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Steps Towards Transformative Consumer Research Practice: a Taxonomy of Possible Reflexivities

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Steps towards transformative consumer research practice: a taxonomy of possible reflexivities Dr. Shona Bettany, University of Bradford, UK Dr. Helen Woodruffe Burton, University of Lancaster, UK Short abstract The aim of ACR 2005 has been articulated by the organisers as the promotion and dissemination of consumer research 'for' consumers. This call asks for transformative consumer research raising the issue that 'Historically, the organization's research has been impelled by the theoretical and substantive interests of academics'. It is on this point that this paper acts to transform arguing that a transformative ethic should be enacted through consumer research praxis. To achieve this it presents worked examples of the practice of reflexivity in consumer research developing a taxonomy of 'possible reflexivities', and discusses their possibilities for transformation of the consumer research process

[to cite]:

Shona Bettany and Helen Woodruffe Burton (2006) ,"Steps Towards Transformative Consumer Research Practice: a Taxonomy of Possible Reflexivities", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 33, eds. Connie Pechmann and Linda Price, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 227-234.

[url]:

<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12326/volumes/v33/NA-33>

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Steps Towards Transformative Consumer Research Practice: A Taxonomy of Possible Reflexivities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of ACR 2005 has been articulated by the organisers as the promotion and dissemination of consumer research 'for' consumers. This call asks for *transformative* consumer research raising the issue that '*Historically, the organization's research has been impelled by the theoretical and substantive interests of academics*'. It is on this point that this paper acts to transform arguing that a transformative ethic should be enacted though consumer research praxis. To achieve this it presents worked examples of the practice of reflexivity in consumer research developing a taxonomy of 'possible reflexivities', and discusses their possibilities for transformation of the consumer research process

INTRODUCTION

Reflexivity has been identified in the Social Sciences (e.g. Wasserfall, 1993, Kleinsasser, 2000, Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) as a way to address power and control in the research encounter (amongst other issues). Researchers are encouraged to understand themselves through 'thinking about their own thinking' in order to scrutinise pre-understandings and their influence on research and its results (Johnson and Duberley, 2003) and to give analytical attention to the researcher/researched relationship (Fischer and Bristol 1993, Hirschman 1993). In 1993, Wallendorf and Brucks called for consumer researchers to engage more with reflexivity particularly about the researchers' roles during the research. It would seem fair to suggest that these considerations would help to further benefit the aims of 'emancipatory' consumer research (Oleson, 2000, Hirschman, 1993). It is perhaps surprising therefore, that researcher reflexivity *per se* has not received more attention within the consumer research literature to date. One reason for this may be as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) point out, '*While the importance of being reflexive is acknowledged within social science research, the difficulties, practicalities and methods of doing it are rarely addressed. Thus, the implications of current theoretical and philosophical discussions about reflexivity (in) research practice remain under-developed*' (p. 413)

As well as having the potential for assisting the development of consumer research which is more emancipatory in nature, there is another strong argument for paying greater attention to researcher reflexivity within consumer research—the growth of interpretive approaches to consumer research. The notion of researcher reflexivity, of presenting honest and self-searching accounts of the research process, is increasingly being seen as an important and integral part of qualitative research (e.g. Sherry and Schouten, 2002, Kleinsasser, 2000). According to Gergen and Gergen (2000), reflexive researchers seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical situatedness, their personal investments in the research, acknowledging various biases they may bring, revealing '*their surprises and 'undoings' in the process of the research endeavour.*' (p.1027) As Mauthner and Doucet (1998) describe the role of reflexivity in data analysis '*the best we can do then is to trace and document our data analysis processes, and the decisions we make, so that other researchers and interested parties can see for themselves some of what has been lost and what has been gained...we need to document these reflexive processes, not just in general terms but in a more concrete...way in terms of where, how and why*

particular decisions are made at particular stages.' (p.138)

As qualitative research has become so much more prominent in consumer research over the last couple of decades, the notion of reflexivity—aligned so closely as it is with qualitative research interests—indicates a clear need to develop the discourses already apparent in consumer research in terms of reflexivity and formalise the conceptualisation and operation of this research approach. Currently, there appears to be a lack of structured debate about what reflexivity is, the research processes around reflexive research are not articulated clearly; as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) point out: '*in practice few researchers give reflexive accounts of data analysis or discuss how reflexivity can be operationalised*' (p.416) Additionally, a plethora of different approaches are evident—in short, as Johnson and Duberley (2003, p.1280) note, the result of this complexity can be '*terminal ambiguity*'. The aim, therefore, of this paper is to stimulate essential new discourse around the praxis of transformative consumer research, and move the discussion towards one which examines the many different reflexivities which might be enacted within consumer research. To accomplish this it provides a discussion of 'possible reflexivities' to structure the debate of this element of transformative consumer research practice and to guide the transformative consumer researcher. This discussion is illustrated using worked examples from the writers own research endeavours to demonstrate how these different reflexivities have worked in practice.

REFLEXIVITY IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

Researcher reflexivity has been conceptualised in consumer research discourse as a sub type of introspection (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). These authors argue that there is much to recommend reflexivity as a research practice as it will '*improve our understanding of the actual research process*' and act as such to develop consumer research theory (Ibid.355). In social sciences this has been characterised by some writers as akin to exposing the '*critical incidents*' in a research project (Fish *et al* 1991) and discussing these openly and honestly as a way for the reader to examine and appraise the decisions that were made during the research journey. However, in addition to these concerns for reflexivity as a route to better knowledge making, reflexivity has also been identified as a way to address the power issues and specifically the instrumentality of the researcher/respondent relationship. Hirschman (1993:551) advocates a more reflexive approach to research, and argues against the use of detached and 'objective' methods in consumer research. She exhorts consumer researchers to '*choose to abandon any method or practice that is premised on power inequalities between researcher and subject*' she argues that research should be designed which recognises respondents as '*equal sentient beings*'. Fischer and Bristol (1993) suggest that engaging in ongoing self reflection in consumer research can be used to develop a more collaborative, open and sensitive approach to research and act as a foil to the authority of the consumer researcher in the research encounter.

It was while conducting our own research and immersing ourselves in the possibilities of reflexivity that we began to recognise that reflexivity was not a simple or straightforward endeavour, but one which emerged even in our own research projects as different entities. A close reading of the literature around reflexivity, and

reflection on our own research led us to think about reflexivity in terms of 'ontology' and 'power'. In terms of ontology, we reflected upon reflexivity as it has been seen as a route to better knowledge and enhanced theory building through reflection on the process of research. This to us suggested questions and challenges arising pertaining to the 'reality' of the research process, not just in terms of what 'really' happened but the model of reality implied in different reflexive approaches. In terms of power, this pertains to reflexivity as a route to addressing the power imbalances inherent in any research encounter, whether that be conceptualised in terms of an overt remit for an emancipatory research politics, or as a way to direct the researcher encounter towards one with less of a dominating and instrumental dynamic. Here we reflected upon the shifts in the researcher/respondent power dynamic which occurred at different parts of our own research. It was these twin bulwarks of reflexivity, *ontology* and *power* that became the cornerstones of our discussion. To illustrate the discussion, two research stories are given as worked examples.

TALES FROM A TRANSFORMATIVE FIELD 1: *****S STORY

My research can be termed '*feminist*' from my self-identification as a feminist and from the inclusion (but not exclusivity) of methods drawn from feminist scholarship. It embodies feminism as a *perspective* (Reinharz, 1992) rather than a political stance and embraces many of the issues raised by a number of writers (e.g. Bristor and Fischer, 1993) concerning consumer research in terms of acknowledging individual differences, for example, and opting for research which is not explicitly aligned to marketer interests (e.g. Olander, 1993). However, the literature does not offer a particular framework to show what feminist research should be like (Maynard, 1994), rather feminist researchers (e.g. Fonow and Cook, 1991, Skeggs, 1994) examine the research process from a viewpoint of the different elements feminist scholarship has to offer. A great deal is written, however, on the nature of the interview in feminist research (e.g. Reinharz, 1992), largely stemming from Oakley's seminal 1981 paper "*Interviewing women; a contradiction in terms*" in which she challenges the traditional conventions of interviewing and the role of the interviewer, especially the characteristics of "*proper*" (p.38) interviews, such as objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and science and where she asserts that personal involvement is "*the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.*" (p.58)

I was influenced by the notion of the researcher as "*bricoleur*" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), incorporating the idea that research is a process shaped by the individual history of the researcher and the individual characteristics of all the people in the research setting. The qualitative researcher "*refuses to be limited*" (Janesick, 2000, p.381), rather, the '*researcher-as-bricoleur*' uses the tools of his or her methodological trade to provide solutions to problems (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998); "*the choice of which tools to use, which research practices to employ, is not set in advance.*" (p.3). According to Denzin and Lincoln, the '*bricoleur*' develops diverse skills from interviewing to observing and interpreting, engages in intensive self-reflection and also explores the many interpretive paradigms that can be brought to any particular problem. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.8) note: "*Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.*" In my research, I draw from a number of areas to develop a methodological approach which can best capture the individual's point of view and secure rich descriptions. Additionally, individual factors such as the researcher's (*my*)

personality (Punch, 1998), (*my*) personal history (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), (*my*) personal interest (Morse, 1998) and (*my*) personal desire to examine consumption independently of marketing management implications (Holbrook, 1987) from the consumer's perspective (Hirschman, 1991), were of primary concern to me in my endeavours; hence they represent my first steps on the way to becoming a reflexive researcher. At the outset, I planned to adhere to the best tenets of interpretive research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) adopting the existential phenomenological interview as the main tool for engaging with lived experience (Thomson et al., 1989). However, from a personal experience perspective, I soon found myself confronting certain challenges arising from the interview process. Instead of ignoring these difficulties or '*brushing them under the carpet*' in the writing up process, I undertook self-reflexive reporting of the interview process (Reinharz, 1992) to present a critical assessment, from my perspective, of the design decisions and changes which took place.

One of these challenges was the sense of difficulty in the "*bracketing*" which Thompson et al (1989) hold is necessary for attaining an understanding of respondents' lived experiences (p.140). Hudson and Ozanne (1988) recognise this difficulty as a criticism of interpretivist approaches; "*it is questionable whether researchers can really bracket their biases and socio-cultural backgrounds*". (p.516) Thompson, Locander and Pollio do make the assertion, however, that bracketing is not intended to imply a neutral view as researchers must always see and interpret the world from some perspective. Hirschman (1992) did not feel that the issue of bracketing was a problem in her study of drug addicts, even though she admitted at the time to being a recovering drug addict (p.161). However, her description of what bracketing consists of is perhaps slightly more straightforward: "*phenomenology brackets the external world to include only those aspects that are present in the consumers' consciousness*" (p.161). Certainly, within her description of the research methodology, Hirschman made no secret of her personal status; she identified herself as a recovering addict as well as researcher and noted that she believed some of the participants' "*willingness to serve as informants was based largely on their knowledge of my own addictive history*". (p.161) However, I sensed a real problem in this regard which stemmed from direct experience of, and involvement with, the subject of the study, unlike, for example, Eccles (2000) who notes that during her study of addicted shoppers, "*the fact that the researcher had experience as a woman and as a researcher, but none as an addicted consumer prevented the imposition of preconceived notions*". (p.143, emphasis added) While Sue Eccles is not, by her own admission, addicted to shopping, I have a feeling that there is no-one in the world better qualified than me to undertake research into the particular area of consumer behaviour which has been the subject of my research for many years now—frankly, what I don't know about it *from personal history and experience* isn't worth knowing.

It would be hard to state for certain, therefore, that bracketing was successful, especially when Arnould and Fischer's (1994) definition of the sort of knowledge which would be classed as "*[pre-]understanding or pre-judgement*" (and thus which should be bracketed) is considered: "*The [pre-]understanding of consumer researchers is found in two inter-related traditions—experience as a consumer and experience as a researcher*". (p.57) However, from the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, according to Arnould and Fischer's discussion (1994), researchers should not try to put aside [pre-]understanding, rather researchers should capitalise on it; "*Philosophical hermeneutics stresses that [pre-]understanding enables rather than constrains the interpreter*". (p.57) This viewpoint, when taken into account vis-à-vis the explication of existential phenom-

enology as put forward by Thompson et al (1989) perhaps illustrates the two oppositional dimensions of the researchers' role in the interview and the interpretive process. Some writers have criticised the lack of reflexivity in interpreting unstructured interviews: "*common platitudes proclaim that the data speak for themselves, that the researcher is neutral, unbiased, invisible*" (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p.661) and this view negates the value of the researcher and the "*strong arguments for strongly reflexive accounts*" (Oleson, 2000, p.229) about the researcher's own part in the research. Indeed, as Fontana and Frey (2000) note, while traditional interview techniques have determinedly aimed to maintain neutrality and achieve objectivity, feminists are rebelling against this stance and seeking to use the interview in a more participatory way. Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) suggest that in humanistic enquiry researcher understanding arises from direct personal experience and the researcher serves as measuring instrument; there is no possibility of objective truth; "*the researcher must place faith instead in his or her own sensitivity and empathic insightfulness when exposed to the thoughts, beliefs, values and realities constructed by others*" (p.242)

For me, the interview experience raised issues which led to further reflection and critical review, especially concerning the role of the researcher (i.e. my own role) in the research process and issues such as self-disclosure (Reinharz, 1992). At this stage, these questions can probably be best described as reflecting conflict between, on the one hand, my desire to maintain rigour by adhering to a prescribed methodological protocol (i.e. existential phenomenology at this point) yet simultaneously, on the other hand, to start to be more critical; to engage in critical analysis of alternative approaches and to examine issues relating to my role in the research, particularly as a woman and as a feminist. This reflected my growing awareness of, and engagement with, the critical debate surrounding marketing and consumer research discussed previously as well as an increasing sense of the role of self as a researcher, as a woman and as a feminist. It is a dilemma recognised and questioned by feminist researchers who identify problems with "*how we shift across the edges of our own personal lived experiences, our research explorations of others' private lives and our transformation of these into the format of public knowledge.*" (Edwards and Ribbens, 1998, p.203)

As stated, it was principally the notion of '*bracketing*' which started to give rise to doubts in my mind as to the use of the existential phenomenological interview approach. As Schwandt (1998) states: "*Whereas the individual-as-citizen legitimately has a practical (in a classic sense), pragmatic, interested attitude, the individual-turned-social-scientist brackets out that attitude and adopts the posture of objective, disinterested, empirical theorist.*" (p.248) Because of this distancing of oneself as inquirer, Schwandt argues that interpretivists cannot engage in critical evaluation of the social reality they want to portray. Contrast this with feminist scholarship which emphasises identification, trust and empathy, which brings out a relationship between researcher and researched based on cooperation and collaboration (Punch, 1998). This describes much more aptly the situation I found was arising in the interviews and which, I felt, made a positive contribution to the successful outcome of those interviews in terms of generating rich, deeply personal accounts of the consumption experience. Acknowledging this was probably the starting point for my engagement with feminist research praxis. Oakley advocated a new model of feminist interviewing that strove for intimacy and included self disclosure. Other key aspects of feminist interviewing relate to the issue of hierarchy and equality between the researcher and the researched (Oakley, 1981, Oleson, 2000); the notion of the interviewee being actively involved in constructing data about their lives, rather than passively manipulated (Graham, 1983); interviewee-guided interviews (Sandelowski and Pollock, 1986) where

the interview becomes an *interviewee*-guided investigation of a lived experience that asks almost no prepared questions; self disclosure where interviews are modelled on a '*true dialogue*' rather than an '*interrogation*', where participants become '*co-researchers*' (Bristow and Esper, 1988). Another important issue in feminist scholarship is that of '*voice*'; of allowing the different and multiple voices within the research (including the researcher's) to be heard and displayed equally, rather than subordinated or manipulated by the '*scientific*' researcher, of trying to understand and interpret the participants' stories without imposing meanings (DeVault, 1990). Thus, interviews were conducted in ways which embraced the above issues wherever appropriate. This does not mean, however, that the existential phenomenological approach was rejected completely; the thinking behind this approach remained influential throughout, particularly at the hermeneutic level within the iterative interpretation process to identify the interpretive themes (Thompson et al, 1990). I no longer tried to be as invisible as possible (Fontana and Frey, 2000) and made no attempt to retain a quasi-objective role through detachment, bracketing or any alternative techniques; instead emphasis was placed in the interview on exploring the participant's experience of the specific aspect of consumer behaviour under study through the medium of shared knowledge; a dialogue which acknowledged my own personal experience of the phenomenon and which attempted, as far as possible, to build empathy and trust between the researcher and the researched.

In a sense, this illustration represents my own '*auto/biography*' of the interview stage of the research process which provides a "*practical tool to bring the process of constructing research to the surface.*" (Birch, 1998, p.174) This also responds to Mauthner and Doucet's (1998) call for acknowledgement of the three '*voices*' within research; the researcher's '*voice*', the '*voices*' of the individuals interviewed and the '*voices*' represented in existing theories or frameworks, which should be incorporated into the structure of the research.

TALES FROM A TRANSFORMATIVE FIELD 2: *****'S STORY

I too self identify as a feminist researcher, while understanding that there is no definitive guide to the nature of feminist research (Fonow and Cook 1991). Feminist research, rather than being a prescriptive guide to the researcher, presents a series of challenges to the researcher. Indeed, for me, feminist research is much more about a series of question marks that 'hang over' the research process which must be addressed by the researcher and the choices made and dilemmas struggled over clearly articulated within the research text (Griffiths 1995, Ramazanoglu and Holland 2000). One of the most enduring challenges and dilemmas for feminist researchers has been the concern to be reflexive in the research encounter, that is, to reflect on the process of research and to engage with the issues of power, control and instrumentality in the researcher/respondent relationship. It seems sensible to assume that the form of reflexivity that emerges from any specific research encounter is configured through the nature of that encounter both ontologically and in terms of the aims and objectives (the politics) of the project. Thus discussion of researcher reflexivity in terms of '*possible reflexivities*' seems more realistic. This story therefore outlines the forms of reflexivity which emerged in my own recent research project, described as a consequence of the nature of the research both ontologically and politically.

My research project concerns anthropological study of a professional context, focusing on organisational and identity work with what might be called an '*elite*' respondent group (Moyser and Wagstaffe 1987). The theoretical approach used was Actor Network Theory (ANT). ANT is an interdisciplinary approach to the social

sciences and technology studies that evolved from the work of Michel Callon (1991) and Bruno Latour (1992) at the Ecole des Mines in Paris. ANT has not gained significant purchase in consumer or marketing research as an approach as yet, but has achieved much credibility as a research approach in organisational studies (Cooper 1992, Cooper and Law 1995, Law 1994), health studies (Callon and Rabeharisoa 1998, 1999, Cussins 1998, Singleton 2000), the arts (Hennion 1989, 1996, Gomant and Hennion 1999), medical technology (Mol 1998, Dugdale 1999, Prout 1996) and engineering (Suchman 2000) to name but a few. ANT is rooted in semiotics and poststructuralist thought and can broadly be characterised as a research approach based on a post humanist ontology (Jones 1996). This foundational ontology is predicated upon a rejection of both natural realism and constructivism (or relativism), which the key protagonists call instead 'social realism'. Latour (1992), argues that both social realism and natural realism actually reinforce modernist categories like subject/object, micro/macro and agency/structure, thus replaying the arguments about these dualisms which have dogged sociology for centuries. As a result, the power of these analyses was becoming lost in endless epistemological debate. As a researcher I had found the contemporary renderings of these debates in marketing an insufficient basis for addressing these dualisms, which are also of concern to feminist theorists, and as such saw ANT as a possible way to do research which got past these stultifying debates and allowed me to engage with, particularly, the subject/object dualism. As Jones (1996:291) argues, this radical post humanist approach attempts to move beyond these debates through a *'deliberate rejection of scientific realism (the belief that nature alone determines the ways in which scientific representations are developed and refined) and social realism (the idea that questions of scientific fact are never answered definitively by nature, but are decided instead by human interactions)'*. In *'We have never been modern'*, Latour (1993) justifies this rejection by arguing that social constructionism and the scientific realist approaches they purport to critique follow the same basic ontological logic. This is because they rest on the assumption of an ontological 'gap' between the 'real world' and 'the social'. To illustrate this he argues that, scientific realists when asked the question of whether you can close the gap between the social and the natural, say that the gap can be closed through good scientific methodology. On the other hand, social constructionist approaches would argue that the gap cannot be closed because science is just another language game. Latour argues that in effect they are both realist positions, the social constructionist is arguing for social realism, the 'real' is determined by the social. The ontological position of ANT proceeds from the answer that there is no gap, what is deemed to be 'the social' or 'the real' are co emergent effects of heterogeneous relations. This means that *'because society is one of the categories that actor network analyses render transparent, societal explanations-interests, norms, class position-are no longer useful answers, but instead become part of the question'* (Frickel 1996:29). This reconfigures the type of questions that might be asked, in that they are framed in terms of 'how things are as they are', how they are 'held in place' as effects. As Law argues, *'Far from being a theory of the social or even worse an explanation of what makes society exert pressure on actors, it always was, and this from its inception, a crude method to learn from the actors without imposing on them an a priori definition of their world-building capacities.'* (Law et al 1999: 20). In understanding what to study in this ontological approach, the metaphor of the 'actor-network' was developed (Callon 1986, Latour 1988) as one which is intentionally oxymoronic and in tension (Law 1999). That is, it does not simply map onto the dualisms 'agency' and 'structure' but attempts to guide the researcher in theorising a de centred, post social and post humanist account. In this formula-

tion, the object of research becomes *'heterogeneous networks'* (Law 1987), *'empirically identifiable configurations of human and non human forces seen in relation to one another'* (Frickel 1996:31) that is, networks of entities, human, non human, conceptual and material that are defined in terms of each other in a *'material relationality'* (Law 1999). The process of *'heterogeneous engineering'* constructs those entities in terms that their *'stability and form'* is seen as *'the function of heterogeneous (social, technical and natural) elements as they are shaped and assimilated into a network'* (Law 1987:113). Therefore, these entities, both human and non human are seen as effects of the actor network(s), and the human, or any other actor was not to be privileged or considered 'essential' or prior.

Crucial to this discussion of researcher reflexivity is that ANT is based on no stable theory of the actor; in other words, it assumes the radical indeterminacy of the actor. For example, neither the actor's size nor its psychological make-up nor the motivations behind its actions are predetermined. This means that 'agency' is found, not in terms of the prior goals and plans of the 'independent thinking subject' but in terms of the relational networks within which they are embedded. As Fuller (1994: 746) argues, ANT, *'instead of treating agency as an ontological primitive out of which societies are constructed (it) treats agency as a theoretical construct carved out of an already transpiring social order'*. The 'ontological primitive' view sees the agent as already formed and essentially prior, moving according to its own volition unless constrained by other forces. ANT on the other hand sees agency as not beginning with this kind of 'agent' but with a social space through which 'agents' emerge. Agency is therefore seen as the property of associations rather than emanating from the 'choices' of bodies seen as 'ontologically primitive'. Action, and thus responsibility, becomes distributed among a series of relations. As Callon and Law (1995: 485) put it, *'it's the relations . . . that are important. Relations which perform. Perform agency'* This ontological foundation poses very specific problems for the would be reflexive researcher. Reflexivity is a problematic issue for any project which has at heart a post humanist ontology because the idea of reflexivity, at base, is grounded in the assumption that the reflections on the process by a thinking, independent subject can give a better account of the research (Haraway 1997). In terms of this research, this would inevitably lead to critiques that it reproduces a dominating logic that I can stand outside this process and comment on it, a logic that I am not 'allowing' my respondents from within this ontological approach (i.e. I am a sentient subject everyone else is an effect). Moreover, it assumes a stable and coherent 'project-ness' (Law 1994) that I can capture as a whole, reflect upon and represent. This significantly refigures what reflexivity can mean within a post humanist approach because ways must be found to operate research to subvert the simplistic logic of the researcher using reflexivity in a technical sense, to reflect upon their interaction with object of study such that the subject-object binary is reproduced.

The best way I found to deal with this issue was to step back and to think about it in terms of what or who am 'I' during the research process. Using the narrative given above I can describe this in comparison to the 'I' that is emerging as an effect in that research story. In the previous story, the research has a politics of emancipation, which has a specific configuring effect on the researchers

¹There are many realisms. Jones (1996) posits that realism generally denotes belief in the existence of a 'real world' *beyond human language and cognition*. Common forms of scientific or correspondence realism further stipulate that logically ordered statements about the real world can more or less accurately represent the external realities to which they refer

subjectivity. Here no such politics can be claimed for my work because as just another effect of the research process, the politics of my position as researcher becomes one which feminist theorist Judith Butler calls 'a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power' (Butler 1993:35). ANT diffuses 'responsibility' among a network, thus subverting the 'us and them' logic of research as such describing the research dynamic in terms of a researcher/respondent relationship becomes meaningless. This is because ANT analysis is based on engagement with a set of negotiations which describes the progressive constitution of a network in which both human and non-human actors assume shifting and multiple identities according to prevailing strategies of interaction. This way of doing research has interesting effects on my relationship *vis a vis* the others who have taken part in the research, because taken as an 'effect', I am articulated within the research as implicated, produced and co-emergent. I am not performing a location for myself that resist the norms of the 'field' as performed by this research, or is located as outside those norms. As Butler argues (1993:15) that the subject 'who would resist such norms, is itself enabled, if not produced by such norms'. This position means that my relationship with the others that participated in the research is flattened, that I am a performative effect within the same conditions of possibility as the respondents.

In terms of what might be called reflexivity, 'I am being produced by the research as a story that constructs me within the conditions of possibility and project specific exigencies, as what I am allowed to become, not a 'reflexive subject'. For me ANT emerged as an idealist approach, which in practice grated against the genre of scientific research we all have to work within. This proved tricky to work around in cases where reflexivity might be most evident. For example, at moments in the research where I felt the pressure to make a 'methodological choice' which I would then be expected to 'reflect upon' this was obviously done overtly. For example I had to make 'decisions' in my methodology about sample size and sample frame. However, instead of articulating this in terms of 'choice' my narrative resembled one where I reflected on the 'researcher-as-effect' and 'respondent-as-effect' that was emerging through the research at that time in terms of the field of possibilities enacted by the multiple networks of the specific research project within which I was operating.

Of course, it could be argued that would be disingenuous of me to make such a claim. I am writing the thesis, I have 'captured' the words of the respondents in my tapes and field notes and, despite the admission that I am inevitably folded into the same conditions as my respondents I retain some kind of power to produce this work, and myself, in certain ways rather than other ways. I would argue that this type of approach because it explicitly places me as an effect emerging with and through the research, although it may never 'equalise' the power relationship within the research it gives me a well articulated analytical position within the research from which to at least interrogate that position and destabilise my own authority as within the research.

Illustrating how ANT has addressed this concern for reflexivity, Latour (2003:36) has reminded researchers using this approach in a recent paper that, 'the network is not 'a thing in the world' but a path traced by the researcher'. This is where a more specific form of 'reflexivity' comes in, where to be reflexive 'does not signal an increase in mastery and consciousness, but only a heightened awareness that mastery is impossible and control over actions is now seen as a complete modernist fiction'. (Latour 2003:36). During my research, and especially the writing up stages, I presented 'my self' as an uncertain and emergent effect, multiple and shifting. The 'researcher-as-effect' in the research as a result of the

multiple and complex actor networks that are inevitably implied in any funded research project became an explicit and major part of the research. In these confrontations I have articulated the possible ways of coming to matter as an 'author' that 'I' could have emerged as, as an effect of the research. This means that 'I' and the other effects in the research, emerge in the thesis as 'becoming subject' to it, fragile, processual achieved effects performed as different and multiple and that 'could have been otherwise'. In this research approach, the idea of different voices of participants is not valid, the focus and topic of the research is the emergence, through negotiations and confrontations, of the various non human and human effects that emerge *as a consequence of the research process*, with no prior essence implied, and which are seen in this context in terms of their material semiotic fragility, multiplicity and tenuousness.

DISCUSSION: CONCEPTUALISING REFLEXIVITY WITHIN A TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA

As has already been explained, during our discussions of reflexivity in the research process, it became clear to us that different forms of reflexivity were in fact being deployed. In fact, the overweening issues for both of us was the shifting nature of reflexivity itself during both of our research processes. As has already been addressed there was an emerging dynamic in our reflections between power, ontology and reflexivity. Different kinds of reflexivity were implied by the different ways reality emerged in our research, and different kinds of power relationship were being enacted at specific points through our own reflexive approaches.

This rendered the theorising of reflexivity in our own projects highly problematic. Analysing and close reading of our own work suggested a taxonomy of four possible reflexivities, based on the two dimensions of power and ontology, Objectivist, Perspectival, Experiential, and Multiplex (Figure 1).

These should not be seen as mutually exclusive, both of our worked examples contained elements of each, and this is the point we are making. There is no claim in this paper that any one of these reflexivities are superior to the others, only that they are appropriate to the different contexts that large qualitative research projects inevitably throw up, and as such they denote shifts in the ontological/political nature of the researcher/respondent relationship at different times in any one research project. There is also no suggestion that this framework is exhaustive or prescriptive, it is merely presented as a starting point for the stimulation of necessary dialogue.

Objectivist reflexivity refers to the practice of commenting upon the technical choices that were made on the research journey in terms of, for example, method choice, decisions over analytical categories etc. This form of reflexivity is deemed objectivist because it is aimed primarily at giving better accounts of the research process to produce better knowledge. In objectivist reflexivity there is an assumption of both a fairly stable and ontologically singular research project and researcher who reflects on this project and the choices and possibilities open to them. Despite our political commitments against objectivism, this form of reflexivity was evident in both of our research projects. At stages throughout the research, particularly the methodology, we gave commentaries upon our choices based on objectivist measures of research. Both of us feel that this is inevitable given the genre within which we are working, where metanarratives of truth and objectivism are dominant and the researcher has to show a degree of rigour in terms of the choices made and how they relate to the idea of better science. As can be seen in our examples, objectivist reflexivity has problems for the researcher who is trying to deal with issues of power in the

FIGURE 1
Framework of possible reflexivities

		Nature of the research encounter	
		More researcher controlled	Less researcher controlled
Ontology	Singular reality	Objectivist Reflexivity	Experiential Reflexivity
	Multiple reality	Perspectival Reflexivity	Multiplex Reflexivity

research context. Whatever the ontological approach, reflecting on methodological choices, however this is done, reinforces the authority of the researcher and reiterates their status as thinking sentient subjects. In both of our examples it can be seen that the shifting nature of the researcher/respondent power dynamic is something that we both have had to struggle with and manage as best we could through employing different kinds of reflexivity as necessary and facing the implications and consequences of that as an important part of the research process.

Experiential reflexivity concerns complex research situations where researcher and respondent are engaged in sharing of experiences. This type of reflexivity is evident in the first worked example. Emphasis is on co-creation of meaning through intimate research in which experiences are shared and no attempt is made to ‘bracket’ the researchers own lived experience. The researcher reflects upon their own experiences and those of their respondents to build a picture of, and to understand, the phenomenon under study. The issue raised here concerns how to ensure that the experience of those being researched does not become subsumed within the researchers own frameworks and lived experience. Experiential reflexivity therefore becomes a task of interrogating the researchers own research practice to ensure that this does not happen.

Perspectival reflexivity is so named because it demonstrates an appreciation of the different perspectives of the different subjects involved in a specific research encounter, and/or recognises that different groups are likely to view different topics through very different lenses, and sensitivity to this is reflected in the research design. The researcher reflects on these different perspectives or views them as different ‘lenses’ through which the researcher might view the research ‘object’. This can be evident in interpretive research where researcher gives various perspectives on the research object as different stories from different perspectives, or as in the worked example given first, as a sensitivity to the different voices that make up the research encounter. Perspectival reflexivity rests upon the ontological assumption that there is a fairly stable research object which can be viewed differently depending upon the perspective of the viewer. This can emerge as different ‘voices’ or indeed the different ‘stories’ of reflexivity that are being presented here. Reflexivity in this case emerged as a requirement to ensure that the researcher reflected upon the likely implicit boundary work being done in terms of this research object.

Multiplex reflexivity is evident only in the second worked example. Multiplex reflexivity differs from Perspectival in that the

object of research is not taken as essential, with different perspectives or lenses deployed to view it differently. This type of reflexivity focuses on how the researcher and the researched are constructed as such through the research process as multiple, shifting and tenuous entities specific to that project. Unlike experiential reflexivity no prior or shared experience is sought, reflection in on how the entities that emerge take shape and this is seen only in terms of the multiple actor networks of the research itself. This type of reflexivity is evident in story two.

CONCLUSION

We would have liked to have analysed in much more depth the four categories of reflexivity, and to provide further examples for our struggles with this issue. Indeed, this is another of the problems of reflexive consumer research: restrictive word count. However, we have presented this thus far as a starting point. We begin and end our paper with the specific call for papers from the ACR 2005 organisers, as it is one we identify with strongly as transformative consumer researchers. In the call, the mission of this conference is stated as one which focuses upon making a ‘*positive difference in the lives of consumers, both present and future generations, through the chosen focus and conduct of specific research*’. The organisers emphasise their hopes of stimulating a ‘*fresh dialogue on the opportunities, challenges, and future of Transformative Consumer Research, and to showcase promising and path-creating examples of TCR as well*’. Following the ethos of this call, this paper is designed not as a definitive statement on reflexivity in consumer research or a desiccated or normative framework which prescribes approaches that the consumer behaviour researcher should follow, but instead as a starting point for fresh dialogue around these issues. The politics of this paper are transformative but true transformation requires collaborative discussion and a sense of moving forwards together. We sincerely hope that this paper is therefore taken in the spirit with which it was written, as a dialogue opening starting point for these very prescient discussions of transformation in the process and praxis of consumer research.

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