

Collective stereographic photo essays: an integrated approach to probing consumption experiences in depth

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Abstract

This paper proposes and illustrates an approach to probing a consumption experience in depth by means of integrating five perspectives on marketing or consumer research—namely, those that focus on (1) the nature of the *consumption experience*; (2) *photography* as a means of collecting data; (3) the *photo essay* as an approach to presenting findings; (4) *stereography* as a technique for enhancing the vividness, clarity, realism, and depth of the visual images used to represent consumption; and (5) *collective collaboration* as a way of applying the foregoing concerns to the gathering and communication of findings that represent a relevant group of consumers. Toward this end, the authors describe an integrative method and report an illustrative study of informants' verbal and pictorial responses to the topic "What New York Means To Me". When these inputs are focused on consumption experiences, captured via self-photography, explained by means of introspective vignettes, presented as printed stereo pairs or electronic 3-D anaglyphs, and analyzed as a collaborative sample of responses, they combine to generate a *collective stereographic photo essay* whose vividness, clarity, and realism help to probe the depths of this illustrative consumption experience.

Epigraph

New York, New York—
The city so nice
They had to name it twice
(J. Hendricks, 1958,
"New York, NY").

1. Introduction

This paper proposes and illustrates a new integrated approach to marketing or consumer research directed toward understanding the nature of consumption experiences. Toward this end, we combine five already well-established facets of consumer research in what we believe is a novel way that potentially sheds light on the meaning of consumption among the members of a particular group, subculture, or market. Specifically—drawing from concepts, methods, and aims previously developed separately in other contexts—we bring together aspects

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of marketing research that focus on (1) the nature of the *consumption experience*; (2) *photography* as a way of collecting data; (3) the *photo essay* as a vehicle for the presentation of findings; (4) *stereography* as a technique for enhancing the vividness, clarity, realism, and depth of these visual images; and (5) *collective collaboration* as a means to gathering responses of potential interest to marketing or consumer researchers. The result of this integrative effort is a proposed approach, described and illustrated in what follows, that we call the *Collective Stereographic Photo Essay*.

We shall begin with a brief account of the sources for our integrated approach. Then we shall describe the proposed method in more detail and shall illustrate its application to the specific case of consumption experiences associated with living in a particular location—namely, New York City.

1.1. Key aspects of the approach

1.1.1. The consumption experience

Consumer researchers have increasingly accepted the premise that our field of inquiry extends well beyond the domain of conventional goods and services (Kotler and Levy, 1969) to embrace the usage and disposition (Jacoby, 1978; Sheth, 1982) of various events (e.g., rock concerts), ideas (religious faith), people (political candidates), or places (travel destinations) that provide customer value (Holbrook, 1993) in ways that deserve scrutiny as meaningful forms of consumption experiences (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). For example, studies in our discipline have addressed such consumption experiences as those associated with river rafting (Arnould and Price, 1993), swap meets (Belk, 1991; Belk et al., 1988), dinner-time meals (Heisley and Levy, 1991), homelessness (Hill and Stamey, 1990), fan clubs (O'Guinn, 1991), or the motorcycle subculture (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). In a similar spirit, we shall focus on the consumption experiences derived from the place in which one lives in general and, as a specific example, from life in New York City in particular (cf. Holbrook, 1994).

1.1.2. Photographic data

In exploring the nature of consumption experiences, marketing and consumer researchers have in-

creasingly found uses for photography in their work. Specifically, drawing on the approaches developed in visual sociology (Becker, 1986, 1995; Chaplin, 1994; Wagner, 1979) and in cultural anthropology (Ball and Smith, 1992; Bateson and Mead, 1942; Collier, 1967; Collier and Collier, 1986), researchers in our discipline have begun to use photographs as one form of data collected from informants (Belk, 1991; Belk et al., 1988; Heisley et al., 1991; Wallendorf and Belk, 1987) or from other sources such as advertising and the arts (Bachand, 1988; Bertrand, 1988; Hudson and Wadkins, 1988; Kaushik and Sen, 1990; Stern, 1994). However, a limitation of some such studies is that one has no firm basis for assuming that the photos taken or chosen by the researcher have a particularly significant meaning or resonance in the lives of the relevant consumers. To overcome this limitation, one worthwhile avenue pursued in the social sciences has encouraged informants to take their own photographs of meaningful objects or events in their daily lives (van der Does et al., 1992; Ziller, 1990). In marketing, this approach has been extended by Zaltman and his colleagues via the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique or ZMET (Zaltman, 1996, 1997; Zaltman and Coulter, 1995; Zaltman and Higie, 1993). Briefly, ZMET rests on a number of premises concerning the meanings of products, brands, or consumption experiences in the minds of consumers. These include the recognition that such meanings are stored and communicated as images in general and often as visual images in particular. To capture the metaphoric content of such images, ZMET asks informants to take representative photographs or to collect other relevant pictorial materials that reflect their consumption experiences or that indicate what some concept of interest means to them. Later, these pictures are combined by informants, with accompanying stories, in the form of evocative and expressive montages. Examples of the insights gained from such informant-designed collages appear in applications of this method to studies of consumer responses to Nestle Crunch Bars (Zaltman et al., 1995), to the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (Zaltman and Schuck, n.d.), and to computer-mediated communication from the home (Greenspan et al., n.d.). The metaphor-elicitation aspects of ZMET—which ultimately result in the representation of mental models via the construction

of consensus maps—are particularly well-suited for labor-intensive use with small groups of 15 to 20 informants participating in lengthy and intensive depth interviews (Zaltman, 1996, p. 16). By contrast, the method proposed here is directed toward broader-gauge studies using larger samples of informants. Nonetheless, in pursuing the visual aspects of our approach, we do borrow, adapt, and extend Zaltman's technique by capitalizing on the ease and cheapness of photography via the use of inexpensive disposable cameras (cf. Zaltman et al., 1995, p. 8).

1.1.3. The photo essay

As shown by numerous authors, photography contributes not only as a means for gathering data but also as a potential mode for presenting the findings from a marketing- or consumer-research study (e.g., Hill and Stamey, 1990; Holbrook, 1987, 1988; Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; O'Guinn, 1991; Peñaloza, 1994a,b; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Often, an intermediate stage involves the use of photographs as stimuli in an experimental design (Bell et al., 1991; Loosschilder et al., 1995; McCracken and Roth, 1989) or the "auto-driving" of informants wherein they are shown photos of themselves taken by the researcher and are asked to comment on the meaning and significance of these pictorial representations (Collier and Collier, 1986; Harper, 1987, 1989; Heisley and Levy, 1991). Further, the presentation of findings may extend beyond the use of photos as exemplification (e.g., Langholz-Leymore, 1988; Mytton, 1996; Solomon, 1988), documentation (e.g., Bachand, 1988; Heisley et al., 1991; Hudson and Wadkins, 1988; Stern, 1994), or corroboration (e.g., Bertrand, 1988; Holbrook, 1988; Joy and Venkatesh, 1994; Kaushik and Sen, 1990) to embrace their use as a mode of self-expression via the illustrated introspective essay (e.g., Holbrook, 1987, 1997a; Mead, 1994; Peñaloza, 1994b; Rook, 1991). A problem with this general type of presentation is that one often has no strong basis for assuming that the pictures on which the essay is based actually reflect the intentions of the relevant consumers at the time they were taken. To address this issue, the present study combines aspects of both auto-driving and self-expression in the sense that our informants provided verbal self-interpretations of their intentions when taking their photos. In other words, we

auto-drove their photographic intentions (rather than their actual photo outputs); used their self-reflective verbal vignettes to construct an interpretive essay (independently of the pictures themselves); and then illustrated this essay with photos that appear to achieve a high degree of self-expressive visual impact (so as to demonstrate the contribution made by stereography).

1.1.4. Stereographic photos in consumer research

A further refinement in our use of photographs for purposes of marketing or consumer research concerns the collection and presentation of stereographic three-dimensional visual images by means of stereo pairs or some other suitable 3-D technique. Such stereo 3-D pictures lend themselves to publication in the printed pages of our journals or books. Moreover, via not only stereo pairs but also other formats such as red-and-blue/green anaglyphs (described later), they may also appear in electronic media like the World Wide Web. This general approach to three-dimensional stereography is quite new to the literature on marketing and consumer research. One previous study in this direction has reviewed the numerous different types of stereo 3-D displays in general and has illustrated the application to marketing research of computer-generated three-dimensional data plots in particular (Holbrook, 1997b). Another has focused specifically on the technical aspects of stereographic photos but has not dealt with issues of substantive relevance to our interpretation of consumer behavior (Holbrook, 1996). The present paper advances the previous work on stereo 3-D displays by integrating stereography into a cohesive research approach and by providing a substantively interesting application to real informants.

1.1.5. Collective collaboration

Finally, the method used here involved a collective collaboration by a large group of informants addressing a theme of mutual interest as part of a common project. By contrast, previous photographic studies in marketing or consumer research have most typically dealt with small numbers of families (e.g., Heisley and Levy, 1991), with highly selective sets of informants (e.g., Zaltman, 1996, 1997, etc.), or even with samples of one (e.g., Holbrook, 1987, 1988; Rook, 1991). Because we relied on a group

effort, we think of our approach as a collective endeavor that lends itself to various sorts of organizational settings where a team-like collaborative atmosphere can be counted on to prevail—offices, clubs, societies, small communities, task forces, military units, professional associations, classrooms, and so forth.

1.2. Justification

The method proposed here develops the collective stereographic photo essay in a way that capitalizes on the strengths of its various component parts while overcoming some of their limitations when used separately in previous applications. Specifically, in exploring consumption experiences, our approach draws on the insights of Zaltman and his colleagues by using photographs taken by the informants themselves and, therefore, interpretable as directly relevant to the thoughts, feelings, and meanings of primary interest (Zaltman, 1997, p. 428). The communicative power of these visual images—that is, their vividness, clarity, realism, and depth—is enhanced via the use of three-dimensional stereography. Further, our understanding of these stereo 3-D photos is facilitated by verbal vignettes that capture the pictorial intentions of the informants (rather than their actual success in translating those intentions to film). When undertaken in a group context by a sizeable number of participants, this combination of visual and verbal materials promises to shed light on the sorts of collective consumption-based phenomena experienced by the members of offices, clubs, small communities, or other organizations and therefore of potential interest to marketing managers.

2. Method

2.1. Data collection

As noted earlier, our illustrative research question concerned the consumption experience associated with living in New York City or, more colloquially, the goal of collectively expressing “What New York Means To Me”. Toward that end, forty-six graduate students (half men and half women with ages rang-

ing from their late twenties to early thirties) in two marketing classes at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Business participated as informants by following a carefully worded set of instructions.

Briefly, each informant was asked to address the theme of “What New York Means To Me” by taking a couple of representative stereo photographs and by writing a brief vignette to indicate the significance of these photos. Emphasis was placed on finding “some scene that captures the essence of what New York means to you”; on representing that scene pictorially “from two somewhat different angles and/or set up in two somewhat different ways”; and on providing a verbal paragraph intended to “describe the relevant scene...and convey why you have selected this particular scene”.

Much of the instruction sheet covered the house-keeping chores of circulating the cameras from student to student (*not* a trivial concern, as it turned out); providing the necessary permissions (via the appropriate signatures); and properly executing the stereo photographs themselves (by means of composing the pictures in an interesting way so as to include a sense of depth between foreground and background, insuring adequate lighting, holding the cameras correctly, and synchronizing their shutters). One possible limitation, as noted by a reviewer, is that our request to include “significant depth information” might have restricted the range of visual impressions available to the informants in capturing and conveying the essence of their NYC experiences. While valid in theory, this objection does not appear to have posed a major problem in practice. Many of our informants did in fact take photos of scenes with little meaningful depth-related information such as distant vistas or flat walls of buildings. Hence, they were apparently not unduly restricted by our attempt to encourage them to visualize in depth. In future applications, this problem might be addressed by dropping the explicit request for significant depth, by using cameras on slide bars with variable distances between the lenses, and by asking informants to adjust the lens separation to roughly one thirtieth the distance of the nearest object so as to insure a good overall sense of depth no matter what kind of scene they might happen to choose when left to their own devices (Burder and Whitehouse, 1992; Ferwerda, 1990; Waack, 1987). However, for now, such a

refinement must remain in the category of a promising topic for future research.

2.2. Stereo pairs

As indicated by the aforementioned review papers (Holbrook, 1996, 1997b), innumerable techniques exist for generating three-dimensional stereographic images. The approach used here relied on the cheapness and ease of taking pictures with disposable cameras. For this purpose, matched camera pairs were taped together end-to-end with instructions to fire them simultaneously, preferably in good sunlight and always using the built-in flashes, at a distance of about ten feet from the nearest object. For safety, each informant was asked to take at least two photographs of his or her scene of interest, as viewed from at least two different angles.

After developing, stereo pairs were cropped and mounted side-by-side to recreate the left-versus-right positioning of the twinned cameras (Burder and Whitehouse, 1992; Ferwerda, 1990; Waack, 1987; White, 1996). Observing good stereographic practice, care was taken to insure that corresponding components in the two images occur at the same height vertically and that objects closest to the viewer lie at the same horizontal position from left-to-right with respect to the edges of their two respective borders.

2.3. Viewing techniques

2.3.1. Free-viewing

The resulting stereo pairs may be free-viewed without the assistance of any optical device. To do this, place the stereo pair close to the eyes; look through or past the two pictures; and then move the face slowly away from the pair while continuing to gaze straight ahead until the two pictures come into focus, float together, and fuse into one stereo 3-D image (Alderson, 1988; Best, 1979; Ferwerda, 1990; Girling, 1990; Grossman and Cooper, 1995; Johnstone, 1995; Pratt, 1995; Waack, 1987). Such free-viewing does require a certain amount of practice because it involves overcoming an inveterate response in which our eyes habitually tend to point inward (converge) and to focus (accommodate) at the same time as some object comes closer to us. To

free-view, we must learn to *decouple* accommodation and convergence so that we manage to focus on the pictures in close proximity to the face (accommodating) while simultaneously relaxing the eyes in a way that allows them to look straight ahead at the two images (without converging). Those readers who are unable or unwilling to master this free-viewing technique may wish to rely on one of the effective approaches to aided viewing.

2.3.2. Aided viewing

Though numerous approaches to aided viewing exist, two are particularly well-suited to the sorts of pictorial stimuli likely to appear in marketing and consumer research. The first facilitates the stereoptical fusion of the stereo pairs just described by means of a *prismatic lorgnette viewer* that bends the light rays from the right and left pictures in such a way as to bring them into alignment for the two eyes when converging and focusing in their normal manner. The second converts the left and right images to blue-or-green and red shades of color respectively and then superimposes these two pictures onto the same visual space to form *anaglyphs* for purposes of viewing through *red-and-blue / green glasses* (which selectively filter the material of opposing colors to retain the appropriate image for each eye). Such aids to viewing—the prismatic lorgnette or the red-and-blue/green glasses, as needed—may be ordered (at costs of about two pounds or twenty-five pence, respectively) from Cygnus Graphic (P.O. Box 32461, Phoenix, AZ 85064, USA, 602-277-9253); Reel 3-D Enterprises (P.O. Box 2368, Culver City, CA 90231, USA, 310-837-2368); the Stereoscopic Society (c/o Eric Silk, 221 Arbury Road, Cambridge, CB4 2JJ, UK); or Bode Verlag (Postfach 405, D-45716 Haltern, Germany).

2.4. Analysis and presentation

The introspective vignettes and stereographic photos collected from our informants were interpreted by the authors for key themes reflecting the consumption experiences associated with the general topic “What New York Means To Me”. In our view, the relevant aspects of the “New York Experience” could be summarized under seven major thematic headings: (1) Pleasures; (2) Opportunities; (3)

Loved Ones; (4) Stress; (5) Distress; (6) Respite; and (7) Ambivalence. Though many self-reports mentioned more than one of these key motifs in passing, most emphasized one of the seven themes over the others and attempted to convey its meaning pictorially.

In what follows, due to space constraints, we shall confine our attention to selected quotations excerpted from the introspective vignettes together with one sample stereographic photo taken by our informants to represent the significance of each theme. These plus other verbal and visual illustrations may be read or viewed in one or both of two formats. Here, we present our collective stereographic photo essay in the form of a conventional paper featuring quoted excerpts and sample stereo 3-D photos suitable for reproduction on the printed page and typical of the articles that appear in our journals or books on marketing and consumer research. Elsewhere, for those interested, we present a more comprehensive treatment containing the full texts of the informants' vignettes as well as the entire set of 3-D photos in more complete form—the latter as both stereo pairs and red-blue anaglyphs that can be observed by visiting www.sfc.keio.ac.jp/~kuwahara/ on the World Wide Web and by clicking onto the appropriate icon.

3. Illustrations

3.1. Pleasures

The great big city's a wondrous toy,
Just made for a girl and boy.
We'll turn Manhattan into an Isle of Joy
(R. Rodgers and L. Hart, 1925,
"Manhattan").

Many informants regarded New York City as an exciting and stimulating source of culinary satisfactions and other hedonic pleasures. These people tended to adopt an upbeat, optimistic, appreciative attitude toward the City and reported favorably on the experiences of eating, dining, and recreating therein.

At the most straightforward level, some informants merely celebrated the availability of special

treats or delicacies such as preferred foods or other earthly delights. For example, one man attached important meanings to the simple gratifications of a bagel with lox and coffee. This informant photographed the long queue of hungry customers at the place where he buys his breakfast each morning—apparently, the defining moment of his daily routine: "New York means to me...an egg bagel with lox spread and tomato and a toasted almond coffee, light, with 1 sweet and low when I get to the front of the obscenely long but invariably fast-moving line...at H&H Bagels East, 81st and 2nd." Others found more complex significance in local dining experiences—as when an Asian woman voiced her delight over the diversity and multicultural flavor of two neighboring restaurants, one Chinese–Japanese and the other Chinese–Spanish in orientation: "This may be possible only in New York, where different culture[s] meet and new combinations of different culture[s] are created." Meanwhile, an American woman responded to the profusion of menus from local take-out and free-delivery restaurants that come sliding under her door by interpreting these emblems as symbolic of the wider range of diverse enticements the City has to offer:

New York, to me, means a place where you can get anything, any time, as exemplified by the plethora of takeout menus pictured. This quality of course extends beyond food—you can get witchcraft supplies, spy equipment, incredibly expensive shoes, crack, World Series games, a huge range of live music—anything you can think of, you can find it in New York.

In a similar spirit, for one male informant commenting on the excitement of shopping at a thriving culinary emporium like Zabar's on Broadway at 80th Street, a key source of pleasure lies in the feeling that you can almost literally get any food or kitchen-related item you want, whenever you want it. As shown in Fig. 1, his stereograph pictures an almost overwhelming array of goodies that fill the three-dimensional space:

No place for me is more emblematic of consumption, New York style, than Zabar's, on the Upper West Side. Here, as in the rest of the city, merchandise is crammed into every corner; it is piled into refrigera-



Fig. 1. Pleasures.

tors, it hangs from above as one moves through the store—it completely surrounds the shopper. There is a seemingly boundless variety of items: prepared foods, cheeses, cheesecloth, meats, meat cleavers, candies, breads, bread trays, coffee, coffee makers, coffee filters, tea, tea strainers, tea pots, pasta, pasta machines, pasta tongs, salsa, salsa bowls, the list goes on and on... As the photograph (hopefully) shows, one first steps into the store to confront the cheese counter, piled high, literally brimming with dairy products from all over the globe. The consumer has to speak over a wall of cheese to the salesclerk/cheesecutter, who stands before another wall of cheese. Between them literally hangs a curtain of cheese from the ceiling... As with New York City, despite the crowds, we can't wait to return for another visit to Zabar's, because there's so much there.

In Fig. 1, this informant's stereo 3-D photograph conveys various aspects of the sense in which the pleasures of food at Zabar's are plentiful, abundant, or even in-your-face. In three as opposed to two dimensions, we clearly see how the 'curtain of cheese' hangs between the customer and sales clerk. We also observe details of the 'boundless variety' on the counter piled with delicacies. What seems like an incoherent jumble of products on display (when seen in only two dimensions by looking at just one of the

two pictures in the pair) sorts itself into an array of clearly distinct items awaiting our delectation (when seen in three dimensions by fusing both pictures into one 3-D image).

3.2. Opportunities

And if you make it there,
You'll make it anywhere;
It's up to you, New York, New York
(F. Ebb and J. Kander, 1977,
'New York, New York').

Other informants placed their appreciative emphasis less on hedonic pleasures such as food and more on cultural opportunities such as the arts and entertainment. Such consumers valued New York City for its unlimited pop-culture events, concerts, museums, galleries, theaters, and other worthwhile experiences. They mentioned the City's constant flow of information, its intellectual challenges, its celebrity status, its global consciousness, and its commercial potential.

For example, one imaginative woman—writing her response in the form of a poem—found surprising but delightful humor in the architectural details represented by a gargoyle on the side of a building or what she called "humor in the grotesque". Another informant emphasized the multicultural diversity of Times Square at night and pushed his point-

and-shoot cameras past their optical limits by trying rather unsuccessfully to take a picture in the dark of the way “information flows through space as light” while “flashes and images light the night”. For another informant, who photographed the corner of 91st Street and Madison Avenue, satisfaction seemed to stem as much from the contemplation of available but missed cultural opportunities as from actual participation in these potentially time-consuming distractions from her schoolwork: “I stand there every morning to catch the bus to Columbia. However, I *could* go [to] the Cloisters or Lincoln Center. This is why I love this busy street, it reminds me of all the opportunities New York has to offer.”

By contrast, another woman proclaimed the wonders of the New York theater scene from the vantage point of an habitué celebrating the merits of the discount ticket center at the TKTS booth in Duffy Square near Times Square:

The picture shows the statue of Father Duffy in the foreground. . . . As a child, growing up in the Midwest, . . . I knew I was destined to live in the city. This feeling was confirmed upon my first visit at age 16. I saw a lot of Broadway shows during that visit—the perfect activity for an aspiring actress. When I moved to NYC at age 18, the TKTS booth became an important part of my life, allowing me to see shows I could not otherwise afford. . . . This scene really captures all that New York means to me. The bright lights of Broadway and Times Square, the opportunity to see the shows on Broadway.

Also stressing the role of a statue in her appreciation of New York, another informant focused on an aesthetic experience available closer to home:

My picture shows the statue right next to St. John the Divine Church. This represents New York to me because I look at it outside my window and I walk by it every day on the way to school. . . . This statue represents my freedom, my imagination and my dreams. It always uplifts my spirits, and clears my mind.

And—speaking of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine—one more informant developed the meaning of that essentially medieval edifice by virtue of its symbolic connections with the nature of our contem-

porary life in the Big City: “In the middle ages the cathedral exerted the magnetic force and served the many purposes that New York City now does here in America.”

Contrasting with those just mentioned, who found satisfaction by immersing themselves in the cultural life of the City, others took pleasure in regarding its splendors with detachment from a safe distance. Thus, one woman expressed special enthusiasm for the spectacular skyline of New York when seen from the heights of a park near her home in Hoboken, New Jersey: “While the city appears so overpowering and overwhelming when I’m there, it appears significantly smaller and much more beautiful when looking at it from afar.” In the same spirit, another informant from New Jersey took his stereograph of the Manhattan skyline from across the Hudson River and emphasized the commercial significance of its water traffic:

The photo represents two things. First, because I grew up in the suburbs (Long Island), New York City was always an important place that was just a little bit in the distance. Second, New York City was to me (and still is) an important commercial center, so the NY waterway ferry in the foreground stands for the river traffic that was so crucial to NY’s development.

With further regard to New York as a “commercial center”. Another informant viewed the City as a land of opportunity where aspiring artists or entertainers come to pursue their ambitions: “For dreamers and pragmatists alike, . . . it’s the opportunity to realize one’s ambitions that draws so many to this city.”

Finally, one eloquent informant summed up many of these celebratory impulses by reference to a local cultural icon found at Rockefeller Center near the corner of Fifth Avenue and 50th Street. Specifically, he developed a detailed metaphor suggested by a statue of Prometheus, the Greek god of fire, who in his view symbolizes the City’s “creativity, energy, capital, and brain power”:

Just as Prometheus brought fire to man and thereby advanced human society, New York brings to the world the highest levels of creativity, energy, capital,



Fig. 2. Opportunities.

and brain power, thus advancing our civilization ever and ever upward. Thus, my stereographic photo of Prometheus and surrounding Rockefeller Center skyscrapers not only best defines what New York means to me, but is a metaphor for what the city means to the world.

When comparing either 2-D member of the stereo pair with the fused 3-D image in Fig. 2, we see that the three-dimensional effect in this informant's stereograph helps us grasp the sculpturesque qualities of the Prometheus statue. Further, the depth of the view from this low statue (below sidewalk level) to the tall buildings behind it (looming high in the background) dramatizes what the informant calls the "surrounding Rockefeller Center skyscrapers... [as] a metaphor for what the city means to the world" and reminds us why tourists tend to walk around town with their heads tilted back and faces pointing upward.

3.3. *Loved Ones*

New York's my home—
Let me never leave it—
New York's my home sweet home

(G. Jenkins, 1946,
"New York's My Home").

A third upbeat and optimistic theme tended to identify New York with the presence of certain important friends or loved ones who make the City a meaningful place or treasured home in which to live. In this connection, one informant simply associated NYC with a local concentration of close college friends gathered at the Cornell Club: "In this space isolated from the crowds and the noise of NY I am surrounded by images of Cornell and nostalgic memories of time spent with friends." For another, when combining both the verbal and visual components of her contribution, the expression of person-centered contentment seemed more bittersweet. Thus, she took a darkly underexposed photograph of a dreary skyline seen from her apartment window to show a rather unflattering bird's eye view of her neighborhood but then proceeded to describe the picture in glowing terms that focused partly on the excitement of her surroundings and partly on her relationship with her boyfriend Jim [disguised name]: "New York to me is a city of neighborhoods, and this view represents my neighborhood and the good feelings I have for the people who live and work there, and the great times I have there with Jim."

One of our more moving responses came from an informant who described his experience of New York in the context of a love for his girlfriend Candy [disguised name], whom he considered to be a "real"



Fig. 3. Loved Ones.

New Yorker. It seems fair to say that his telescoping of the New York Experience into this rather passionately romantic expression of devotion and its successful reflection in three dimensions appear both penetrating and touching in the context of an otherwise routine class assignment:

I [took] my “what New York means to me” picture in my apartment on 120th Street. The subject of my picture is my girlfriend, Candy . . . I met Candy . . . in the spring of 1995 after I finished my first year of graduate school. We’ve been dating for 15 months. She is a native New Yorker, and so I decided to take her photo. When I write that Candy is a real New Yorker—I mean it like this. She was born in Manhattan, she was raised in Manhattan, and she has lived in Manhattan her entire life. She has no driver’s license because she has never had a need to drive. Whenever she talks about an address, she always gives cross streets. For example, she says that she goes to such and such [a] doctor “on 86th and Madison” or that her cousin works at a place “on 52nd and 3rd.” Candy’s ethnicity is Hispanic: her mother emigrated from Puerto Rico and her father is Spanish. To say the least, Candy has struggled her entire life; her mother raised her alone in Spanish Harlem. Through a lot of hard work and discipline, however, Candy received a scholarship from

Columbia College and graduated Magna Cum Laude. I love Candy very much.

In the stereograph that appears in Fig. 3, we find this informant’s girlfriend Candy surrounded by various possessions scattered casually on the bed. Via stereo 3-D, each possession stands out clearly—the backpack, the *NY Times*, the handbag, the reading lamp (receding toward the background). These details give the stereo photo an intensely personal touch. In addition, when seen three-dimensionally (but not two-dimensionally), Candy’s left arm appears to float toward the camera; and she seems to have thrust her face forward—as if wanting to join the informant on the other side of the lens—a physical gesture that bolsters the theme of romanticism so prevalent in his verbal account.

3.4. Stress

Do you miss the thrill, the subways, the schlepping?
And is it second nature still to watch where you are
stepping?

(D. Frishberg, 1981,
“Do You Miss New York?”).

On a somewhat more negative note, several informants emphasized that—while exciting and stimulat-

ing—New York can also seem rather tense or even overwhelming. In short, the hectic pace, the pressing crowds of people, the insistent time pressure, the general hustle-and-bustle of activity, and the ubiquitous sense of urgency all combine to place the local citizen in a sort of suspended state of perpetual stress.

For some informants, this feeling of tension or strain was rather subtle or almost subliminal and not altogether unpleasant. It manifested itself in a sort of vague disquietude in one's environment—as in the sense of being inundated with stimuli or thrown into hectic situations where some celebrity like Milton Berle might pop up at any time: "All the celebrities that are a constant presence in New York exemplify the competition that exists for a New Yorker's attention Seeing these famous comedians going about their business in New York reminds me of all the stimulus [sic] that a New Yorker is inundated with on an average day." For others, a feeling of unease seemed part and parcel of their everyday interior, exterior, or neighborhood surroundings. One visitor from Asia found an almost ominous sense of foreboding in the gloomy corridor of his apartment building: "Old, dark, many doors of strangers, and long." Another informant saw the view from her bedroom window as a study in bleak drabness—so bleak, apparently, that her photograph was nothing but a dark patch: "I have to look up above the building in hopes to see the color of the sky." Still another commented somewhat restively on the fast pace of her neighborhood surroundings; she produced an almost bizarre photograph that she took at a rakish angle and that features traffic careening through a wide city street: "I have adapted to my fast paced surroundings . . . great music and harsh daily sounds, over-active lifestyle."

Other informants tied their stress even more directly to what we ordinarily think of as everyday consumption-related activities, such as the problem of coping with the concentrated living style of a New York apartment in which all of one's cherished possessions must somehow be crammed into a couple of rooms: "My crowded apartment is representative of the New York style of living, where many, many experiences are crowded into concentrated time and space Boy am I beat." On a similar theme, carried outdoors, another informant expressed her

mingled state of exhilaration and exhaustion via a simile based on her experiences in slogging through flea markets while searching for their always elusive hidden treasures:

I photographed the entrance to the Chelsea Flea Market, an image I chose as a metaphor for my experience of New York. For me, New York—like the flea market—represents a condition of exhilarating and exhausting stimulation. There is no possible way I can see/experience everything, but I have to seek out as much of it as I can, because I know that there is magic hidden treasure out there. I also know that I'm going to have to slog through a lot of junk, and I might still come away empty-handed, or with a false promise.

Finally, a theme that recurred frequently manifested itself as the major preoccupation of at least three informants who responded to the crowded New York subways with degrees of stress-induced coping that ranged from resigned philosophical detachment concerning their "intimate anonymity and self-sufficient efficiency" to reluctant complicity in wanting to tell others "to get a move on it" to overt abhorrence at the "wave of people" who make it "almost impossible to walk in the opposite direction":

My photograph of a mere subway station is representative of . . . intimate anonymity and self-sufficient efficiency Everyone can be anyone in New York. The subway is representative of this freedom, both literally and symbolically. One subway token can take a person from one end of the earth to the other, quite simply. From Wall Street to the outer reaches of every borough, the subway supports the desires of members in a society, who wish to transport themselves from one place to another and even those who find their sole business on board In New York, a city which may appear chaotic and disorganized on the surface (and in fact may well be in terms of bureaucracy), the individuals who comprise the fabric of this metropolis function according to systems each has constructed for him/herself. The subway represents this infrastructure.

This rush hour scene at the World Trade Center is . . . symbolic of what New York means to me because I see New York as a very active and busy place, where people are eager to seize



Fig. 4. Stress.

opportunities I used to be very annoyed at how this mad rush of people always seemingly got me caught in a wave, preventing me to look around and absorb my new surroundings. Nowadays, however, I have to stop myself from rushing past the slow people in front of me and telling them that the way to experience New York is to get a move on it.

New York is a fantastic city that just happens to be occupied by too many millions I often need to get from Columbia to midtown during the after-work rush and, therefore, am thrust into the single most crowded place in the city, the Times Square subway station. In particular, there is a wave of people who rush from the Grand Central Shuttle to the 7th Avenue train, and at certain times, it is almost impossible to walk in the opposite direction. As a testimony to what must be avoided in New York, I have taken a picture of the first wave of this crowd.

Perhaps emblematically, only the first of the photographs accompanying these three subway-related vignettes came out clearly, largely because it was taken outdoors and featured a subway entrance gleaming in the sun, whereas the other two (shot in the bowels of underground train stations) were simply too dark and underexposed to prove useful here. A two-dimensional view of the scene shown in Fig. 4 might seem to feature two men leaning against a railing. By contrast, the three-dimensional view helps

us realize the informant's intent by emphasizing the stairway that plunges into the subway station below, with people descending into this atmosphere of what she calls "intimate anonymity and self-sufficient efficiency".

3.5. *Distress*

Autumn in New York . . .
Is often mingled with pain

(V. Duke, 1934,
"Autumn In New York").

Unfortunately, for some informants, the arousing but not necessarily altogether unpleasant feelings of stress just described can sometimes proceed to the level of *distress*. In other words, the hectic pace and pressing crowds can become overwhelming or otherwise debilitating. For our informants, the manner of expressing such distress ranged from whimsy to diatribe.

On the lighter side, for example, one informant crystallized his frustration with the City as a prolonged comic attack on his own personal nemesis—namely, the necessity of paying obeisance to the oppressive force of the ubiquitous parking meter:

Parking meters. Parking spaces. Parking hassles. New York to me is a winding, snarled, crowded, exhaust-

covered highway where *cars don't move* leading to dozens upon hundreds upon thousands upon millions of *full* parking spaces. (Never empty!).

On a more earnest note, several informants described various aspects of the City's filth, pollution, and thriving population of household pests. In this connection, with only a slight touch of nostalgia, one informant recalled her first apartment primarily as a noisy, wild, and infamous locus for bugs and mice emanating from the delicatessen downstairs: "The shot I took is of my first apartment in New York on East 9th Street and Second Avenue, which I am sure is still complete with its share of bugs and mice."

Pursuing the same theme, no fewer than three informants dwelled at length on the subject of their profound distaste for pigeons. Most charitably, the first of these—who captured his photo of an entire flock with a few birds in flight by asking a companion to stand a few yards away and to throw down some bread crumbs—saw the pigeon as a ubiquitous symbol of the New Yorker's fight for survival: "Pigeons are everywhere in New York, and in many ways they are symbols of the contradictions that make NY tick...adapted to survive in the most urban area on earth." A more irate informant conveyed his disgust for the burgeoning pigeon problem in a dramatic diatribe accompanied by a stereograph of one lone pigeon cornered near the wall of a building and, one might think, in fear for its life: "I

see the city as crowded and dirty with pigeons or 'flying rats' around every corner.... What we need here are more hawks!"

A more resigned informant, previously mentioned in the context of the pleasures associated with New York's theater district, referred to the pigeon motif in passing, almost as a taken-for-granted afterthought reflecting the downside of the New York Experience but clearly visible in her stereograph:

Another aspect of New York I found somewhat daunting was (is) the prevalence of pigeons. They were everywhere. These pigeons seemed to have a New York attitude—totally devoted to their own agenda. I had never seen so many pigeons in my life! It seems perfectly appropriate to me that an uncaring pigeon would be perched atop Father Duffy.... when all is said and done, one can end up in bronze with a pigeon on one's head!

This informant's stereo photo of Father Duffy in Fig. 5 presents a complex visual pattern that requires some disentangling in three-dimensional visual space to appreciate the details she has described both here and earlier. In the 3-D as opposed to 2-D image, these details emerge with enhanced vividness, clarity, and detail. The 3-D experience clearly reveals the sign behind the statue saying 'theatre development fund' and 'tkts'; the clamor of tall buildings and a 'Coke' advertisement in the background; and



Fig. 5. Distress.

the celebrated pigeon sitting atop Father Duffy's head (with three more awaiting their turns to perch in this place of honor as soon as the first one vacates his position).

3.6. *Respite*

Don't care if it's Chinatown or on Riverside...
I'm in a New York State of Mind

(B. Joel, 1975,
"New York State of Mind").

From a more balanced perspective, while many informants experienced New York as a source of stress or even distress, others viewed it more charitably as a place that does offer respite from the trials and tribulations that the City itself creates. These more serene informants focused on special locations—havens, retreats, places of refuge—that they have found where they or others can go to seek peace, calmness, tranquility, or safety.

Some such bastions of relief are found in the home itself, as in one man's account of a cozy apartment that shields its inhabitants from the dangers outside: "This is a cozy New York apartment corner, with the rocker and the lamp; and in the background the bars of the window gate serve as a reminder of another New York, outside." Other tranquil spots occur close to home, as in the following three appreciations of scenes found in Riverside Park near Columbia University and the neighborhood where many of the informants live—first, a bench for resting at Grant's Tomb on the edge of the Park; second, some trees that lead into the Park itself; and third, a small flower garden wherein friends of the Park attempt to stave off the forces of chaos.

"Man sleeping on bench" represents how in some ways New York's almost incomprehensible size makes the little things seem more wonderful than they would in any other city. The fact that the bench, next to a small park, in front of [an] intimidating monument, happens to be located just a [few] feet away from a busy street [is] testament to the fact that people acknowledge small pleasures.... Finding hidden treasures within such an omnipotent city is well worth the sacrifices we make to live here.

My favorite image of the city occurs when I walk through College Walk looking at the trees on my way to Riverside Park. My picture is the trees at 116th and [Riverside Drive] where I enter the park to run four times a week. The park is my haven from the craziness of the city.

"A 3-D Photo of a Lamp Post with the Ninety-first Street Flower Garden in the Background." From Bloemendaal (which is, "Valley of the Tulips," in Dutch) in the days of New Amsterdam to Bloomingdale at the rechristening by the English, the Upper-West Side has been a place to find respite from [the] city. This is what I find here and this is why I am quite happy to live here.

Other informants must travel farther from home to reach their special places of refuge. In this direction, one woman gains restorative energy from the experience of watching the roller-bladers in Central Park: "Whenever the city gets the best of me, I pick myself up and park myself in front of the skating loop in Central Park. The vitality that emanates from this group of people seeps into my pores."

Also in Central Park, another informant attains serenity by visiting a boat pond that—by virtue of the childhood memories it evokes—creates a feeling of special contentment to make his trip worthwhile:

Just inside the East 72nd St. entrance to Central Park lies a place that brings me back to my childhood and always puts a smile on my face. It is the pond where kids of all ages race their electronic boats. Whether you own your own model or rent one from the accompanying sailboat shop, the scene comes alive on almost every weekend afternoon between Spring and Fall. When I was there a couple of Sundays ago, a father and his 2 twin daughters were lost in the joy of controlling their boats, and it seem[ed] dad was enjoying himself as much as the kids.... For me, it's a little slice of Central Park where a special serenity exists like no place I've ever seen.

When we examine this informant's photo, the small children and their fathers seen in the foreground of Fig. 6 tend to arrest our glance when viewed monocularly in either the left or right member of the stereo pair. But in the 3-D experience that comes from fusing the pair stereoptically, our gaze is drawn past the people and across the pond, where we



Fig. 6. Respite.

observe the spatial relationships among the miniature sailboats in the distance. Thus, as promised in the verbal vignette that accompanies this photo pair, the scene does indeed appear to “come alive” in its stereographic representation.

3.7. Ambivalence

When you’re back in town for a quick look around, how is it?

Does it feel like home or just a nice place to visit?

(D. Frishberg, 1981,

“Do You Miss New York?”).

Finally, several informants combined aspects of the themes already addressed to emphasize the complex juxtapositions of experiences that give rise to an overall feeling of ambivalence toward the City. In these self-reflections, the good meets the bad; the natural combines with the artificial; the exciting contrasts with the enervating; the spiritual emerges from the secular; the vulgar clashes with the elevated; the past confronts the future. In short, attempts to capture these kinds of ambivalence produced some of the most evocative self-reflections in both pictures and prose. Here, at least four subcategories of ambivalence surfaced, involving aspects of (1) order versus chaos; (2) the old versus the new;

(3) wealth versus poverty; and (4) the natural versus the artificial.

3.7.1. Order versus chaos

First, one informant explicitly emphasized a juxtaposition between two forces frequently noted in the other vignettes. Specifically, she stressed the ambivalent way in which New Yorkers may react to the contradictory forces of order and chaos that compete for dominion over the City. Thus, she pinpointed Grand Central Station as the locus where her suburban lifestyle suddenly changes to a bustling world that she finds a bit intimidating but fascinating:

“Grand Central Station and Commuter Culture.”
The scene . . . represents my New York in that it is the meeting point of my two lives . . . where the unhurried, calm suburban lifestyle suddenly changes gear and becomes quintessentially New York—chaotic, frenetic and infinitely interesting.

3.7.2. Old versus new

Second, the theme of old versus new appeared in one informant’s juxtaposition of Trinity Church with the World Trade Center: “This picture exemplifies the juxtaposition between old and new in the city . . . It fascinates me to see these magnificent old structures, places, and traditions which are everywhere in Manhattan.” A similar old-versus-new theme also sur-

faced in the reflections of another informant on the breakdown between original promise and current reality as found in some of the ethnic neighborhoods visible from his perch atop Morningside Heights near Columbia University: “The main point is the ambivalence I feel about NY. On the one hand I love the city and wouldn’t live anywhere else. On the other NY is so much less than it has been in the past or could be.”

3.7.3. *Wealth versus poverty*

Third, at least two informants gave considerable weight to the pervasive contrasts between the extremes of wealth and poverty found in the New York City streets. One male visitor from Asia mentioned a profound discrepancy between the splendor of Carnegie Hall and the destitute homeless man who politely panhandles with his colorful stack of paper cups at the subway entrance outside: “All the contrasts surrounding him make me feel New York.” Another informant compared the luxurious windows and opulently dressed women on Fifth Avenue with beggars on the steps of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. For her photograph, quite creatively, she expressed this study in contrasts by means of a montage in which she physically assembled some of the symbolic material referred to parenthetically in her vignette: “New York is a city of ambivalence where the best

meets the worst. It is a city of contrasts where wealth clashes with poverty. (\$ bill and trash can) ... (Sunday NYT[imes]) ... (scale[s of justice]) ... (BBQ, beer, and chips for picnics) ... (Words is parentheses appear on picture taken.)”

3.7.4. *Natural versus artificial*

A fourth thematic contrast juxtaposes the forces of nature with those of artificial human constructions. Thus, in taking his magical morning stroll through the human-made terrain of Central Park, one Latino informant found “spiritual” flowers growing amidst the ‘hostile granite’ of a rock formation: “These young, almost humble but strongly alive flowers growing in the very middle of the brute, powerful and hostile granite, depict wonderfully the essence of New York City in the end of the 20th C[entury].” On a more panoramic scale, another informant juxtaposed the natural “trees and grass” of Central Park with the artificial “imposing skyscrapers” in the distance. His wide-angled stereograph—a view of someone else observing the scene—conveys a deep feeling for the contrasts inherent in this vista:

Photograph: “Woman in Park Observing Skyline.” For me, New York is a constant reminder of the complex relationship between humans and nature.



Fig. 7. Ambivalence.

The view that the woman in this picture is experiencing is my favorite view of New York. It underscores and encourages reflection on . . . this relationship. In the park (nature), we find solace from the hustle and bustle of the human-made world, yet, as we see in the picture, the park provides an elegant frame for what appears to be a beautiful and tranquil skyline (human-made world). The fence on which the woman leans is an ironic reminder that, even in nature, humankind seeks to impose its own form of order. When I experience this view, I often have difficulty deciding which scenery is more wonderful: the trees and grass or the imposing skyscrapers. Then I remember that the trees and grass are intended to be a refuge from that human construction. For me, this is a stark example of coexistence, which is the best term I can think of to describe New York.

Here, our presentation of visual illustrations ends with an especially compelling stereographic effect. As shown in Fig. 7, a wire fence separates this young woman from the soft grass beyond, while the NYC skyline recedes into the background far behind a row of trees on the other side of the lawn. Thus, in the manner intended by our informant, the expanse of natural grass and trees intervenes in vivid depth between the artificial structure in the foreground and the human-made metropolis in the distance.

4. Discussion

I like New York in June,
How about you?

(R. Freed and B. Lane, 1941,
“How About You?”).

4.1. General summary and conclusions on the collective stereographic photo essay

This paper has proposed and illustrated an integrated approach to probing a consumption experience in depth via the construction of a *collective stereographic photo essay*. As noted earlier, separate aspects of this method have previously been discussed and applied elsewhere in the literature—but

never, we think, in the integrative fashion developed here nor in a manner that allows the various component parts to complement each other’s strengths. Specifically, to review briefly, our proposed approach pursues the frequently advocated focus on *consumption experiences* (cf. Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) by means of a method whereby informants create their own *photographic representations* with the help of disposable cameras (cf. Zaltman, 1996, 1997, etc.). The communicative power of these photos is enhanced via the techniques of *three-dimensional stereography* (cf. Holbrook, 1996, 1997b), and their meanings are elucidated through a vignette-based intentions-reflecting modification of auto-driving procedures (cf. Heisley and Levy, 1991) to produce a collective form of the subjective personal introspective *photo essay* (cf. Heisley et al., 1991; Holbrook, 1987, 1997a; Mead, 1994; Peñaloza, 1994b; Rook, 1991) that lends itself with special appropriateness to the exploration of the consumer behavior of people in *group settings* (cf. Harper, 1987).

Hence, the novel contribution of the present paper stems not so much from our efforts to address the various separate aspects of our method as from their unique and, we believe, synergistic *combination* in the form of what we call the *collective stereographic photo essay*. To the best of our knowledge, our research is the first to propose and to illustrate this integrated approach. In this direction, we have demonstrated the feasibility of gathering insights into one area of consumption experience—life in New York City—by means of verbal vignettes and pictorial photos created by a group of cooperating informants armed with stereo cameras, good eyes, and penetrating self-reflections on the meanings of their everyday world in the Big Apple.

Interpretation of these creative efforts by our informants has suggested seven key themes, discussed previously at some length under their respective headings: (1) Pleasures; (2) Opportunities; (3) Loved Ones; (4) Stress; (5) Distress; (6) Respite; and (7) Ambivalence. Though these motifs certainly do not exhaust the topics covered in the self-reports and pictures contributed by our informants, we believe that they crystalize the major thematic material revealed by their introspective vignettes and self-photographs. Taken together, these collective insights

probe the depths of everyday consumption experiences for a group of well-educated and upwardly mobile young adults living and working in New York City.

4.2. Implications for marketing

One might reasonably ask where in marketing and to what sorts of managerial problems our approach to the collective stereographic photo essay might most fruitfully be applied. One answer, we believe, is that the method lends itself particularly well to cases in which the marketer addresses a group of individuals who want better to understand or systematically to refine their own consumption behavior. Examples might occur in various organizational settings—as in an office that wishes to investigate how its workers spend their chunks of free time (e.g., the meaning of the morning coffee break or the ethos of afternoon tea); in clubs or societies based on common interests like sports (e.g., cricket) or collecting (e.g., coins); in communities designed for certain types of residents (e.g., retirement centers or nursing homes); or in associations for members with shared professional orientations (e.g., the Academy of Marketing). All such organizations present opportunities that lend themselves to mutually beneficial exploitation by means of appropriately designed marketing strategies. Indeed, managers wishing to target specific offerings at such groups of consumers (e.g., time-saving, hobby-enhancing, life-fulfilling, or career-furthering goods and services) might find that the self-interest of their members encourages them to participate willingly in the sort of collective stereographic photo essay described here and to hold a keen interest in the results of such a project (as did the classmates who contributed to the present research). If so, we believe that consumer-related and marketing-relevant insights comparable to those from our study of the NYC experience should tend to appear.

One venue where the applicability of our proposed approach appears especially promising is in the domain of electronic communities devoted to such common interests as music, movies, cooking, hobbies, space travel, parapsychology, or other sorts of shared concerns. Such virtual communities are found on the Internet in the form of various news

groups, mail lists, and chat rooms. Typically, their members display an oft-noted eagerness to share their ideas and insights. One suspects that they would frequently volunteer as cheerful participants in the kind of collective stereographic photo essay proposed here and that a likely outcome would be probes of the relevant consumption experiences of considerable interest to concerned marketing managers.

Whether conducted via print or electronic media, collective stereographic photo essays should tend to suggest findings of use in the design of marketing strategies. Thus, work initiated subsequent to the present study has described applications of stereography to each of the “Four P’s” of marketing—Product Design, Pricing, Place (Channels of Distribution), and Promotional Communication (Holbrook, 1998). For example, especially when combined with electronic modes of presentation, stereography enjoys clear advantages in uses geared toward three-dimensional computer-assisted design (3-D CAD), computer-simulated shopping tasks, or attention-getting stereo 3-D advertisements. One illustration involves the use of two chocolate-chip cookies in a print ad for a hotel chain (Doubletree Hotels). When presented stereographically, a 3-D version of this visual display creates an eye-catching effect wherein “the top chocolate-chip cookie now appears to rise from the page, to float toward one’s face, and . . . to convey a strong message that seems to say, ‘Come and Eat Me!’” (Holbrook, 1998, p. 9). Further electronic examples appear in a recently completed Web Site (Holbrook, 1997c). To summarize briefly, the essence of these illustrations is that the three-dimensional depth provided by stereography enables product designers better to envision the aesthetic impacts of their creations; permits virtual shoppers to experience a more realistic sense of the simulated retail environment; and facilitates the maximally effective presentation of in-your-face advertising messages. With the increasing effort invested by companies such as Silicon Graphics and Microsoft (Wall Street Journal, 1997), the advent of widely available 3-D displays for television and computer monitors—with consequent implications for marketing applications—may occur sooner rather than later in the rapidly evolving world of commercial communication. If so, the collective stereographic photo essay may provide

a tool of great usefulness in designing the appropriate marketing strategies.

4.3. *Envoi*

We hope that the reader who has stayed with us this far has gained some appreciation for the proposed integrated approach to studying consumption experiences via the collective stereographic photo essay. We believe that the introspective verbal vignettes provided by our informants convey insights not likely to emerge from either a more pedestrian set of qualitative ethnographic interviews or a more traditional array of quantitative survey results. Further, we believe that the proposed use of self-photographed three-dimensional stereo images enhances the vividness, clarity, realism, and depth of the presentation far beyond what one might expect from the ordinary verbal treatments alone or even from the two-dimensional monocular pictures sometimes included as support for conventional ethnographic studies. In both senses, we believe that our proposed integrated approach to the collective stereographic photo essay promises a broad range of useful applications to marketing and consumer research and thereby suggests a worthwhile agenda for further investigations to come.

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