain indigenous people” (Ginsburg 1997: 93). For both the photography and film projects my hope was to engage the youth in all aspects of the project if possible. They helped determine the topics of research based on what they felt were their needs.

The research project began as youth, ranging in age from 13-18, who participate in Planet Youth and Street Spirit programs daily were handed digital cameras and asked to take photographs of Prince Rupert through their eyes. Black and white photography was selected to reflect a street photography style, but the only directions given to the youth were how to operate the cameras. The youth shared three small digital cameras and my Nikon SLR camera and took over 2000 photographs.

Putting the cameras into the youths’ hands and asking them to “just have fun” established trust between the youth and myself. I established only a few rules: first, to ask and let me know who had the cameras, and second, to return the cameras when the center closed so that I could download the images. The range of how far the cameras could venture away from the center was never explicitly defined, and the youth largely kept them inside or in front of the center. Eventually as individual relationships and trust grew a few youth expanded around the town with the cameras. The youth also decided how to share the cameras without adult mediation. Teens wanting to take pictures asked individuals who had cameras, and shortly after those in possession would pass them along. Like most things at the center, the cameras quickly became a possession shared by all. They were treasures treated with the greatest of care and respect by teenagers who are often accustomed to being treated with mistrust by outsiders.

When I brought printed images to the teen center, enthusiasm for the cameras grew and they became part of the experience of attending Planet Youth. No one was protected from the constant flashes as the cameras passed between hands and moved throughout the center. Looking through the printed pictures also became a popular activity and functioned as a photography lesson. Instead of formal instruction in photographic theory, youth learned about composition through the reactions to the images. Out of the more than 2000 photographs taken at Planet Youth over several weeks, hundreds stood out--not only for their subject matter, composition, or lighting, but also for the relationships and experiences the photographs revealed.

I accompanied the youth as they decided where to go and what to photograph. While walking with them, I attempted to introduce photography's ability to speak of life experiences metaphorically, such as taking a picture of broken glass to capture an experience of feeling broken. This was the approach of using a camera as a tool as I was asking them to use the camera for a very specific purpose. The youth instantly rejected this approach and embraced their own agency to use the cameras as toys. They took pictures of whatever interested and entertained them at the moment. They included cameras in how they saw the world; as something to climb on, explore, and laugh with, while focusing their efforts on photographing each other in these spaces.

Lending itself to the playful interaction with digital photography's ability for instant feedback. A picture is taken and seconds later reviewed by the photographer. The image is not kept secretly on a roll of film to be developed and reviewed at a later date. The instant feedback of the camera's review setting ensured that the youth never grew tired of these toys.

The ability to instantly review the photographs helped turned the cameras into toys that not only responded to the youths' intentions, but also shaped how the youth would use the cameras. The individual photographer constantly played with their vision of photography based on the photographs they had taken just moments before. Digital photography allows for individual experimentation with trial and error as the photographer judges some photographs as good or bad. And as was often the case, the photographer would show an image they especially liked to friends. Or when capturing their friends, a photographer would laugh and show an image they judged as bad to their subject before permanently deleting it. I cannot begin to guess the number of photographs deleted by the youth before the camera's memory disks were uploaded into a computer.

Youth Participation and Photo-elicitation

Marshall McLuhan (1964:57) wrote that media are "active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms." For the teens of Planet Youth and Street Spirits, the images are metaphors for the structures that influence their lives and their response to these experiences. McLuhans visual metaphors became active as the youth used cameras to play with each other, the cameras and the meanings of how they wanted to be represented. Pierre Bordieu wrote:

The norms which organize the photographic valuation of the world in terms of the opposition between that which is photographable and that which is not are indissociable from the implicit system of values maintained by a class, profession or artiste coterie" (1991:131).

Through the practice of photography the youth revealed what was most important to them. By looking at what the teens chose to photograph, we see how they construct their

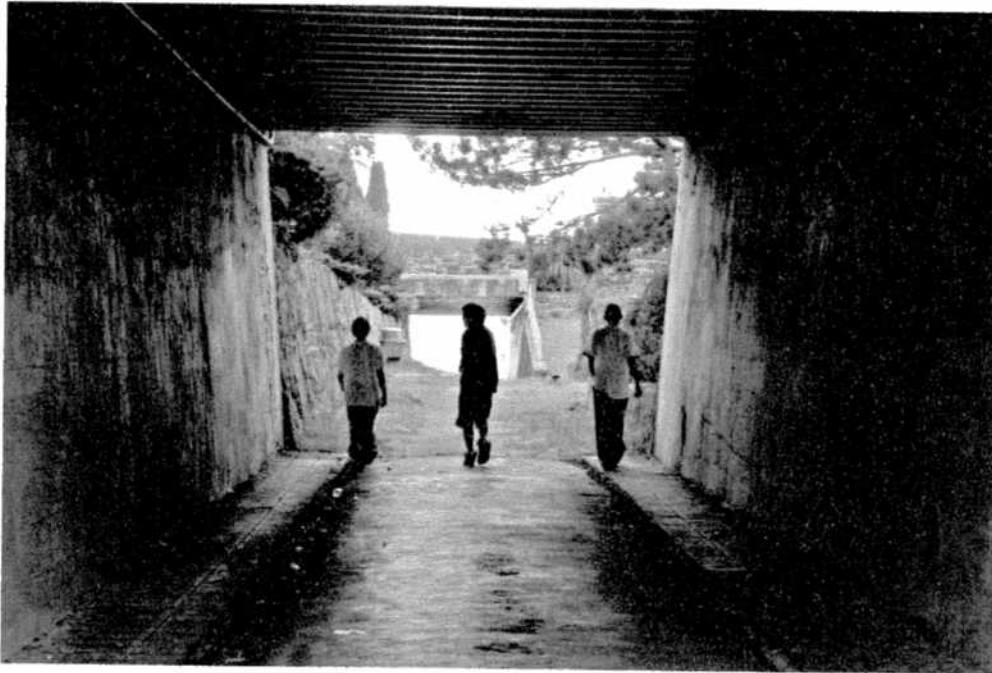
world and reveal that their relationships towards each other is what is most important to them.

Visual anthropology and the process of photo-elicitation offers the tools to unlock these metaphors created by youthful play. The process of photo-elicitation consists of conducting informal interviews using the photographs the youth took to evoke responses. Printing and looking through many of the photographs provided an excellent opportunity to better understand their visions of the teens' world. While digital photography provides the photographer with instant feedback, the process of photo-elicitation helps translate these playful endeavors into meaningful representations.

None of the photographs taken by the youth were manipulated after the youth pushed the shutter button. The high quality of the youths' framing, and photographic use of light and shadow without instruction revealed the youths' ingrained visual aesthetic from growing up in an increasingly visual society. However, asking youth to talk about the photographs revealed that communicating the meanings within images is a learned activity. When first asked what we should call each photograph, most youth would shrug their shoulders and reply, "I don't know." Then when asked again they would continue to say, "I don't know."

Taking a different approach I would ask the youth such questions as, "How does this make you feel? What do you like about it? Tell me about this person. What does it remind you of?" This helped them to understand how photographs created meanings and soon an outpouring of suggestions began. Within a few minutes their titles revealed the youths' creativity and insights as they played with different titles for the photographs. The process of naming grew into explanations of why they liked this title or that title,

which helped reveal common themes.



For example, Stephanie named the above picture “Walk Beside Me,” because the photograph reminded her of a quote by Albert Camus that she had found on the internet: “Don’t walk in front of me, I may not follow. Don’t walk behind me, I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend.” Her title evoked ideas of friendship and support, which became a common theme for the research project. Upon seeing the photograph and its attached title other youth mirrored these sentiments and the photograph sparked conversations about the importance of peer support when life seems challenging.

As they looked through the photographs, the youth constantly referred to friendship and the relationships that form inside the doors of Planet Youth, not what people choose to see outside its doors. Youth described their friends in the pictures as “everyone you’re comfortable with, being around, doing stuff with, and hanging out with.” Brianna added that one of the best things about Planet Youth was “probably just

all the friendship that everybody has in here. Like we all kind of like talk and tell each other stuff and say when something's wrong.”

While some view cameras as an anthropological research tool only for recording, analyzing and explaining observations, the Planet Youth project created a filmic reality that captured the spirit of the youths' friendships. The project paralleled Dziga Vertov's concept of creating a cinematic reality by capturing the spirit of these teens and their center rather than simply detailed observations (Feld 2003:13). Embracing the playful art within photography and its ability to create meaning helped to transform the images from simple snapshots of observations to meaningful and impactful photographs.

Constructing a cinematic truth rests on the relationships surrounding the cameras. While a camera may observe events around it, it also records the relationships between those on both sides of the camera (MacDougall 1991). I have found this to be true as the relationships between those behind and those in front of a lens is seen in the intimacy of the pictures and the openness of those who are filmed. Long shots reflect a hands-off observational style, whereas close ups, meandering cameras, and an acknowledgement of the camera's presence reveal an engaged filmmaking process. In most of the Planet Youth pictures at least one youth stares into the camera lens provoking the viewer to interact with the image.

For the teens of Planet Youth and Street Spirits, their play revealed what was most important to them: the interactions they have with each other. Moments surrounding the use of the cameras were filled with a collaborative exchange of creative ideas among the youth, playful energy, and constant exuberant laughter. Not only were youth interacting with the cameras, but they were also playing with each other through

the process of photography. The intimacy of their pictures is only possible because of their close friendships and playfulness through which the youth approached their photography. Their photographs thus reflect their tight bonds of friendships. These bonds allow their photographs to capture the expressions of life and the range of emotions these youth experience on a day to day basis far better than a tool in the hand of any outside photographer.



Participatory Meanings



Two painted wings and halo caught the attention of the eight teenagers holding four digital cameras. They lined up their shoulder blades to the wings on the wall for their photographs to be taken by their peers. Giggles erupted as the boys made faces and the girls' innocent smiles looked towards the camera lenses.

"Take a picture of someone's shadow," someone yelled among the chaos of laughter and snapping shutters. The group reformed, away from the wall and two boys helped Crystal climb on Evan's tall slender shoulders. He stepped sideways and forward to line up her late evening shadow up against the image on the wall. "Move right, move back," the rest of the group yelled as they stepped out of the way.

I turned to Beatrice who was holding another camera. "Go take a picture of them taking this picture" I said. She smiled and ran across the street. Within seconds Evan and Crystal had found their position, Jade snapped his picture, and Beatrice had captured the moment of collective play and representation.

Angel in the Shade, as the picture came to be called, grew to be a unanimous favorite among the teens at Planet Youth. The process through which the image was taken reflects the spontaneous play that created most of their images. For everyone who ponders the shadow and wings, the image evokes different meanings and emotions. For the youth, photo-elicitations over the photograph began conversations about feeling invisible, needing faith, and also a sense of isolation and hopelessness. For Victor, the image reminded him of “the angel that everyone said is there, but it never really is.”

Through the process of placing cameras in their hands, looking over the images, naming and discussing a select few of the pictures, photography translated these youths’ lives into a visual representation. Through play, the project revealed themes of isolation, invisibility, and showed images of a family of peers that grew to become the major theme of the collaborative research process. Evolving from still photography, a video project provided the opportunity for the youth to add their voices to their representations. The sense of play created the trust and openness that allowed youth not only to reflect how they wanted to be pictured, but also to prioritize how they wanted to be heard.

Participatory visual anthropology projects also offer an opportunity to unite researcher and community interests through the production of visual media. Sarah Barab (2004:257) described “three key elements that distinguish participatory research: people, power, and praxis.” My project with Planet Youth is fundamentally youth-centered and is both informed by and responds to their concerns about discrimination and feeling invisible. By focusing on the youth perspective, the project also addresses power structures of communities, schools, and government bureaucracies that shape the teens

lives while providing the potential for youth empowerment by encouraging them to develop their own representations.

Approaching photography as play opened the possibilities for research. As John Collier (1961:13), a founder of visual anthropology methodology wrote:

Photography can provide a rapid entry into community familiarity and cooperation. The feedback opportunity of photography, the only kind of ethnographic note-making that can reasonably be returned to then native, provides a situation which often gratifies and feeds the ego enthusiasm of informants to still further involvement in the study.

The exchange of images can have a powerful impact on the participants and indeed transformed my relationships with most of the youth. Allowing them to play with the cameras opened the gates to their insights and revealed multiple perspectives, which transformed further as the youth continued to take the cameras into their hands. The exchange of images and cameras in this form of play was central to the entire project.

Active play encouraged cinematic collaboration that explored individual experience through serendipitous discovery. Mirroring the production of Jean Rouch's film *Jaguar* (1967)⁵, photography excursions with the Planet Youth teens were a blend of observation and fictional enactment. The cameras provoked photography fieldtrips and the youths' pictures were often posed as they encountered elements around the town that inspired them. As Victor told me, "the best photographs are those you don't try to take." Instead of focusing on creating powerful images, the youth focused on having fun. The photographs were created out of improvised play as the youth posed for some and seemed

⁵ *Jaguar* (1967) has been labeled an ethnofiction for its blend of observation and fictional enactment (Eaton 1979). Entirely improvisational Rouch and his collaborators enacted the migration of young men from the savanna of Niger to the coast to capture the spirit of this experience (Beidelman 1974).

to randomly snap the shutter for others. The results however are lasting images that provide a window into the youths' lives.

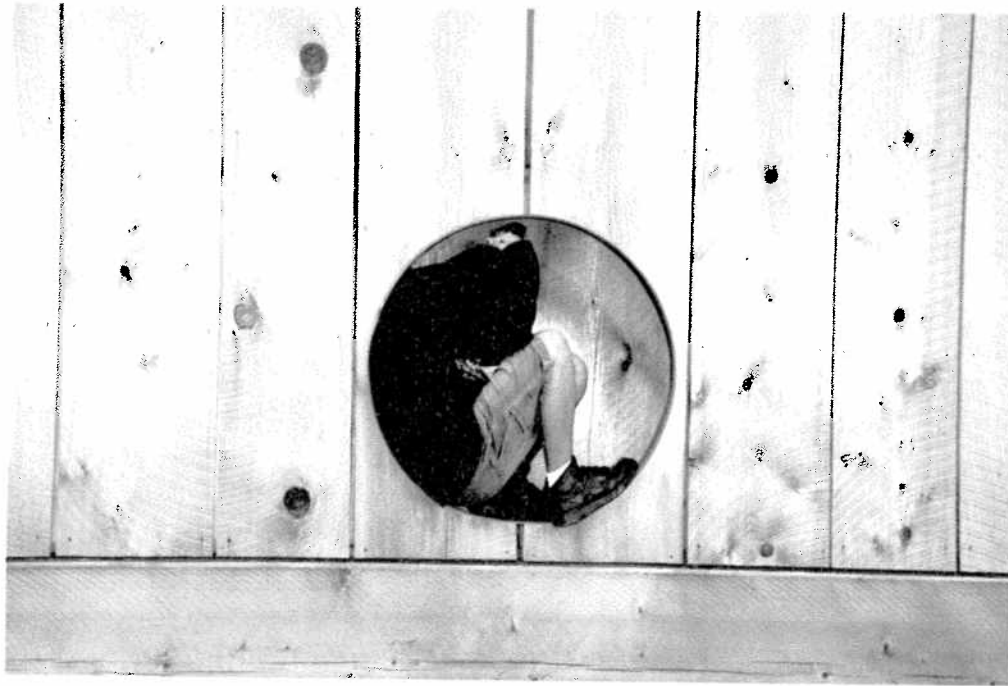
Visual Metaphors

The collection of images, faces, identities, and personalities captured in frozen moments of play, reveal slices of these youths' complicated histories and immense experiences. The pictures call us to wonder about their lives and how the meanings of these photographs change if we actually know their stories of death, foster care, abuse, rehabilitation, friendship, love, and acceptance. Photography gives insight into what is important to these youth based on where they decide to point a camera and when to push the shutter. The project allowed the youth to determine how they want to be represented to the larger community and the result is a collective self-portrait of a group of youth frequently noticed in Prince Rupert's public spaces, but rarely looked at.

While capturing the many sides of the youths' lives, many of the images also took on powerful meanings beyond the context under which there were taken. Those that became favorites usually provoked powerful emotions or thoughts as youth and staff looked over them. The responses expressed by those looking at the photographs help reveal the viewers' background and showed how photographs can evoke memories or connect to a viewer's own lived experience. Thus visual anthropology creates relationships not only between those on either side of the camera as representations are being produced but also communicates to those who view the results.

Stuart Hall (1980) describes this process as the encoding and decoding processes inherent in all forms of media. Those creating media encode a meaning but viewers must

decode these meanings and often create their own. For the project, the teens of Planet Youth produced many of the photographs as part of their play, with little thought to their meaning. Through the decoding process of photo-elicitation however, meanings evolved and were applied to the images.



As an example, for the boy in the picture, taking the photograph was little more than another silly moment in an afternoon filled with playfulness and experimentation with cameras. Having already balanced on narrow walls, climbed up bridges, and walked through tunnels, the youth saw this circle as something else to climb inside.

For staff members however, the image immediately took on greater meanings. While gazing at this picture, one staff member immediately recognized the circle as the entryway to a First Nations longhouse. Through the connection to his own First Nation community, he then found deeper meaning as he pondered over the image. After he pointed out the long house entry, he also noted that the entry was blocked. The picture saddened him because the boy “could not enter to learn our ancestors’ knowledge.” For

him, the photograph was connected to his people's culture and his desire to share that culture with the youth.

For another staff member, the photograph was her favorite "because it's so lonely." The photograph tapped into her own concerns about the youth. "I think a lot of them are really lonely," she said. The boy curled up in the fetal position also added meaning for her. The photograph reminded her of a womb and she felt the boy needed help and nurturing. Using her own personal experience and relationships with the youth, she formed a meaning that expressed her desires to care for the youth and her concerns for their well-being.

Images like these, reflect our own thoughts back at us as we look for understanding. Even the name for this photograph, "Inside," can evoke multiple meanings from being inside a circle, to wanting to go inside a building, to how the faceless boy may be feeling.

Using their toys/cameras for play is what allowed the boys to capture this powerful image. The image itself then becomes a tool for communication as meanings are formed around the two dimensional representation.

Each picture reflects the dialogue taking place between the photographer and the captured subject, between the societies and social systems represented by them, and between their respective visual traditions. In this dialogic confrontation by means of gaze, gesture, and camera there is room for agency (Albrecht et al 2003:7).

This agency lies in the interpretation inherent in photography and the power of the viewer to apply meaning.

The teens of Planet Youth entered the project because they believed taking pictures would be fun, but as the project progressed the youth and I saw the effectiveness

of these images to communicate ideas and feelings. The freedom under which the photographs were taken allowed the themes to develop through a “gradual process of discovery” rather than fitting the youths’ participation into predetermined categories (Henley 2000:218).

This process lends itself to ethnographic research where open ended play can be narrowed into targeted research themes. Play combined with elicitation the youths’ participation in the project created images that became the tools for communicating to the larger community. Photo-elicitations revealed the importance of peer support, which became a theme for the overall research project and helped define the video that gave voice to the youths’ experiences. Isolation, invisibility, discrimination and and their family of peers were all themes that grew out of the project.

The photographs captured the intimacy and closeness of this group of teenagers who refer to each other as a “Street Family.” For many Planet Youth and Street Spirit members these are pictures of their “family,” their support network, and the people to whom they are most loyal. They actively refer to each other as auntie, uncle, nephew, niece, mom, dad and describe the “Street Family” as the people they go to when they need to talk to someone. These youth have created this fictive kinship network as a way to find a sense of stability when much of their lives are unstable. They mapped their “Street Family Tree,” and its 40 members for the video camera. Their photographs reflect this sense of family and Desire told me the photographs and film reveal “the people we go to when we want to talk to somebody” and reflect their close knit support group.

Another common theme for the youth was feeling invisible. They were often drawn toward faceless images and shadows that represented this experience. Youth were

repeatedly drawn to pictures where the identities of the individuals were unknown but the emotions connected to the photographs were shared.

The photographs captured the faces and personalities of an often stereotyped group of youth. During film interviews, the youth referred to being called “savages,” “drunken Indians,” “delinquents” and “a waste of space” which reflected their desire to change these stereotypes. The photographs displayed the youth not as a troubled collective, but as individuals with their own personalities and experiences. One staff member said the photographs seemed to ask people to find out who these youth really are while providing a window to look through.

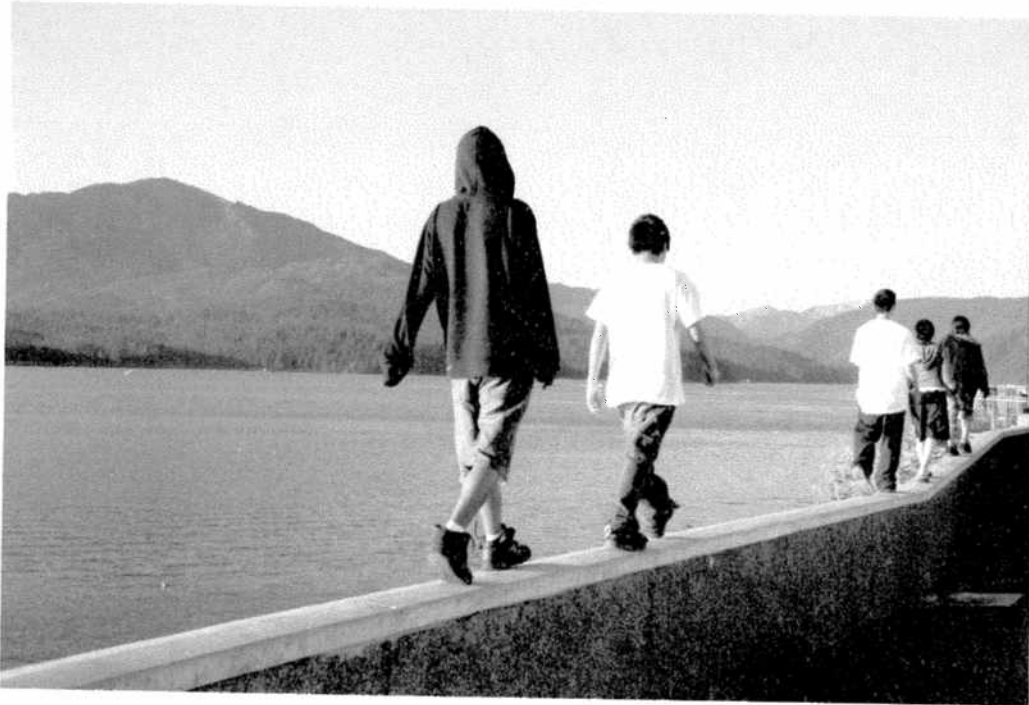
During conversations that occurred while looking at the photographs many of the youth mentioned a close family member or friend whose death had a tremendous impact on their lives. Many explained these deaths were what turned them towards consuming alcohol at a young age or cutting themselves for emotional relief. These experiences, many youth explained, also led to their need to create these strong peer support networks. Their photographs, and stories reflected the youths’ oscillating experiences between inner emotional challenges and the ability to find youthful joy.

As part of the collaboration, at the end of the photography project the youth and I selected 22 photographs that were enlarged, framed and displayed in a empty storefront window on the main street of town. Placed side by side the images created a statement about the youth experiences that spoke to the community. Pictures such as “Lost Beside Me” placed next to “Inside,” “Just Chillin’,” and “Whale Watching” became tools that humanized the youth and brought attention to their experience. Within moments of finishing the display, the youth and I watched as people who normally walked by the

youth on the street without a glance, stopped and pondered the images. Within hours the teen center was receiving calls from individuals interested in purchasing the pictures.



Playing With the Medium: *From Still to Video*



Jade played with the five silver piercings in his left ear as he read my report on the photography project. He and the other Street Spirit Team Members had flipped through the report and the photographs while we brainstormed topics for the video project over a large basket of french fries. After reading a few pages a sour expression appeared on his lips.

"What is it?" I asked. But he shrugged it off as nothing. I asked again, emphasizing that since the report was about him and his friends I should know his opinions.

"It's this. 'At risk.' I don't like being called that," he said, pointing to my introduction summarizing the youth. The group then talked about the label. Later when the camera was rolling we discussed the term again and Jade stared off into space, forming his thoughts as he spoke.

"When I hear 'at risk' I think of people who have nowhere to go, are on the verge of suicide, or who feel like there's no point in living. So I don't know, but when when I think about it over again, it kind of, it is like us cause we're always on the street and we all have a home to go to yes but then most of the time we spend on drinking and everything. We are at risk when we're drinking, but when I first see it the first thought that comes to mind is like "I'm not at risk" but after I keep thinking about it over and over again... I kind of say we are."

Providing cameras and the resources needed to create a public display created the foundations for my subsequent return to produce a video with the teens of Planet Youth based on themes revealed by the photographs. The youths' enjoyment of still cameras in the first project transformed into an acceptance of video cameras for the second collaboration. The relationships created through photography were maintained for the video project, prioritizing the youths' opinions. The greater technical nature of filmmaking however, required that I hold the camera for the majority of filming. To maintain the youths' participation, I asked how they wanted to be filmed and what they wanted to talk about.

“We want people to see what this place is like inside,” they said.

Their directions dictated an observational component of film production where hours of youth interaction were filmed. While the youth never embraced the video camera with the same love bestowed on the still cameras because of the patience real time filming requires, they still played with the equipment; making funny faces and yelling noises into the microphone. And like the still cameras, the video cameras soon became enfolded into the atmosphere of Planet Youth. While the cameras were never invisible to the youth, they were accepted, tolerated, and often ignored.

Jean Rouch suggests that you “distort the answer, simply by posing the question” and took this ideology to heart (Rouch 2003: 220). By introducing cameras, I changed the environment of Planet Youth and the way the teens engaged with their world. Instead of chatting or smoking, the youth took photographs of each other or interacted with the digital video camera. The camera acts as a provacteur. This action however, does not

dilute the effectiveness of these photographs or film to capture a representation of the teens' experiences.

We used the cameras to provoke topics based on the youths' input and how they wanted to be shown to the world. A large part of this is the desire to be heard, which dictated the importance of including interviews in the final film, which would provide the youth the opportunity to speak their mind through an authoritative medium. While interviews were the least playful experience of the project, the relationships built between the youth and myself through the photo-elicitations helped create an atmosphere of trust. This allowed us to explore the issues at the forefront of their young minds.

At times, the need to be heard translated into long powerful stories or summaries of what they and their peers have experienced with foster care or discrimination. However, most interviews continuously oscillated between a joking play and a recounting of experiences of their lives, as illustrated in this excerpt from Crystal's interview:

Jeni: So why do you think I'm talking to teenagers?

Crystal: Because not too many people are listening to teenagers' voices and stuff and we're just so much better to interview.

(laughter)

Jeni: Why?

Crystal: Because like we're like. We hang out on the streets. We know what goes on with us and most of us aren't even scared to say what goes on with us. Especially me. Then some of them are troubled but some of them aren't and you just get a whole bunch of different perspectives from everything. Not everybody goes oh I agree with him. Talk to him.

Jeni: What's going on with you?

Crystal: I just farted... No just kidding. With me, I don't know I'm happy with myself. I still have to pay my rent though.

Jeni: Why are you happy with yourself?

Crystal: Because I'm paying my bills on my own and I'm able to keep my apartment and rent and stuff and I haven't gotten evicted. And I got a job and I'm going to school and feel independent.

Crystal's words reflect her playful attitude. She constantly joked and always found ways to laugh, but her answers also reveal her reality of her experience oscillating between youth and adult worlds. At 19 she is no longer in the care of the Ministry of Child and Family Services and must live on her own, work to pay her own bills, and continue towards graduations in high school. Her words also reflect our relationship, her constant attempts to make me laugh, and the general playfulness that surrounded the project.

This playfulness helps establish the ethnographic process required for visual anthropology to excel based on the relationships between researcher and those recruited to participate. However, in addition to recording the relationships through which images are composed, the art of photography and film must also reflect the responsibility that those involved have towards one another:

If a film is a reflection of an encounter between filmmaker and subject, it must be seen to some degree produced by the subject for films are impressed and, indeed, possessed by their subjects when they become bound into a relationship with the subject as part of a larger set of cultural meanings (MacDougall 1991:7).

MacDougall suggests that participants have ownership over their own image, and as such it is natural that the youth should be active in the process of creating the images of themselves. This transforms visual anthropology from its observational roots into a participatory project, since the youth created and were consulted on their representations. In this manner, the project fits within the approach of shared, "dialogic anthropology," pioneered by Robert Flaherty, one of the first ethnographic filmmakers. This approach narrows "the gulf between filmmakers and the people they film" by including participants as consultants and collaborators in projects (Stoller 1992:100). Not only does this methodology create stronger relationships on both sides of the cameras, but

dialogic anthropology also reflects a responsibility to those being filmed and acknowledges the challenges involved in creating representations.

During the film project, my role as a mediator increased based on the skills involved in film production compared to photography. However, the interactions and relationships built during the photography project allowed the youth to direct the course of the film. My role was to translate the moments of interviews and raw footage into a representation that reflected the youth and their experiences. Thus I left Prince Rupert with 18 hours of raw footage and created a 45-minute film from six hours of interviews, three hours of discussions, and nine hours of the youth engaged in day-to-day activities. Returning to Prince Rupert three months later, the youth reviewed the rough cut, gave feedback and approved of their representations. The film was then cut down to its current 35 minutes.

From the beginning of the project, as a filmmaker, I accepted that the camera and its operator merge to create any particular image. Thus my engagement with the camera has great influence in what is film and how it will appear on screen. Unlike an anthropologist creating representations with a keyboard and a word processor, a visual anthropologist must practice instant improvisation with the camera. Choosing what to film and how to film it at the exact moment it happens. Holding the camera required that I enter into what Rouch called the “cine-trance:” the practice of making “my synthesis at the exact moment of observation” (Rouch 2003:39).

While anthropologists engaged in written representations have access to field notes and memory to combine into their ethnographic text, I left Planet Youth with a finite amount of digital celluloid. These precious hours then had to be edited and

transformed into a visual representation of the moments at which the camera operated. Minh-Ha describes this process: “in film the problem of editing is much more acute, because you can’t reword to condense, nor can you clarify; you can only cut” (1992:145).

Just as we selected which photographs to share, filmmaking is a “complex system of choices” (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 18). The choices made for the film portion of the project were based on the outcomes of the photography project both in regards to what themes to focus on and more importantly how to communicate the youths’ experiences to others. The photographs revealed the youths’ desires to break down stereotypes, but there was also a need to address the realities that shaped their perspectives.

How to represent individuals within the suspended disbelief created by the film viewing process is another challenge. In the sensory experience of film viewing it is easy for audiences to forget they are watching only small segments of the hours filmed out of a participant’s lifetime. In my own work, I recognize the need for observational moments and often rely on long takes to capture the details of life. This is the backbone of ethnographic films that takes a great deal of time and patience to capture. The ability to capture these moments, however, relies on a relationship with those engaged in the film process. Beyond the image, capturing participants’ voices also fundamentally relies on this relationship and on how subjects are approached with the camera.

Then how do we acknowledge this relationship without making the film be all about the anthropologist and their relationships with participants? One solution is the inclusion of material that acknowledges the constructed nature of film production. While most filmmakers cut out glances at the camera or behavior that acknowledges the camera’s presence, David and Judith MacDougall made common a practice of including

these elements as a way to acknowledge the constructed nature of their films.⁶ I have also found including these moments to be a powerful method of reminding audiences of the constructed nature of visual media. It forces audiences to contemplate the filming process that produced the representations they see. A casual glance at a camera or including the line, “we’re so much better to interview,” reveals the youths’ role in the production process.

Film provided the youth the opportunity to be heard as well as seen. They constructed their own narratives about their experience, which they told to the camera. The nature of their experiences and the need to protect individuals dictated how to express their experiences. Instead of observational cinema, interviews and narratives were used to talk about the delicate issues of foster care, drug abuse, and racism. For the camera, Crystal articulated the experience of her peers:

Well, some of them can feel neglected. Some of them can feel emotionally abused. Some of them- depending on what home and where you are at you can be sexually abused, physically abused, emotionally, spiritually. Like it’s really harsh out there. I grew up in the ministry.

Well, I learnt not to trust to many people. Well because if you trust them and you get to close to them, you’re on to loving them and thinking that’s

⁶ The MacDougalls are also committed to the reflexive component of performance and the role of the camera as a mediating tool (Grimshaw 2003). Their film, *Photo Wallahs* (1991), explores the relationship between the context through which the camera operates and the performances of those on screen. Beyond capturing the practice and meanings of going to a small photo booth in the Himalayas the film causes the audience to reflect on how people behave and perform for a camera. The audience sees how people glance and pretend to ignore the camera when on the city street compared to the artistic license of the photo booth itself. At one point the MacDougalls leave the camera in front of a sign that says “if you want to be on camera stand here” and the flow of people in front of the camera allows the audience to contemplate the “universals in photography versus the unique cultural presentation and representations” (Scherer 1992: 1030). The film explores photography’s role in representing and producing culture and the performance engaged in by those in front of the camera.

gonna be your family until you're 19 or until you get out of the ministry. Some things can change like they can get shut down because of protocols, or they can split up because of their own problems, or they can just be growing old, or they can get really stressed out and have to shut down their home, or they can get a job somewhere out of town and just up and move on you. So that's a little bad if you get too close or if some of them are just supposed to be temporary homes and if you get attached right away and it's only temporary and you get pulled out of that home right away. It's just pretty bad. So you just kind of learn not to get too close 'til you know it's gonna be alright.

In the film, her words become stronger because of Crystal's facial expressions and the montage of her peers hanging out on the street. Her words direct the audience to contemplate how many of the youth they see on screen have experienced what Crystal describes and empathize with Crystal because of how she articulates the experience. This is the greatest strength of a final film as a tool. The ability to use a narrative to express particular ideas by playing with the audience's senses, imagination, and emotions to create a lasting impression.

The experiences of the youth can also be damaging because of film's ability to create these lasting impressions. The challenges of teen alcohol abuse are a reality for the teens of Planet Youth, as Jade described:

Shots. From bottles, like we just grab the bottle, take a shot, pass it. Like there's one, keep going. Usually 2-6's 40's, 60's, rarely coolers. But if we do get a cooler, it's a cooler and a 26 at least. No Mickey's at all. It's always hard stuff. Liquor, Smirnoff Gold, Bacardi Raz. Always, the nasty stuff. I don't know we just started, moved on. I don't know, some of us started with coolers, some of us just went straight to hard liquor, and stayed on it. I started off with hard. Bacardi Raz, one of my least favorites. My favorite was Silent Sam, vodka. Most people don't like it cause it tastes like alcohol. Um well duh, I mean, (laughs), rubbing alcohol....

I struggled with how to represent this part of the youths' reality without creating exploitative voyeuristic representations of the youth.

We decided to use interviews instead of observational ethnographic filming to reference these realities without identifying specific individuals. Contrasting these narratives with those about family and the acceptance the youth feel at the teen center also allowed us to combat the negative stereotypes these realities have the potential to create.

The film with Planet Youth, like other ethnographic films are sites of what Michael Fischer explains as “deep play: the cultural sites where multiple levels of structure, explanation, and meaning intersect or condense” (Fischer 2003: 31). Each photograph or screenshot created with Planet Youth represents a blend between observation and participation. They are also cultural moments that have been captured on film, and at another level they are documents of the relationships the youth have with one another and myself. As such, the photographs and film engage at least two “separate cultural meanings embodied in one image” (MacDougall 1991:2). The meaning at the moment the image is created and the meanings produced at the time of viewing.

For visual anthropologists, moments of play captured on film yield insights toward what is photographed or filmed. Not only can anthropological media projects be observational, participatory, or sensory, but there is a call for films to be an empowering tool to be used by “disenfranchised people in their efforts to negotiate a new cultural identity” and political position (Ruby 1991:50).

Anthropologists can provide the tools for media production, and encouraging participants to play with the equipment can create new collaborations and outcomes.⁷ By

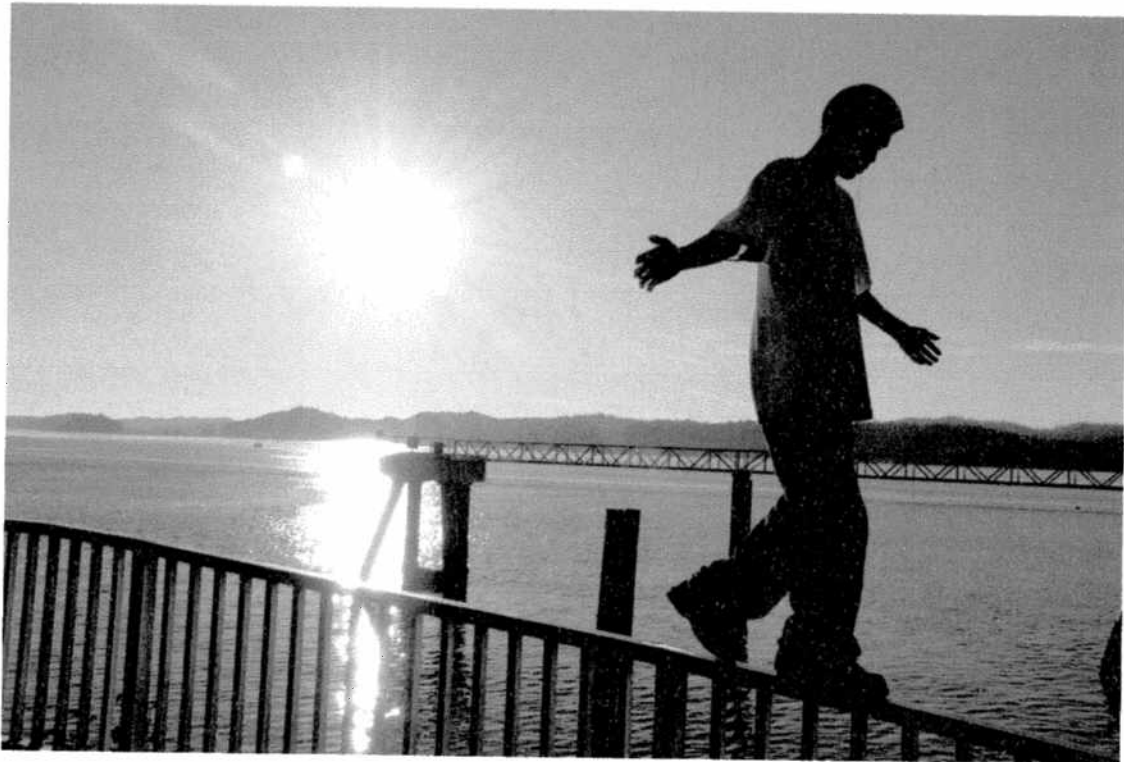
⁷ For example, Terrance Turner began working with the Kayapo as a visual anthropologist and the Kayapo have since become their own powerful political media

playing with equipment the youth expressed their identities as First Nations and urban teenagers. By playing with cameras they created their own representations. By playing with me, we built a relationship that helped the youth feel comfortable discussing painful subjects. Approaching collaborations and filmmaking as a playful process helped create close relationships that translated into intimate moments captured in both still and moving images that can be used to reshape opinions.



producers (Turner 1992). The same has occurred between Timothy Asch and the Yanamamo (Asch et al 1991)

Cameras For Collaboration



Augusta watched Jade on screen. At first the video captured Jade questioned being at-risk and formed his thoughts around whether he and his friends should be labeled in those terms. With a joke off screen the subject and camera changed perspectives. We saw three other boys lounging around a long table, but their joke quickly shifted to the reality of physical abuse. Augusta's lips pursed as she nodded slowly. "It happens to a lot of youth in this town," Jade concluded as the clip faded to black.

As the clip ended a saddened silence took over our small group. Augusta, Beatrice, and I sat around my laptop, watching the now frozen and silent Jade on the screen. Both girls released a heavy sigh revealing the truth of the boys' comments. I had only met Augusta a few minutes before when she wandered over to where Beatrice and I were playing with how to edit a film together, but this clip captured their attention.

Augusta was the first to break the silence. With wisdom and determination beyond her 18 years she turned to me.

"You should interview me. I have some things I want to say. People should hear it."

Augusta embraced the power of film to tell her stories and saw its potential to speak about the power structures that often influenced her life. She told stories of her experiences in foster care and how she did not feel welcomed in school as a minority student. At 18, she knew the connection between her personal experiences and the history of residential schools. She bravely told of her battle with depression as a symptom of her unstable home life. Having seen people's reactions to the photographs, she saw the potential for the film to express the importance of Planet Youth to a larger audience. The medium of film inspired her to participate.

One of the greatest strengths of visual anthropology is its ability to recruit individuals into the project and then communicate beyond academic boundaries. Writing a thesis is the least collaborative portion of the overall project. This document provides me with the most authority as well, since I select which portions of the youths' stories and experiences to use when writing for academic audiences in order to fulfill the requirements for my degree. It is also a format that allows for the greatest anonymity by separating the faces from the stories. Text as a medium could allow for the inclusion of experiences that express the severity of the youths' life experiences, but should not be filmed in order to protect collaborators. Participation however was the priority for this project.

Photography put the research project in the hands of the youth. Taking pictures has become an everyday activity that requires no training to produce results, but also reveals the perceptions of who takes the picture. For these teenagers, being able to play with cameras is what primarily attracted them to the project. Their friends and the items that make them unique are what they value and by photographing each other they were

able to say the most about themselves. Through this process the youth had the most authority over their representations by selecting what to shoot and which photographs to show the public. However, interpretation of the images lies with the viewer. Captions can direct the audience's opinions but "an image contains statements that emerge or remain hidden according to the viewers gaze" (Albrecht et al 2003:7).

In this regard the photographs open the door, rhetorically asking the viewer what they think the youth might experience and why they chose to share specific photographs. It is entirely up to the viewer to construct these meanings, however. Thus at times photographs can offer "too many meanings" because of the infinite details in each image whereas film can "constrain meanings through narrative chains of signification" (Pinney 1992: 27). Placing photographs side by side and including a chorus of stories in the film helps direct the audiences interpretations while creating lasting impressions (Marcus 1994).

Film provides the most powerful medium to share the youths' experiences. One can appreciate the photographs without engaging with the stories behind them. However one can not watch the film without connecting to the gut wrenching moments of cinema such as Augusta discussing depression and her thoughts of suicide. The joy and sadness the youth express through their stories demands that the audience connect with them. Film is not as collaborative as the photography project however, as so much of the production was under my control. The youth had very little influence over the editing process since logistical issues caused the editing to be done away from Prince Rupert. However the youth determined the subjects they wanted covered and approved of the film before it was shown to anyone else.

Sergei Eisenstien articulated “that filmic meaning is built out of an assemblage of shots which creates a new synthesis, an overall meaning that lies not within each part, but in the very fact of juxtaposition” (Bordwell 1972:9). As in all projects of encoding and decoding in communication, film shots work as “a progressive form of contextualization, each shot adding contextual matter to what has been shown before and at the same time” and creating new meanings (Hall 1980). The medium itself engages the senses. “Sound and image together can generate power synesthetic responses” creating a greater impact on the audience than text (MacDougall 2006:42). Thus the final film has the greatest power as a tool to influence audiences by playing with how stories can be told to elicit the greatest sensory and emotional response.

Text is also a constructed narrative as a tool for communicating a specific outcome but provides more authority for the writer to direct the formulation of the reader’s ideas. Thick description is an artistic process filled with it’s own complex systems of choices similar to editing film but with a major difference (Geertz 1977). “Meaning is created through the text, not by the textual substance” where as with film and photography meaning must be formed by what is captured by the camera’s lens (Hastrupt 1992: 10). Text’s greatest strength is it ability for participants to remain safely anonymous and for a researcher to reveal events that may otherwise be damaging to individuals, but text may not leave the same lasting impression as photography or film.

As our project shifted from exploring issues and life experiences to sharing those experiences with larger audiences, the media produced by cameras became powerful tools for communication. While the youth joked and laughed as they took many of the photographs, the severity of many of their experiences were powerfully translated into

visual representations. The youth shared emotionally jarring visual images and haunting experiences. A photograph burns an image into people's minds and film tells audiences what these images mean. Film not only reaches a broader audience, but an audience that remembers the participants' stories.

Having written a report about the photography project I know of very few people that have read through all its pages. The youth themselves, including Jade, never made it past page three. However an entire town has seen the youths' photographs. The entire teen center, including its staff and administrators has watched their film multiple times and when it is screened in Prince Rupert, many more in the community will contemplate the youths' stories.

Approaching cameras as toys creates the space to explore delicate subjects, but destroys the anonymity that often protects collaborators. Thus care must be taken not to exploit the drama of the youths' experiences. To help protect the teens from public or peer backlash, I decided that stories of alcohol abuse, arrest, and suicide were only to be referenced in film to protect individuals. Thus negotiating which medium is best to represent these issues becomes part of the process. At no time did I choose to film the youth engaging in illegal behavior but text could offer a medium to share the details of two boys trying to take care of their female friend suffering from alcohol poisoning, or the dozen faces pressed up against the glass of the teen center watching their friend being arrested for stealing.

Choosing what not to film or photograph is just as important to the research collaboration as what should be shared. It becomes part of the major shift from research "*on* subaltern peoples to research *with* communities" (emphasis added, Menzies

2004:15). While turning the cameras off at certain moments can be criticized for not capturing the youths' entire reality it is also what allowed the research project to go forward.

Play and using cameras as toys may be criticized for a lack of research methodology or design, but it is what empowered the photographs and film to become tools the youth used to share their feelings of discrimination, invisibility, and the life experiences they have endured.

Toys are the primary means through which children learn about and construct the world around them. They are also items through which children learn to interact with each other. Relationships are built around sharing toys and playing together. For the teens of Planet Youth, cameras were toys through which they were able to construct their world. Cameras were a way to experiment with how to look at their world and how they wished to be seen by others. Relationships between the youth and myself were built around the in a way that gave the youth authority over the project.

Visual anthropology and using cameras as toys created a trusting space to explore complicated stories of foster care, discrimination in school, poverty, and abuse. With youth especially, approaching research projects with informality and fun embraces their participation and ideas. Using cameras as toys removes some of the authoritative nature that often surrounds research and using media creates an interest in participating. Play opens up a space to explore delicate issues and creates an atmosphere where youth are empowered to share their perspectives.

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Behavioural Research Ethics Board
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL- MINIMAL RISK RENEWAL

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Charles R. Menzies
DEPARTMENT: UBC Arts Anthropology
UBC BREB NUMBER: BREB-R0243

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:
Institution: UBC
Site: Vancouver (includes UBC Hospital)
Other location(s) where the research will be conducted: N/A

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Paule Wyndham
Melvyn Roth
Caroline E. Jopier
Andrew Marshall

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
Gikwaa First Nation - Project title: 'Container Port Site and Gikwaa: Site and Occupancy Project' - Dmsay'temoodm: Facing Poverty and Homelessness through Customary Ts'msyen Practices
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) - Dmsay'temoodm: Facing Poverty and Homelessness through Customary Ts'msyen Practices

PROJECT TITLE:
Dmsay'temoodm: Facing Poverty and Homelessness through Customary Ts'msyen Practices

EXPIRY DATE OF THIS APPROVAL: April 4, 2009

APPROVAL DATE: April 4, 2008

The Annual Renewal for Study have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Dr. Melvyn Roth, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. John R. Rasmussen, Associate Chair
Dr. Carole E. Jopier, Associate Chair
Dr. Ramon S. Barrera, Associate Chair
Dr. Andrew Marshall, Associate Chair



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 192, 6180 Agrionomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK AMENDMENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Charles K. Menzies
DEPARTMENT: UBC AMS/Anthropology
UBC BREB NUMBER: HB8-P0199

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:
Institution: UBC
Site: Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)
Other locations where the research will be conducted:
This is the institution of a graduate student based in Prince Rupert, BC.

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
N/A

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
AN11034 Student Research Project

Expiry Date - Approval of an amendment does not change the expiry date on the current UBC BREB approval of this study. An application for renewal is required on or before: April 18, 2009

AMENDMENT(S)	AMENOMENT APPROVAL DATE						
	May 13, 2008						
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Document Name</th> <th>Version</th> <th>Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Consent Forms: Revised Consent Form (2008)</td> <td>N/A</td> <td>May 11, 2008</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Document Name	Version	Date	Consent Forms: Revised Consent Form (2008)	N/A	May 11, 2008	
Document Name	Version	Date					
Consent Forms: Revised Consent Form (2008)	N/A	May 11, 2008					

The amendment(s) and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board

- Dr. M. J. Williams, Chair
- Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
- Dr. Lynn Rabin, Associate Chair
- Dr. Laurie Long, Associate Chair
- Dr. Daniel Graham, Associate Chair
- Dr. Anita Hill, Associate Chair