Replaying Our Process: Video/Art Making and Research

Wendy Luttrell[1] and Emily Clark[1]

Abstract

This article charts a collaborative and multimodal inquiry practice between a professor and a doctoral student who met during a visual methods course, *Doing Visual Research With Children and Youth*. Our collaboration focused on blurring the border between art making and research as a means to analyze and re-represent photographs taken by children. In stepping outside our comfort zones as researchers, we shared the same preoccupation: How much creative/artistic license would we exert regarding our use of the children's photographs? This article explores the making of a video montage in ways that created new ways of seeing and knowing that took us by surprise and helped us rethink the interplay between methodological and ethical imperatives. We hope the article invites other professors and students to fashion collaborations that support such creative experimentation and reflection.

Rewind: Children Framing Childhood and Looking Back

Our article utilizes video-editing terms as a nod to our collaborative video making process and as a means to organize the article. Each section is written from a particular perspective; sometimes an "I" voice representing our personal perspectives, and at other times a "We" voice that reflects a joint view about our experience or lessons learned. In 2003, I (Wendy Luttrell) began a visual ethnographic project in a public elementary school in Worcester, Massachusetts. Worcester is a northeastern, post-industrial, working-class city that has been home to a multitude of immigrant groups since the turn of the 20th century and into the present. The chosen school site was a microcosm of the city, rich in racial, ethnic, national, linguistic, and some economic diversity. Thirty-six children were given disposable cameras to photograph their family, school, and community lives.[1] I was interested in considering what role, if any, gender, race, ethnicity, class (relative advantage), and immigrant status would have in how the young people (at ages 10, 12, 16, and 18 years) would represent their lives and "what matters most" to them (a prompt I offered for picture taking). How would they use their cameras to make identity claims? How would their representations change over time, space, and in relationship with others? What larger narratives and social discourses would their images speak to and against? I was especially interested in how the children would take up and respond to neoliberal, racialized discourses that blame urban

students and their communities for the state of their schools; refuse to see students and their families as resources; and excessively control and punish students (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; García & Guerra, 2004; Valencia, 2010; Weiner, 2003).

The research generated an extensive audiovisual archive; 2036 photographs; 65 hr of video and audiotaped individual and small group interviews where the young people discussed their images, why they took them, and which images they wished to share with peers, teachers, and in public exhibitions; and 18 video diaries produced by a subset of participants at ages 16 and 18 years.

I turned to photography for several reasons. Photography is part of how we read and record our social worlds, construct our selves in relation to others, and express matters of the heart.[2] Talking about images is known to introduce topics, mobilize feelings, and surface knowledge that might otherwise be overlooked or not fully understood by outsiders, in this case, adults, like me, who are trying to learn with and from children and youth.[3] Photography historically occupies an elevated place in constructions of family (Hirsch, 1997; Sontag, 1977) and childhood (Higonnet, 1998), and identity (Tinkler, 2008). And finally, it has become an increasing

[1]The Graduate Center, New York, NY, USA

Corresponding Author:
Wendy Luttrell, 365 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016, USA.
Email: WLuttrell@gc.cuny.edu

means of everyday communication; while this wasn't the case for the children at the beginning of the project, by the time they were 16 and 18 years, photography had become part of their social media and everyday practice. Inviting the children to "play" with the camera and the images that were produced was part of the project's agenda. I was not interested in the children as "apprentice" adult photographers, in providing technical instruction or aesthetic directives, but rather in how they chose to take up the "assignment," and what could be learned from their choices. In a school setting, and in an era of standardization and highly scripted curriculum, allowing children this kind of freedom of self-expression set the project apart from business as usual.

I have written elsewhere about the approach I took to analyzing the photographs, what I named, *collaborative seeing*. The approach resists any single orientation to the children's photography—whether as an aesthetic experience, a social-cultural activity, or a cognitive-development process, to name three common perspectives (Luttrell, 2010; Sharples, Davison, Thomas, & Rudman, 2003). Utilizing interpretive methods grounded in visual sociology and visual anthropology (content analysis, intertextual analysis, narrative analysis), I aim to identify and preserve multiple layers of meaning and the ways these meanings change depending upon different contexts of "audiencing" (i.e., differences between what the children say about their photographs when speaking one-to-one with an interviewer, in small groups of peers, when deciding which photographs should be publicly exhibited, and in retrospect when they look back on the photographs they took; Luttrell, 2010, 2016).

This approach to viewing children's photographs is meant to generate a sense of curiosity, a "need to know more stance," (Luttrell, 2010, p. 233) an approach I took into a graduate course on visual research utilizing the audio-visual archive where Emily and I connected.

Establishing Shot: Doing Visual Research With Children and Youth

A central theme of the course is about the relationships between and among images—their *intertextuality*—and the social locations and conditions through which images get produced, circulated, and received (Rose, 2001).

Students begin by looking across the archived images, taking time to identify where they fix their eyes and what questions they have. Then students develop a categorization scheme for the photos. These schemes inevitably vary but frequently include descriptive groupings like "people, places, things"; settings like "school, family, community"; activities such as "work, consumption, leisure, literacy"; as well as more analytic groupings like "sources of pride, value and concern."

Following the categorization exercise, students move more deeply into the practice of looking, focusing on a few selected photographs. They follow Howard Becker's (1986) guidelines for working with images. Students are cautioned not to "stare and thus stop looking; look actively . . . you'll find it useful to take up the time by naming everything in the picture to yourself and writing up notes" (Becker, 1986, p. 232). After building up capacity for attention to detail, students are encouraged to continue with Becker's (1986) further invitation to engage in

> a period of fantasy, telling yourself a story about the people and things in the picture. The story needn't be true, it's just a device for externalizing and making clear to yourself the emotion and mood the picture has evoked, both part of its statement. (p. 232)

Aside from offering two different epistemological perspectives on seeing and reading photographs, the point of these two exercises is to catalyze reflexivity about what the viewer sees, interprets, and why she or her has come to this reading.[4]

Rough Cut: Emily's Photo Analysis

I (Emily) was drawn to the visual research course because it felt like a space that might resolve what Leavy (2015) describes as a "long[ing] to merge [my] scholar-self with [my] artist-self" (p. 3). From the start of our class, I was aware of a tension between the researcher in me wanting to interrogate the images as archival objects and the artist in me recognizing that each image had been created and curated by photographers to communicate particular aspects of their lives. As I set about to look through the archive, I found myself awash in waves of nostalgia as the feeling of elementary school is so visceral in the images.

I sat in my tiny closet workspace and clicked through the 2,000+ images, just looking. In class, Wendy had impressed upon us that while exploring the archive we should heed Howard Becker's instructions to "look actively, and not 'stare.'" These guidelines took away the pressure of how I had been trained to consider art—the form, composition, or content of the image. I slowly built a catalog in which I kept track of the basic elements in each photo—the subject, the colors, and the textures. Memories of my own childhood surfaced as I remembered snapshots of groups of friends making funny poses and pictures of teachers in their "teacher sweaters" making "teacher faces" now stored in a box under my bed. I also experienced a sense memory of holding a disposable 35 mm camera, looking through the viewfinder and the clicking sound of winding film to advance to the next frame. I remembered the anticipation of going to the drugstore to pick up my envelope of pictures—the frustration of blurry images and the elation when the shot that I

wanted was in the stack. Stepping away from the constraints of formal notions of what makes a "good photograph" allowed me to break from the culture of critique and open my artist/researcher eyes to other possibilities of knowing. I was able to see the subjects of the photos and also could consider the conditions under which they were taken. I was able to experience the archive as an artist/researcher.[5]

In this process of viewing, I noticed my gaze shifting from peopled to unpeopled spaces and from photos that contained activity to photos that featured stillness. Within this gaze-shift, I realized there were six photos (taken by six different children) of the gymnasium all taken from approximately the same perspective. In four of the photos, the gymnasium is empty and sunlight shines through the windows creating shadows along the wooden floor. I downloaded the images onto my desktop and lined them up, partially to make sure that what I was seeing was really there and partially as a way to view them side-by-side and figure out what caused my reaction to the photos. As I looked (not stared), I found that while I was initially attracted to the emptiness (and yet fullness) of the space, my senses were also stirred by the textures at play. My eyes moved over the images seeing (and feeling) the smoothness of the polyurethane bleachers and the tiled wall, the scarred wooden floor, and the deep shadows created by the sunlight.

There is something about experiencing a place when you are the only person in it that appeals to me. Sitting in a sanctuary when there is no service, riding a bicycle down a city street as the sun is beginning to rise, or working in a classroom after everyone has gone home for the day, all spaces that are void of people yet full of memory and spirit. Perhaps I am drawn to photographs of unpeopled spaces because I know that I am seeing something uniquely seen by the photographer—I am entering an intimate moment in which I can see the gymnasium from the perspective of the students. Six students stopped and noticed this space from almost identical perspectives—why? I could feel what Lippard (1997) might call "the lure of the local," "the pull of place that operates on each of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies" (p. 7). Although I have never been to the school that the children were photographing, I know school spaces, as a student, as an educator, and as a parent. In my experience, the gymnasium is often the life-blood of a school building and it is rarely quiet. Often filled with running, yelling, bouncing balls, jump ropes clacking, whistles blowing, the idea that these children specifically chose to document the gym when it was empty gave me pause. This view of the sacred in a school was very close to how I feel when I think about my own experiences in elementary school.[6]

I then moved from looking at the images as stills on the computer screen to imagining them in motion, as a video montage hoping to capture movement through time.[7] Using the school day as a narrative device, I was able to sequence the six images beginning with an early morning picture of an empty gymnasium, moving to a basketball game, to a gym full of children lined up wearing winter jackets, to three different photos of the four rectangular windows, casting sunlight and shadows onto patches of the gymnasium floor. As Grimshaw (2001) writes, montage is also about "breaking the invisible relationship between perception and the world . . ." (p. 11). My desire was to make this break by juxtaposing a more dominant view of schools as confinement, which is how so many students with whom I have worked experience schooling[8] with my perception of school as "sacred space." I hoped the montage format would allow for the viewer to see beyond the deficit and despair laden images of urban schooling perpetuated by popular culture (think *Stand and Deliver* or *The Wire*, Season 4) and toward the possibilities of seeing urban schools as spaces of calm and warmth.[9]

The tension between artist and researcher peaked when I began editing the video. Starting with the elements of certain photographs, I added layers of sound—a basketball dribbling and the swish of a net paired with an image of students playing basketball and sounds of background chatter of kids matched with the image of children gathered in the gym. Adding sound felt like adding a layer of texture to the images. Although I didn't have access to actual sounds from that gymnasium, I was able to locate sounds that aligned with what was occurring in the gymnasium at the time. This did not feel like overstepping my boundaries as a researcher because I wasn't applying a layer of sound that I thought might influence the emotion or mood of the images. One might hear the sounds of a bouncing basketball in their imagination when looking at images of children playing basketball. But then I wondered, would I be overstepping if I added music?[10] I searched for music that would convey my sense of the life and spirit of the space without the score becoming the narrative. I settled on "Arterial" by chamber group, Rachel's. This is an instrumental piece that features a piano and string instruments, which shifts from a light flowing andante to a sultry adagio. For me, this music accentuated the different ways in which the children photographed the space as both full of activity and movement, as well as stillness.

Eyeline Match: Seeing to Making

When I (Wendy) first viewed Emily's 35-s video montage, I thought to myself, "how did she capture the look and feel of this place without ever having been there?" I was reminded of debates within anthropology about the role of images (photography, video, film) versus direct observation and immersion (embodied in the ethnographic imperative to "go and see for oneself") as a means to establish ethnographic authority.[11] Emily's video montage pieced together separate photographs (and different elements of each photograph) into a continuous whole, allowing me to enter the space again, as I remembered it.

Emily's use of a visual zooming effect moved my eye slowly into, away from, and across the four large windows in the gym, charting a passage of time through the changing patterns of light. I had not previously noticed that the children had taken their photographs of the gym at different times of day, until Emily had sequenced them in this way. The soundtrack she inserted added to my sense of "being there." At first, I wasn't sure about the use of the instrumental music, thinking it might be a distraction, but as the tempo slowed after the flurry of blurred student bodies, sounds of muffled voices, and basketball dribbling, I felt the school day wind down. By bringing my eye to the changing light, warm colors and smooth textures of the gymnasium floor and my ears to familiar school sounds and punctuated rhythms, Emily's video montage evoked a sense of familiarity and comfort in the gym as it had been described to me by so many of the children at the time of their picture taking. This space was identified as "special," a place they felt they "belonged" as per the picture prompt. Aside from serving as the gym, the space was a site of belonging because of "morning meetings" where all the children gathered for the pledge of allegiance and sixth-grade students were invited to read "words of wisdom," a privilege they were eager to soon be given.

By adding a filter that made all the images grainy, reminiscent of an old film, Emily had also fabricated a sense of the past—a nod to the fact that a decade had passed since these photographs were taken, with disposable cameras, now ancient technology. This effect could also be read as nostalgia or a lament of a childhood past, as if inviting viewers to project their own memories and feelings about school onto the screen. This feature made me consider the children's photographs as image fragments from daily school life—Freud used the expression, "the day's residues"—that might appear in dreams, fantasies, and memories.[12]

Emily's video montage shifted my lens from photographic to cinematic. I imagined sitting in the darkness of a theater watching the children's photographs put in motion across the screen.[13] Alongside providing a moving documentary feel of the particular school site, I envisioned creating a video montage that could invite viewers to imagine school as a multisensory site of sound, light, stillness, and aliveness; a theme of life in schools that is hard to capture in a single photograph, but easier to picture through video.

If I endeavored to make such a video montage, what would this exercise be called? Data analysis? Data visualization? Experimental documentary? Art making? I think I wanted a label for what I was envisioning to assuage my anxiety about going outside my researcher comfort zone. I was comfortable with students, like Emily, making such experiments, but could I allow myself the same freedom?

In thinking about using a cinematic form to piece together a batch of pictures, I drew inspiration from visual theorist Lucien Taylor (1994) and his discussion of acclaimed ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall. Taylor (1994) writes about the difference between *illustrating* knowledge through film and *discovering* knowledge through filmmaking:

> . . . ethnographic films should be made not to communicate prefabricated (anthropological) knowledge, but rather in order to provoke new knowledge through the very circumstances of their making. Thus conceived, ethnographic filmmaking becomes in itself less an instruction of communication than an activity of discovery, of *truth-making*. (p. xii, emphasis added)

The nagging question for MacDougall (1994) about ethnographic filmmaking is, *whose story is this*? It is a question with both moral and ontological dimensions. He argues that all texts (written and visual) subordinate some information over others as it is created by the researcher/filmmaker. In both cases, the researcher/filmmaker decides what texts/images to include or exclude.

While thinking about how to select the images I might use, I was reviewing the children's videotaped conversations and being taken back again and again by their heartfelt reactions to photographs; reactions that I wasn't sure how to name. I saw and felt love, (dis)comfort, (dis)pleasure, resistance, ambiguity, joy, and pride (to name a few) and I was searching for a vocabulary. I felt a sense of intimacy and pleasure reviewing their images and videotapes and even more when I was able to meet with them as teenagers and watch them revisit their childhood photographs.[14] I had been inspired by feminist botanist Barbara McClintock's early writings about her coming to "know" her plants intimately and the pleasure she drew from that (as cited in Keller, 1982, p. 601). By immersing myself in this way of "knowing" and attending to the children's feelings as they were looking at their photographs as well as my own feelings of looking at their looking, I sought new literature.[15] Feminist Karen Barad's (2012) article about the intimacies of feminist science and the act of "touching" and being "touched" was especially helpful. Barad (2012) celebrates feminist science for its unapologetic "commitment to be *in* the science, not to presume to be above or outside of it" (p. 207). I had been looking for a way to communicate the significance of the tender way Gabriel had caressed a photograph he had taken of his mother and the sigh in his voice as he spoke of his explosive love for her. I had taken note of the palpable emotion I heard in the voice of Francine as she asked me whether we could talk more about the photograph that she had taken of her mother and the way she stroked the edges of the photograph as she spoke, as if she was reaching for words.[16] I interpreted the emotional charge of these moments as part of a larger pattern of love, appreciation, and admiration expressed by the children about their moms, spoken as if to protect or defend against a perceived devaluation of their mothers in the eyes of others (Luttrell, 2013).

I was arguing for preserving multiple readings of the children's mom photographs as idealized or ideological visions of family life, and also as stories of mom's exhausting and inflexible work schedules, difficulties making ends meet, and the pride the children took in their own roles sustaining family life (cooking, cleaning, child minding and supervising homework tasks, to name a few). But reading Barad's (2012) formulation of "touching" and "being in touch" as a form of "theorizing" opened new lines of thinking about my own "hand" and "touch" "without any illusion of clean hands" in the discovery process (p. 207).[17] Her provocation—"The idea is to do collaborative research, to be in touch, in ways that enable response-ability" (Barad, 2012, p. 208)—cleared a path forward that was freeing.

In retrospect, I might characterize this new path as a shift from a "need to *know* more" to a "need to *explore* more through making" stance as a researcher.

Frame-by-Frame

I (Wendy) decided to revisit work I hadn't read for years—Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* which I had appreciated as a way of reading photographs, but not embraced as my own. Re-reading, I realized that Barthes's work bridged two theoretical orientations that I had built into the research design without necessarily thinking of it this way. The first is sociological, focused on examining the structures and patterns of meaning conveyed by photographs (what he would call the studium), including the meanings gleaned from the children's accounts of why they had taken them and why these photographs mattered. The second is an appreciation of what might be beyond meaning or words: what he called the punctum. Barthes's emphasis on what it *feels like* to look at a picture centers on his own account of searching for a photograph of his mother after her death.[18] His account now held greater resonance with me as I thought about my interviews with the children about their photographs and my own reactions to their photographs. How, if at all, was a particular photograph, viewed by a particular child as well as my own viewing, being pulled or piercing meanings beyond words or codes of culture?

In my interviews with the young people as teenagers, I noticed that their encounters with pictures of themselves as children were patterned and emotionally charged, filled with laughter, surprise, delight, embarrassment, and disbelief. Echoes of the recurring refrain of "Oh my God . . ."were filled in with an array of phrases: "I can't believe it"; "I was so little"; "Look at my hair!" Some of the young people paused and carefully examined a picture as if trying to find traces of a past child self before moving onto the next photograph. There were also certain photographs of school that were viewed with an emotional intensity I couldn't label. I was particularly struck by one photograph of the gym with a red tricycle that had grabbed the attention of several young people, "Oh my God . . . there it is," as if attesting to a "having been there and a no longer being there in the here and now." Was it nostalgia? Mourning a loss? Was it "an uncanny sense of the otherness of the self, a literal holding oneself at a distance in the sensation of contact, the greeting of the stranger within?" (Barad, 2012, p. 206). Was this an example of what happens in a touch: "an infinity of others—other beings, other spaces, other times" that are aroused? (Barad, 2012, p. 206).

To be "in touch with," "responsible and responsive" to these acts of looking, these moments of connection, touch, and surprise, made me want to return to videotaped footage I had taken at the school. Videotaping had been an experiment, but handling the video camera had made me nervous and it felt intrusive. I had taken footage from the outside-into classrooms and as I walked up and down hallways and stairwells. I had also videotaped a "morning meeting" and a special assembly in the gym. I put the videotapes away never thinking they would see the light of day. Reviewing the footage, I could see many of the same image fragments that were highlighted in the children's photographs and that as teenagers they reacted to with such intensity when viewing them again (including the red tricycle which would become an anchor image of the video montage). I wondered how I could use different video clips as a connective thread to stitch different children's still shots together into a video montage. The hope for this comingling of images, sounds, and motion would be to evoke and provoke viewers to consider the sensory life worlds, memories, and affects of schooling.

I was keenly aware that such an evocation and provocation would be at odds with school as a site of measurement and standardization. In an age of neoliberal accountability culture, learning and teaching is messaged through the continuous demand and display of quantitative assessments—charts, tables, graphs, and statistics that turn students and teachers into "data," (Vinson & Ross, 2003) sidelining the "feel" and "intimacy" of school spaces, activities, interactions, and emotions.[19]

Try as I might, I didn't feel I had the technical skills, only a creative vision. Emily had these skills, a collaborative spirit and was a willing partner. I applied for funds to support her work (not nearly enough as it turned out)[20] and we carved out time to work together.

Match Cut: Making the Video Montage

Process

Our creative work together was amazingly smooth and nourishing, our eyes attuned in complementary ways to an array of images we had both culled from the archive and from Wendy's footage. Our process was characterized by a willingness to play, laugh, make, and remake, until we were

(temporarily) satisfied (and tired). It has been much harder to put into words or codify our process, not simply because we are forced to use words to describe what is more easily seeable than sayable, but because we are grasping for an effective vocabulary to explain ourselves. Then again, maybe this is why it worked so well; we were in knowledge "discovery" mode, not knowledge "production" mode.

First, we identified the still images we wanted to use, all of which were images the children had already approved for public release. Then we looked through Wendy's video footage together. We identified clips and stills that appealed to us, as complements to or in dialogue with the children's images. Each video clip we selected was named by its content (like a code: "approaching the school"; "hallway passage"; "Worcester blanket"; "red tricycle"; or "boy walking away") and we became familiar with these image names as we spoke about the sequencing. We trained our eyes on pacing, mood, and dramatic arc as we endeavored to make a 4-min video.

In keeping with consent and release agreements and considerations of confidentiality, there were some images and video clips that we wished we could use but in some cases had to reject. For other images, we tried using different strategies to alter, blur, disguise, or block a part of an image that might identify a person whose permission we did not have. Cropping, fiddling with the color, zooming into a small piece of a child's photograph, adding a filter of light, all these were decisions we pondered and debated. Our ethical deliberations moved between the spaces of "do no harm," to improper exposure of a person, to misappropriating a child's image, all typical concerns of ethical standards upheld by Institutional Review Boards. But beyond this, we were influenced by Mirzoeff's concept of countervisualities that emphasize the "right to look" and the "right to be seen," a claim to autonomous experiences, values, ways of seeing and knowing that lay outside of dominant discourses and structures.[21]

Our Ethical Eyes

We each brought a distinctive ethical eye to these deliberations based on our relationship to the project and our positionalities:

Wendy. I had written previously about ethical dilemmas of representation in my work with pregnant teenagers who had made visual self-representations utilizing collage:

> As guardian of the Piedmont Program for Pregnant Teens (PPPT) girls' self representations, I am curating their art work and retelling their stories in ways they might not. In muddling my way through . . . I have been guided by three main considerations—*relationship, responsibility* and *risk*. (Luttrell, 2003, p. 167)

The same considerations hold true in this project. My selection and curation of images for the montage could not be disentangled from my relationship with a child photographer, my sense of responsiveness to and responsibility for the stories and feelings behind a photograph, and for the conversations that had been elicited in different audiencing sessions (with me or another interviewer, in small groups of kids, with teachers, etc.). One distinguishing feature of my current entanglement and responsiveness was that I was doing more than "curating" and then reflecting and commenting on images made by young people; I was curating, reflecting, commenting, and re-purposing the images with my own hand.

As in my previous work, the risks felt layered, and included wrestling with my Whiteness and efforts to, in Toni Morrison's (1992) words, "unhobble the imagination" from the demands of "racially inflected language" and ways of seeing racial difference that are risky—in her words, "complicated, interesting and definitive" (pp. 12-13, quoted in Luttrell, 2003, p. 168). For example, as a consequence of having to explain to Emily why a certain re-purposing of a child's image did or didn't feel right to me, I had to put words to these risks, responsibilities, and racial inflections. One image sequence in particular crystallized the sense of riskiness in how I was re-purposing video footage. I had footage of one of the participants—a Haitian American boy walking alone down the long hallway, with his back toward the camera. His gate is slow and deliberate, shoulders slightly hunched, head bent with straight back. The video clip captures the sound of his footsteps in an otherwise silent walk. To my eye, there is a heightened sense of tension and ambiguity—is it resignation or determination? In speaking together about the various ways this sequence could be seen, Emily and I (both White) imagined the larger narrative of racialized ways of seeing Black children, and its grip on viewers' eyesights. We talked about when to cut the scene—before, during or after the boy opens the heavy wooden door into the next hallway. We agreed that he must pass through rather than be stopped in his tracks. So much of the drama of schooling in contemporary society is about racialized and racist misperceptions that cause Black children to be overly disciplined and punished—"pushed out, overpoliced and underprotected"; we wanted to convey the possibility of his freedom rather than his confinement.[22]

Emily. Wendy writes that her decision-making was guided by her sense of responsiveness and responsibility to her relationship with the children, their stories, and feelings. I developed an appreciation for the artistic integrity of the photos after immersing myself in the archive through a semester's worth of projects and then throughout the summer as I selected photographs from which we might draw. For me, making decisions about which images to use and how to use them was always complicated by thinking about

them as someone else's artwork. By this, I mean that I appreciated the ways in which the children framed their shots, tried different angles, and posed their subjects. The images were far more than a collection of snapshots—they were full of artistic promises.

There were lots of tools that I could suggest to create the aesthetic we were trying to achieve but my sense of responsibility to the artful integrity of a child's picture made me question what line I was willing to cross in terms of editing. Would I be willing to crop the photos for any other reason than to protect anonymity? Would I re-touch them to enhance color or light? What helped me resolve these dilemmas was returning to either a story about the photograph that Wendy would share or a conversation/reflection about our reasons for re-purposing the image. Our conversations pivoted around the "relation between what we see and what we know," and I was comfortable with the awareness that this relation is never settled as visual theorist John Berger (1972) cautions (p. 7).

If there was a single guideline in our process of ethical decision-making, it was returning to our purpose and subject matter: to create a visual "feeling" and "intimacy" and aliveness while looking at school spaces, activities, and interactions. Had our purpose been different, for example, had it been to problematize questions of multicultural identity in school settings, our deliberations about image selection and repurposing would have been quite different.

Audience Response

What most surprised us when we began to get viewer feedback was how often we were asked which images were the children's and which were Wendy's. This reaction gave us pause, especially insofar as adult viewers' assumptions were challenged; for example, when an adult viewer was surprised to learn that a particularly compelling or powerful image had been taken by a child. In one instance, we were asked whether it was a child who had chosen to photograph a poster of "No Child Left Behind," as if this policy reference wasn't expected to have meaning for a child. We are still debating this puzzle, and how best to grapple with and unsettle "adultist" assumptions. There is a nagging and hard-to-answer question when adult researchers give kids cameras—what imaginary of childhood, self, and schooling is being brought into focus, from whose perspective, and with what purpose in mind?[23]

People closest to the project, including members of the research team and members of the Collaborative Seeing Studio (CSS; http://collaborativeseeingstudio.commons. gc.cuny.edu/), were drawn to the multisensory presentation of time and place and evocation of ambiguity and nostalgia. They had questions about how to locate the work—was it art? Research? Where did it fit into the broader study? They raised questions and curiosities about how Emily had created the soundtrack that prompted us to revisit our process.

Our shared goal was to evoke not to denote through an aesthetic rather than through a conventional storyline. We were trying to conjure senses and feelings by following lines, light, textures, colors, shapes, and movement.[24] In the video that Emily had made for class, she had navigated the tension of soundtracking by sticking to a story that she was trying to tell with the images (a story of a school day passing). We knew that the sounds of the place were necessary in our quest to evoke both an liveliness and a meditative spirit of the school. Emily was able to capture actual sounds of the school building, teachers' and children's voices, footsteps in hallways, doors opening and closing from Wendy's video footage. She used these sounds as a foundational layer and then added open source sounds to create more texture. Emily had decided to experiment with Garage band to compose some music to add another element of sound to the video. While composing, she thought about the ways in which instruments can be used to mimic the rhythms of urban life and school. She wove together the found sound of street traffic with drumbeats and electric bass, piano staccato layered with the sound of running feet, the pitch of the school bell, and timbre of voices on the street and in classrooms to create an acoustic portrait of the school community. At the close of the video, the viewer is left with a grainy image of a fading hopscotch outline drawn onto the cracked concrete surface of the playground. As the image rests on the screen, in the background a piano plays a bright allegro. In early viewings of the video, we were critiqued for "emotionally manipulating" our audience. This reaction generated rich discussions about our intention and purpose in making the video, and again in how to locate the work—as experimental, multisensory documentary? A re-mix? As we did not want discussions of music to dominate discussions about the video, we decided to pull it from the soundtrack. But perhaps not permanently, as we continue to hear the music when we view it. We are still in the process of replaying, refining, and revising the video as we screen it to varied audiences (including some of the youth participants).

Bridging Shot: Thresholds of Knowing and Being

As we reflect on our process, we resonate with the words of Elizabeth A. St. Pierre, Alecia Y. Jackson, and Lisa A. Mazzei (2016), who describe the experience of curiosity:

> . . . some encounter with the world jolts us and demands our attention. It sets our curiosity to work; sends us to the library to read hoping to find others intrigued by the same problem; intrudes in our conversations with colleagues ("Have you ever wondered about —?"); saturates that liminal space–time between sleeping and waking; and, eventually, re-orients our seeing, re-orients our thinking, re-orients being, so that orthodox distinctions fail, normalized boundaries dissolve, and

things that are not supposed to relate connect and surge into new intensities. We believe this experience of the empirical is not so unusual but that our training inhibits it. We are required, in the name of valid, systematic science, to force that experience into the structure of a pre-existing methodology that simply cannot accommodate it. (p. 104)

What we especially appreciate about this reflection on the experience of curiosity and the conditions for new inquiry in what has been called "new empiricisms" and "new materialisms," is that it flips the question around to ask, not what our method *is* or *how to do it*, but what it has *done* for us. Making the video montage has allowed us to see and experience the children's images in new ways, adding new layers of meaning and to see ourselves in new ways, as makers on the threshold of knowing and being. It has sparked our curiosity and challenged us to think about the ethical imperatives that shape our research and teaching, from the imposition of standardization and performance measures that have reduced children and teachers to "data" points, to racially inflected ways of seeing that are supported by discriminatory and criminalizing practices of punishment. These impositions have created an impoverished view of schooling and learning. Making the video montage has also revived a sense of schooling as a site of comfort, care, activity, stillness, reflection, affirmation, a sense of belonging, being, and becoming that require a more forceful engagement with how Barad defines ethics. Her definition rests on researchers' responsibilities to the "infinitude of the other, welcoming the stranger whose very existence is the possibility of touching and being touched, who gifts us with both the ability to respond and the longing for justice-to-come" (Barad, 2012, p. 219). We are by no means claiming that the video montage accomplishes this telling but that the making of our video montage opened up new possibilities of seeing and knowing that took us by surprise.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. The overall prompt for picture taking in Grade 5 was "imagine you have a cousin your age that is moving to town and coming to your school. Take pictures of the school, your family and community that will help him or her know what to expect." The children then generated more specific prompts including "Take pictures of what learning is like at school"; "What makes you feel proud (of your school, family community)?";

"What is something that concerns you about your community?"; "Who or what do you admire?"; "Take pictures of places inside and outside of school where you feel comfortable"; "Take pictures of places inside and outside of school where you feel respect"; "Take pictures of places inside and outside of school where you feel like you belong"; "What do you do after school and on the weekends?" In Grade 6, the only prompt was, "take pictures of what matters most to you."

2. See Trachtenberg (1980) and Wells (2003) for useful critical reviews of photography and its function, character, and the limits of photographic communication.

3. When I began my research in 2003, "giving kids cameras" research was just beginning to flourish. See Clark-Ibanez (2004), Clark (1999), Cook and Hess (2007), Kaplan (2013), Luttrell and Chalfen (2010), Mitchell (2011), Orellana (1999), Prosser and Burke (2007), Thompson (2008), Tinkler (2008), Yates (2010) for an illustrative, but by no means exhaustive review of using photographs to elicit dialogue between adults and children.

4. These two exercises reflect different epistemological approaches to "reading" photographs, one that is grounded in a positivist social science approach of "content analysis" and the other grounded in semiotics and the impact that photographic images have on viewers. See Gillian Rose (2012) for an excellent review of an array of approaches and how these approaches have changed since the 1950s.

5. I (Emily) came to graduate work with a background in photography. The opportunity to take a class in visual research was a chance to think about the ways in which I might be able to use my artistic skills/knowledge in a research capacity. See Leavy (2015), McLuhan and Fiore (1967), Tufte (1990), Evans and Agee (2001), Estomin (1996), and hooks (1994) for more ways in which art and research can work in concert.

6. The use of the term sacred in this secular way can be located within literature on spirit of place. Relph (1976) writes, "The uniqueness of a place comes from the position it occupies in a configuration. But above all, the places are defined as a web of meanings attached by the history by the collective memory and the culture of the community" (p. 3).
I (Emily) think about the sacred as being a place of deep meaning located in these places that are steeped in community memory.

7. Suhr and Willerslev (2012) define montage as "cinematic rearrangement of lived time and space" (p. 285).

8. As a teacher in the New York City public school system working in a self-contained Special Education high school, I (Emily) have had many students explain how policing, lack of access to challenging coursework, and high levels of surveillance make them feel as though they are just being warehoused but not educated.

9. Mirzoeff's (2011) concept of countervisuality undergirds our thinking about the montage. He defines visuality as "the means by which authority is sutured to power." Visuality is the way that authority envisions itself, gains and maintains power by constructing and legitimating its own worldview as natural. Countervisuality, therefore, is a kind of rebuff, a refusal to accept visuality's claims to truth, neutrality, and authority.

10. In this work, there is a constant tension along the continuum of art making and social science. In my (Emily's) concern about overstepping, I was trying to carefully distinguish my work as a multisensory approach to data analysis and not as an artful documentary. Music is often an essential component of an artful documentary. When thinking about sound I wanted to be cautious of film's "ability to evoke emotional response or induce pleasure in the spectator by formal means . . . to engage with the musical or poetic qualities of language itself must not be seen as mere distractions from the main event" (Renov, 1993, p. 35). In this case, the main event was the focus on evoking a sense of place through the children's images.

11. See Grimshaw (2001) and Grimshaw and Ravetz (2005) about the fraught relationship between vision (direct observation vs. photography, video, film) and knowledge in ethnographic inquiry.

12. Freud's (1977) *The Interpretation of Dreams* was first published in 1899 where he described how images, objects, and sensory impressions of daily life constitute the "raw material" of dreams that are innocent seeming representations, but loaded with unconscious meanings and motives.

13. I was influenced by Victor Burgin's description of the benefits and limitations of different visual formats (as cited in Taylor, 1994) puts it:

> . . . in the cinema we sit in darkness; in the gallery, generally, everything is light. In the cinema we sit still and images move; in the gallery the images sit still and we move. In the cinema the sequence of images, the sequence of the reading is determined for us; where in the gallery we determine the sequence and the duration ourselves. (p. 455)

Burgin also writes about the benefits of digitization as a way to bring an array of inputs (scanned images, live video, found sounds, and so on) onto a common ground compared with photography, which brings everything in the environment into a common frame. I became intrigued by the power of video-editing (IMovie, Final Cut IV) as a powerful tool to more easily accept these inputs quickly.

14. In the follow up phase of the project, I was able to track down 26 of the 36 original participants. All agreed to be interviewed about their childhood photographs and to reflect upon the ways in which they and their lives had and had not changed.

15. These readings included Ahmed (2015), Barad (2007), and Ingold (2011).

16. Gillian Rose's (2004) article, "'Everyone's cuddled up and it just looks really nice': An emotional geography of some mums and their family photos," influenced my thinking about the intensity with which the children spoke of photographs they took of their mothers.

17. I should note here that Barad is not talking only about the human "touch" but also the physics of touch—the interchange of particles, force fields, and energy. She does this to offer a challenge to the usual dichotomies between "affective" and "scientific" dimensions, as well as human and nonhuman experiences we call "touch."

18. *Camera Lucida* documents Barthes's search after his mother's death for a photograph to remind himself of her as she was. He provides exquisite detail about sitting alone in her darkly lit apartment sorting through photographs, holding each "under the lamp" (Barthes, 2000, pp. 63-72). He struggles to explain the impact of the photo that he finds and his reaction to it (and not sharing the image with the reader), for its trace of her, his memory of her and his loss that is beyond words. The book is a testament to both the studium and the punctum as ways of seeing photographs.

19. See Restler (2017) for a visual and arts-based research study that explores care and intimacy in school spaces.

20. We are grateful to have received a PSC-CUNY research award. Wendy also wishes to acknowledge the support of an American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Fellowship (2015-2016).

21. See also Gross, Katz, and Ruby (1988) for more discussion about image ethics.

22. See Kimberlé W. Crenshaw's (2015) report (https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/54d2d37ce4b024b41443b0ba/1423102844010/BlackGirlsMatterReport.pdf). A "zero tolerance" movement in school discipline that mandates specific and harsh punishments for the violation of school rules, including minor infractions like "insubordination" are part of the problem, especially when research shows that people of all races see Black children as less innocent, more adultlike and more responsible for their actions than their White peers. See Morris (2015), Ayers, Dohrn, and Ayers (2001); Ferguson (2000); and Nolan (2011) for more discussion of the racialization of school punishment.

23. See Luttrell (2010, 2016), Piper and Frankham (2007), Pini and Walkerdine (2011), and Holliday (2000) for examples.

24. During an interview about the creative process of composing, Hans Zimmer stated, "the only thing you have is you stick to the storytelling, you hang on for dear life to whatever the story is that you want to tell . . . the stuff on the screen leads you somewhere" (Moog Music, 2015).

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Author Biographies

Wendy Luttrell, PhD, is professor of urban education, critical psychology, and sociology. She is the current executive officer of the urban education PhD program at the Graduate Center. Her research examines how urban American schooling shapes and reinforces beliefs about gender, race, class, identity, knowledge, and power, with a focus on how systems of inequality get internalized, especially by learners who have been marginalized, excluded, or stigmatized.

Emily Clark, MST, is a PhD student in the urban education program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. As a full-time New York City public school teacher, she is interested in visual and artful research methods that reflect the liveliness of her students. Her research interest is in the nexus of school-based dis/abilities related to behavior, understanding adolescence and the development of the juvenile justice system.