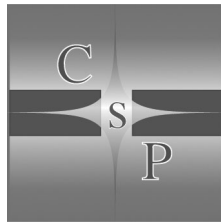# Video Vision

Video Vision:
Changing the Culture of Social Science Research

Edited by

Martin J. Downing Jr. and Lauren J. Tenney

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

To Claude "Tommy" Downing, my parents (Dad and Betty), and Laura for their support and encouragement.

—MJD

In memory of Esmin Elizabeth Green, a mother of six and Jamaican immigrant, described by those who knew her as a "beautiful person."

Ms. Green's murder-by-neglect was captured on videotape at the Kings County Hospital Center Psychiatric Emergency Room and broadcast around the world. This videotape brought to light the falsification of documents, which read that she was up and to the bathroom while the videotape showed her writing on the floor dying. It has spurred an international effort for change in the psychiatric world and a caution to us all not to lose our humanity in this surveilled world.

—10e

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PREFACE

How did two students of environmental psychology come together to create a book about the use of video in social science research? This is a question for which we have continued to debate even as this book goes to press and our second annual conference on the subject is soon to take place. *Video Vision*, which began as an afternoon workshop intended for graduate students, has become an opportunity for us to reach a wider audience of researchers who may be considering or questioning the use of video in their own work. We of course would not be here without the efforts of early pioneers and dedicated academics in this field of visual research including Margaret Mead, Sol Worth, John Adair, Beryl Bellman, Bennetta Jules-Rosette, Paul Hockings, Marcus Banks, Sarah Pink, Gillian Rose, and David MacDougall. Therefore, we want to acknowledge them here and express our appreciation for influencing us in such positive ways. In deciding to contribute to this ever-growing literature, we wanted to write a book that tells a story of what it is like to be students of social science out in the field using a video camera. With any luck our volume has tapped into these powerful and personal experiences while introducing the empirical potential of this technology.

Rather than argue about the advantages of video, we would like to offer readers an ecological perspective that the editors of this compilation share in hopes of developing a useful theory with which to incorporate this methodology. We believe that video can act as a tool used, not for direct perception, but during direct perception. James Gibson depicts tool as an extension of one's hand or body, thereby pushing the boundary between person and environment beyond our skin (1987). As such, a camera would become part of one's being rather than a detached object of the environment (Gibson, 1987; Pink, 2001). Based on this connection, not only does the person perceive but so too does the camera. Now it would most likely be a fallacy to imply that our tool directly perceives objects in the environment in a similar manner as the human eye. So rather than push the envelope with regard to a radical empiricist approach to immediate experience, we propose a dual existence between Gibson's *tool* and Fritz Heider's *thing and medium* (1959). Harry Heft informs us that it is not clear whether Heider was in favor of the concept immediate experience,

like Gibson (2001). However, there are enough subtle differences between these two leading figures that suggest a distancing for Heider from Gibson and William James' radical empiricism. Viewed in this light, the camera can function as a researcher's tool affording him or her a way to capture the environment of study as he or she directly experiences it, while simultaneously providing a *thing* that transmits information much like that of a *medium*. For Heider, "the process of perceiving involves reconstituting the object as a psychological entity from the spurious units of the medium" (Heft, 2001, p. 227). Our function of perceiving is the reconstruction of events and objects captured, which is exactly what a video camera allows us to do. It can be used to re-experience behavior and events later in time.

Moving towards a macro approach in this discussion, Heider also distinguishes between composite and unitary events (1959). The composite event occurs when "single parts are to a high degree independent of each other, and there is no causal connection between the parts of the event since each part is caused separately from the outside" (p. 5). The non-stationary video researcher, an outside force, records clips or pieces of data often at different times and perhaps in various locations. On the other hand, in a unitary event "one part causes the next and is caused by the previous one" (p. 5). The unitary event might reflect the camera resting on a tripod as it continuously records the whole of a situation. Thus unitary and composite events encompass entire scenes, whereby people, cameras, and environments are taken into perspective.

We have chosen the chapters in this book for their intellectual, empirical, and practical merits. Though ours is an ecological and environmental psychology perspective, we feel compelled to present readers with real world experiences that reflect the discourse of social science. This volume should serve as a guide to anyone interested in pursuing visual methodologies, with the editors' hope of inspiring your own video vision.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Walter Benjamin, in his examination of authenticity being replaced by mechanical reproduction, comes so far as to suggest how film allows for the analysis of behavior (1969). It is a way of combining art with science to provide better insight into human life. David MacDougall recently suggested that films automatically portray complexities of social environment relationships, whereas writers must have the intent to do so (2006). This advancement of technology affords us a chance to, as Margaret Mead explains, "illuminate our growing knowledge and appreciation of mankind" (1975, p. 10). While this may be our ultimate goal as social scientists, we are perhaps accomplishing this at the expense of our informants. Susan Sontag, in her notes on photography, suggests that capturing people in a photo is a violation and it turns them into objects for our possession (1977). Researchers must try to resolve this dilemma by establishing rapport with participants, ensure their ethical protections, and use culturally relevant methods.

Decisions about whether or not to employ visual methods in a social science research endeavor are often made prior to arriving at the field site in order to satisfy human subjects protections requirements and funding proposals (Pink, 2001). But the usefulness of such methods will be dictated by the context. Researchers should determine the level of cultural familiarity with technology as well as obtain permission from authorities or informants before snapping a photo or recording a scene. This raises ethical questions including to what extent is consent informed and how will participants be represented through the medium. In Chapter two, Tenney and MacCubbin stress the importance of triangulating one of the Belmont Principles, *Respect for Persons*, amongst researcher, participants, and institutional review boards while underscoring the issue that informed consent is continuous throughout the research process and not a single introductory event. Libman and Fields, in Chapter three, describe the use of video messages to give participants more control over their filmed experience and the opportunity to determine audiences for such messages. Pink (2001) suggests that collaborating with informants can improve their awareness and ease anxieties. A collaborative project might consist of giving cameras to participants, using photo or video elicitation, or the joint

editing of footage (Banks, 2001; Felstead, Jewson, & Walters, 2004; Pink, 2004; Tenney, 2006).

Early in the 1980's video was in greater demand than film by anthropologists because it was less expensive and had longer run times (Pink, 2001; Pink, 2004). This shift from film to video coincided with a breakdown in the art-science dichotomy, to which Benjamin had previously alluded. Pure objectivity, afforded by strict documentation and data recording, was being replaced with a more subjective approach for understanding social relationships. Building on this, researchers began to ask themselves what influences they bring to video, what benefits can be gained from reviewing footage with participants, what goals or intentions do participants bring to the project, and how should the video-making process be explained to audiences. These are questions for which we should still be asking of ourselves today. Ultimately, this leads us to a necessary discussion on reflexivity, which is the idea that social scientists should recognize and assess their role in the production of knowledge. An example of this comes based on reviewing the documentary *Silverlake Life* (1993). The filmmaker Tom Joslin records the last days and weeks of his intense struggle with AIDS, but feels compelled to evaluate this experience as both patient and director. In the first chapter of this volume, Downing reflects on his roles of recorder and interviewer behind the camera during the process of data collection.

Outline for Video Vision

In recent years the use of video to capture data has soared spurring debate about such concepts as reflexivity, participatory action, lived experiences, consciousness of the camera, role of the participant, role of the researcher, equipment selection, and the body-camera-environment connection. These issues have been addressed consistently throughout Video Vision. To begin this compilation, Downing makes a case for why video is a valuable tool for social scientists while using practical advice based on his personal experiences with this technology. Because his video interviewees could be considered part of a vulnerable population, persons living with HIV/AIDS, bringing the camera into their homes required additional safeguards to protect their privacy. This zooms into a section that addresses ethical responsibilities for using video in field research as well as methodological and analytical strategies.

Chapter two (Tenney & MacCubbin) presents readers with historical

motivations for the creation of the Nuremberg Code, Declaration of Helsinki, and Institutional Review Boards and ethical guidelines for researchers working with human subjects in relation to video. They offer concrete insights into struggles researchers have faced when attempting to gain IRB approval for participatory action research, which used video as a research tool with populations who were considered vulnerable. So this chapter gives direction to IRB members, researchers, and participants about the challenges of protecting human subjects when using video. They address the need for various groups involved with the IRB process to educate themselves about new methods such as video.

In the third chapter (Libman and Fields), a feminist perspective is applied to introduce the significance of video messages as an instrument for homeowners to create housing policy discussion. The use of video messages as a technique to redistribute power to research participants offers an exciting way that video can alter the political landscape of power, educate individuals affected by a problem by individuals affected by that same problem, those who are in positions to help them, and the broader society.

This is followed by an in-depth examination of digital video-editing. Chapter four (Turan & Chapin) introduce us to the idea of video being first generation data and discuss the benefits of working with unaltered materials for analysis, while offering practical guidance on required skills such as creating bins to store data. Their work shows how video can zoom in on the humanity of research participants with the development of categories such as love and reverence. Additionally, Turan and Chapin offer a two-stage consent and release process to ensure that participants are comfortable with the imagery that has been created of them, and how it is being used – before it even becomes admissible as data.

Part II zooms out toward broader applications in the practice of using video in field research. Chapter five (Beaty) investigates the results of utilizing informant-made videos to better understand young people's perceptions of their school environments. She illustrates the power of video for capturing change. Looking specifically at how students interact with and within their school environments, this work transforms static research by creating a dynamic interplay between the person and the camera she is holding. Utilizing sociocultural theory, Beaty unmasks developmental processes of social identity and with a permanent record created by young informants, she opens up the scope of vision for how

young people experience their worlds.

Following this in chapter six, Pine describes obstacles he faced when attempting to film meaning in everyday life and how this ultimately led to the adoption of an *aesthetics of use* for engaging "a secretive social world" (p. 146). His anthropological perspective is especially informative for the social scientist who wishes to introduce his or her method(s) on groups to which he or she is not yet an insider.

In chapter seven, Mausner presents readers with a look at how attaching video cameras to the heads of participants can be invaluable to understanding the experience of hikers – or any other experience where active use of the body is required. Beyond this, the author describes her process of creating a notation system, which has garnered wide acceptance as a means of analysis for units/elements found in natural environments.

Chapter eight (Beckman) explores the benefits of video methodology when working with survivors of Hurricane Katrina, concerning their decisions to either remain in New Orleans for rebuilding or to relocate. Her focus on social support networks and home opens up ways to combine psychological research with video and can be applied to a multitude of research endeavors. Beckman offers sound practical and experiential guidelines that should prove useful to both novice and professional video researchers.

Chapter nine is a collective effort to present two projects, *Red Flags* and *Easy Targets*, taken on by young people and researchers working in partnership with each other towards solving problems that affect them and us all. This evocative work grounded in participatory action research with young people who have been oppressed and discriminated against based on their race, ethnicity, and citizenship status is the crux of what the use of video in research is all about and has the potential to achieve.

Consistently, themes of power, agency, transformation, and change are found in these collected works leading us to believe there is something unique and real about the use of video as a research tool. Due to its constant flux and development, a researcher must be willing to adapt easily and view it as a craft. We believe it gets to the human experience in a way that a survey, interview, or even focus group alone cannot.

Despite cautions of the validity of self-report on camera and taking a

moment in time that may become de-contextualized by the editing of phrases that can be used as a person may not have intended, video adds a truth and depth to research not previously attainable. This is especially true when participants have the opportunity to review, analyze, and present materials that were generated by themselves or in conjunction with researchers.

As the authors in this volume discuss the intricacies of using video-from obtaining IRB approval, to learning how to shoot a camera, to learning how to edit and present footage, to learning how to achieve an audience-we ask you to ask yourself: What is your Video Vision?

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CHAPTER ONE

WHY VIDEO?
HOW TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES METHOD

MARTIN J. DOWNING, JR.

Advances in technology have improved our ability to capture lived experiences through visual means. I reflect on my previous work with individuals living with HIV/AIDS, the results of which are described in another paper, to evaluate the effectiveness of video as a medium that not only collects data, but also produces knowledge. I have provided strategies for confronting specific technological barriers and concerns in research. I made sure to consider my own role within this research, and have chosen to share the personal insights and revelations that occurred in light of using this visual method.

In this chapter[1] I describe how video technology can enhance qualitative research. Drawing on examples from my own work, which is reported in another paper (Downing, 2008), the value of this tool as a medium to produce knowledge is explored and evaluated. The possibility of collecting image-based data can lead to questions regarding ethics, role of researcher and camera, and analysis; as well as concerns about the proper use of video equipment. In what is to follow I have raised these issues and offered solutions based on actual experience. In doing so I want to stress that close attention has been paid to the concept of reflexivity, which is an awareness of the researcher's role in acquiring data (Lynn & Lea, 2005). My purpose here is to share with other qualitative researchers

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[1] Reprinted with permission by *The Qualitative Report*. Original citation is Downing, M. J. (2008). Why video? How technology advances method. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(2), 173-177. Retrieved from
http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-2/downing.pdf

the interesting, yet often surprising thoughts, reflections, and decision-making points I encountered as a result of incorporating video and ultimately having visual elements as a source of information. It has been deliberately written un-glossed so that my experiences with this technology will be more accessible and perhaps relatable.

The initial interest in video research occurred during the end of my first year as a Ph.D. student at the City University of New York. I was in the process of preparing a research proposal for my second-year field project, which was geared toward understanding the relationship between home environments and living with HIV/AIDS. I had already decided to collect survey data on sleep quality, perceived stress, medication adherence, and perceptions about urban residential environments. But I wanted to study home in the context of illness, so I realized that I would need to include a qualitative dimension to this project by visiting the residence of each participant. Interviewing participants in the comfort of their own home is essential for evoking emotional topics (Cooper-Marcus, 1995). But how might my efforts make a novel contribution to the literature? This was a question I would often refer to as I progressed toward a final proposal. Should I interview the participants about their experiences with home or was that too obvious a solution for such a problem?

I realized that it would be significant if each individual could describe to me the layout of his or her residence and what attention to HIV occurred in different spaces. So, I initially planned to write down this information as I heard it and hoped that a visual image could be reconstructed later during analysis. This, however, seemed entirely too complicated and virtually impossible for someone with my limited qualitative research experience. Fortunately for me, I had a colleague who was struggling at the same time with her own field project involving the use of video. Suddenly I had a viable option to collecting this valuable information.

My next question was not so simple to answer. How would I get consent from participants who were considered part of a vulnerable population to have a video camera inside their homes? It was already going to be a difficult situation explaining why I needed to conduct the study at their home rather than in a neutral or laboratory setting. Adding the use of video would make the research prospect even more threatening. I decided, somewhat regrettably, that all participants would be promised complete confidentiality where my eyes, as the principal investigator, would be the only set reviewing these tapes. This seemed to be the only

ethical solution, despite the obvious benefits of having more than one viewer/rater during analysis. I came to this decision too quickly out of fear that no one would participate without the added security. As it turned out, I still had trouble finding a diverse and sufficiently sized sample.

This study received approval by the Institutional Review Board within the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. However, since it was not a funded project I relied on my own 8mm video camera, which had the capability to display footage on a larger screen (i.e. television). This feature would become particularly important in the data analysis. For the purposes of my research proposal, I stated that participants would take me on a tour of the interior and exterior spaces within their residences. The video camera would capture the sights and sounds during the tour, leaving open the possibility of taping elements that were not explored by the individual. Initially, my only expectations for using this technology was to record the structure and layout of each home with the hope of uncovering some evidence of an interaction between the environment and illness. It would be an exceptional way of representing the physical space so that later I could revisit, reflect, and reconstruct the scene by simply watching the tapes. I had no idea how relevant that statement would become until months later.

During my first two home visits, I took on a much greater role than I had anticipated. I was working with two disabled participants who were not able to fill out the survey packet without my assistance. Given the number of surveys that I had included, I ended up spending close to an hour writing down answers for each participant. By the time I was ready for the video tour I felt mentally exhausted and unable to fully comprehend the situation at hand. I experienced technical difficulties during the first home tour despite having used this camera on several occasions. I was unaware that the nightshot effect had been turned on. I resolved this problem only after videotaping the tour in nightshot mode, and then awkwardly having to ask my participant if I could redo the experience. Fortunately I did not have any more equipment trouble with the remaining tours. However, those first two videos were very basic, emotionless, and lacked in dialogue. It was almost as if the camera had been attached to a remote control car and steered through the home. I also felt that the participants were shy about being recorded, even when it involved only their voices.

I arrived at the home of my third interviewee ambivalent about going

through this process all over again. My mind was racing with concern that the project had taken on an entirely different face than I intended. Fortunately, this was the man who would turn it all around! Kaleb was a very outgoing and lively spirit who welcomed me into his home as if we had been friends for years. From the outset I could tell that he would be in charge of this whole encounter, and for once I was comfortable with stepping out of control. Once again I helped fill out the surveys, which gave Kaleb an opportunity to tell his story in between questions. I found that many of these participants wanted to tell the story of how HIV or AIDS came into their lives. I had not expected this during the design phase, but was quite receptive to it. I felt honored that these men and women wanted me to know about who they are and how they got to this point.

When it was time to do the video tour, Kaleb walked me over to his front door and turned into an actor playing for a full audience. As an experienced performer, this was nothing new for him. He took me through room after room showing me anything and everything about the home that he continued to create. At times I would stop and ask questions or make comments, to which he would further elaborate or show me something else. I was not only capturing the environment but his active life within it. What an experience this was turning out to be. From this point forward I approached each video tour as an opportunity to interview. While most of my questions were formed during these interviews, I did ask participants about any attempts they had made to improve overall health by altering the physical surroundings of their home. I also thought it was important to ask what adjustments to the interior and/or exterior spaces of each residence would be made if possible, and how these changes could affect a person's struggle with HIV/AIDS.

Thereafter, all I needed to do was probe a few times during a tour and participants would open up. As Pink suggests "Video invites informants to produce narratives that interweave visual and verbal representation" (2004, p. 62). It was as if my opportunity to meet them had become their opportunity to meet me, and subsequently anyone else I talked to about this. Sometimes I felt as though my video camera were being used as a weapon against landlords or housing policy. It was not uncommon for participants to remark on the difficulty in acquiring certain maintenance services (i.e. repairing of windows, smoke detectors, heating system, and bathroom drainage), or obtaining permission for particular amenities such as the installation of a washer and dryer or an extra door lock. But what I

found more surprising was the positive reception that I received utilizing this tool. Instead of a threat to their security, it provided a voice for educating and even venting. Looking back after having developed some adeptness with the camera, I could see missed opportunities in the footage of my earlier tours.

I had promised everyone that their physical body would not be the focus of my filming in order to ease any fears. But how would I engage them in conversation if my eyes were constantly behind the camera? During Kaleb's video tour I found myself disconnected from him and the stories he was telling. There were times when I wanted to look him in the eye instead of being a mere extension of the camera, reminiscent of Gibson's "tool" in the person-environment relationship (1986). Unfortunately, I did not come to a solution that day, but on my next interview I made some adjustments to the filming process allowing me to be more personable with the remaining participants. At certain moments throughout the video tours movement would cease as objects were described, pictures were identified, or design modifications were explained. It was at these moments that I realized I could pull my head away from the camera and talk directly with the participants. I had managed to stay attached to the equipment while still filming, yet now I had joined the conversation.

This may seem like a simple concept, but for an amateur video researcher it made a world of difference. As a social scientist conducting these interviews, I needed to be a participant-observer (Willig, 2001). MacDougall (2006) reminds us to be aware of the bodies and images not in front of the camera. There are entire scenes taking place just outside the frame. My body and the participant's body were engaging in verbal communication to which the lens was not privy. Fortunately the built-in microphone was! When I began to review the footage in those early stages of analysis I remember being struck by the notion that my camera had captured more than just visual elements. Would this be information that I could use to effectively answer my initial question about how individuals living with HIV/AIDS relate to their home environments?

I decided to pursue an audiovisual analysis of the video footage with the hope of demonstrating relationships between home and illness. My first goal in this process was to view and transcribe all of the video tours. Once I had accomplished this I began to look for insights about any interactions between the participants, their homes, and HIV/AIDS. By

extracting content from transcripts, I was able to focus on connecting participant words with visual elements. Specifically, I asked how these sights encouraged theme development within the interviews and text. What I found far surpassed my original intentions for this project. I discovered that the home serves as a place of security, self-expression, control, and restoration (Downing, 2008). But it was not just the participants' voice that led to these conclusions. The visual had provided essential support to the audio, thereby rendering both elements mutually reinforcing. At the outset, I may have forgotten that a video camera can hear as well as see; but never again will I underestimate the power that these two features might afford a qualitative research endeavor.

I have tried to stress in this discussion the unexpected qualities video afforded my research. Not only was I able to capture the physical environment of my participants, but also the camera provided a unique interviewing and analyzing opportunity. I found it to be a vehicle for capturing the lived experience of home and illness. While I certainly agree with Banks (2001) and Pink (2001) that not every situation warrants the use of a visual method, researchers should not be too quick to discount its potential. Video has long been considered a useful instrument for recording data, but this process is in itself knowledge producing. As such, social scientists must consider the possibilities of exploring human behavior with technologies that advance traditional methods. My advice for anyone considering video as an option in research is to be comfortable with your equipment and to have an open mind throughout the process.

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PART I

ZOOM IN: A FOCUS ON ETHICS, METHOD AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN NO ONE WAS WATCHING:
HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTIONS
AND VIDEOTAPING (TAKE ONE)

LAUREN J. TENNEY
AND PATRICIA MACCUBBIN

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to **embolden** and *underscore* the importance of human subject and participant protections in social science research when using video as a research tool. Authors not necessarily limited to the role of academics address issues of human participant protections and informed consent through many and varied lenses. Litigators, ethicists, patients, advocates, politicos, entertainers, educators, and members of the popular press and media have written extensively about fair warning of the risks and benefits of research to participants as well as obtaining true informed consent. What we present is just a snapshot of the breadth of work on the subject from the perspectives of ethics, regulation, and policy and we encourage you to further research these matters on your own. There is something uniquely invaluable about the level of access to information available to us today. If it were available in his time, the developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) might have said that the Internet allows for the conditions of an in-depth and personal activity-based experience of gathering information, which thereby furthers learning.

Beyond the simple fact that protecting people who are participating in research is the ethical thing to do, this work was inspired in multiple ways. First, Tenney's personal experiences as a doctoral student attempting to