CHAPTER FIVE

FIELDWORK: THE BASIC ARTS

There may be kinds of information that are in fact vital to the task of anthropological analysis but that are fairly consistently excluded from our field notes—in other words that we have conventional criteria for identifying observations as data that are inappropriate for the kinds of hypotheses and theories we wish to develop in our analysis. The frequent assertion that anthropology is an art as well as a science might depend precisely on the unsystematic or unreflecting way in which we accumulate part of our basic data.

—Fredrik Barth
Preface to *The Social Organization of the Marri Baluch,* x

This chapter is as close as I come to presenting a fieldwork manual. It brings me perilously close to dwelling on the techniques and strategies of fieldwork as craft, although I will focus on the less systematic aspects related to the experience rather than on data gathering per se. At the same time, behind every strategy or technique employed in fieldwork there needs to be sound human judgment—an artistic decision guided in large measure by what passes as ordinary courtesy and common sense. I have made "Courtesy and Common Sense" my first subheading, to precipitate out some pervasive elements in fieldwork before dealing with topics more customarily addressed in such discussions. Under the unconventional subtitles "Being There," "Getting Nosy," and "Looking Over Others' Shoulders," I then review fieldwork's major dimensions: participant observation, interviewing, and archival research.

Courtesy and Common Sense

On first thought, participant observation would seem to be the obvious choice as a starting place for discussing the basic arts involved in fieldwork.

On second thought, centering on participant observation hopelessly confuses whatever is unique to fieldwork with the display of everyday courtesy and common sense.

A fieldworker can easily offend through inappropriate behavior, comment, or question. But fieldworkers are not clairvoyant; they, too, are subject to making social errors. If it takes thoughtful explaining to get out of a tight or embarrassing predicament that one shouldn't have gotten into in the first place, that is certainly not an art limited to those who do field research. Nor are those who do fieldwork necessarily gifted in the handling of human relations. I have heard colleagues reportedly successful at fieldwork ask rhetorically, "Can you imagine *me* doing participant observation?" and a voice inside me whispers, "Well, frankly, now that you mention it . . . ."

Presumably the human relations aspect of fieldwork is enhanced for those to whom such qualities as empathy, sympathy, or at least everyday courtesy and patience, come naturally. I see no evidence that such qualities can be taught, or that they show themselves to be particularly abundant among the practitioners of certain disciplines to the exclusion of others. The consequence of anthropology's supposed humanizing message seems not, in my experience, to be any more or less evident in the everyday behavior of anthropologists than of ordinary folk. If it were, then to be a member of an anthropology department would be the envy of members of every other department on the campus.

The idea of "participant observation," which James Clifford characterizes as a predicament transformed into a method (1988:93), can raise a straightforward question: How does one go about being artful when assuming so obvious a role? I recall a colleague in the 1960s who flat-out rejected any proposal he was asked to review that explained, or attempted to explain away, the question of method with the simplistic response "participant observation." Michael Moerman, writing in the postmodern heyday, has observed that participant observation, "once anthropology's secret shame," had subsequently become "the fashionable focus of its self-absorption" (1988:68). Nevertheless, participant observation will surely continue to

occupy the preeminent role Russ Bernard ascribes to it as the "foundation of anthropological research" (1988:148). It is all encompassing, yet, Bernard continues, it is "not really a method at all." Rather, it is "a *strategy* that facilitates data collection in the field—all kinds of data, both qualitative and quantitative" (p. 150). Employing it as a strategy requires common sense.

Viewed as a strategy, participant observation needs to be examined in terms of what it is that brings fieldworkers into a setting in the first place and whether they are well situated to learn whatever is to be learned. This is where many qualitative researchers get off on the wrong foot, somehow confusing the fact of their physical presence with the hope that simply by "being there" they will be able to observe or experience what they are interested in observing and experiencing. Two questions to ask in that regard are, "Can whatever I want to study be 'seen' by a participant observer at all?" and, if so, "Am I well positioned to observe those phenomena?" These questions need to be followed by a third one: "What are my own capabilities for participating and observing in this situation?" Many descriptive studies intended to be pursued through participant observation have elected a time-consuming approach with only an outside chance that the researcher proposing them will ever have the opportunity to "see" whatever purportedly is to be observed.

To illustrate: Years ago I remember talking with a student who had heard of an Alaskan village where television was about to be introduced. Intrigued with the possibilities of ethnographic inquiry and the tradition of village studies, the student asked whether I thought ethnography would "work" as the appropriate research strategy for a study of the impact of television on village life and, if so, how I would approach it.

My personal reaction was, "Why bother?" The broad sweep of a community study did not seem warranted with such a narrowly focused and poorly posed question. I replied that on a well-funded project one might assign an ethnographer to *every* family, or, lacking such generous funding, one might assign a lone researcher to any household willing to have a longtime observer. In either case, the purest observer would not want to influence the results and therefore would be hesitant to describe the study as one on TV's impact, yet a live-in observer in a village household might prove far more entertaining than TV fare, the researcher's presence creating the very kind of distraction that dedicated participant observers try

desperately to avoid. It looked to me like a low-yield investment of researcher time to catch a few possible comments and to record some TV watching. Even then, at the end of the year how would anyone actually assess "impact"? The proposed project seemed to illustrate what Fredrik Barth has described as a tendency to confound *process* and *change* (Barth 1994a:76).

Granted that the village had been without TV before, was the occasion for introducing it all that interesting? It was not the inefficiency of the research strategy that bothered me so much as the mismatch between the magnitude of the problem and the magnitude of the investment in time and resources to study it. A year devoted to a study of village life in modern Alaska ought to be a provocative experience and rich source of data. A commitment of that sort seemed to warrant a more imaginative scope of work than tracking TV viewing and attempting to assess—or guess—its impact. I gently asked whether the student could think of any other ways to get relevant information if the social impact of TV was his burning issue?

Another example illustrates the complex cross-over (or heavy residue) from tightly designed quantitative studies to the creative use of qualitative ones. This time *sampling* was the bugaboo. A student in a seminar I was presenting overseas was interested in studying what she called "discovery learning." In my suggestion that participants engage in some modest field research during the course of the seminar, she saw an opportunity to try her skills at classroom observation. But she had become distraught over a major obstacle she foresaw and made a special appointment to discuss it with me. "I have always understood that any school or classroom in which I do observations must be selected by random sample," she explained. "What if the school and teacher I happen to draw isn't using discovery learning?" Her faith in sampling procedures for subject selection was as profound as her misunderstanding of when to apply them. Common sense should have guided her to a setting where she was likely to find the phenomenon of interest; questions of frequency and distribution were beyond the scope of her proposed inquiry.

I was intrigued that this student felt bound so rigidly to sampling procedures in spite of the fact that hers was to be an exploratory case study. It signaled that my explanations about qualitative research were not powerful enough to dispel her previously held beliefs about how "research"

is supposed to be conducted. There was room for some teaching here, but there was also a challenge for me to try to learn what I could about the beliefs associated with "research" from my workshop participant. Might that be where the real art is in all inquiry: recognizing what might be learned as situations present themselves? If so, then, as anthropologist Mariam Slater once caricatured it (1976:130), whether or not you eat soup with a chicken head floating in it is rather incidental to the business at hand. What counts in fieldwork is *what is going on in your mind.*

Even to describe participant observation as a "strategy" may be going too far, except to prompt researchers to seek an opportune vantage point for seeing what they want to observe. The element of strategy turns on two complementary questions to be reviewed over and over:

- Am I making good use of the opportunity before me to learn what I set out to learn?
- Does what I have set out to learn, or to learn about, make good use of the opportunity presenting itself?

What is going on in the researcher's mind is critical to all this. If nothing is going on, not much is likely to come out of the experience except experience itself, with a possible residue of "empathy, a rapport high, and headnotes," in Roger Sanjek's terms (1990:238). This is not unlike actors whom we criticize for simply "mouthing words" rather than getting into their role. (I address this issue more fully in Part Three, "Fieldwork as Mindwork.") It may seem strange thus to separate mind from body, but the distinction helps to underscore the difference between what others observe us doing as we go about fieldwork—how we get around and conduct ourselves—from what is going on in our minds as we go about it.

How researchers move their bodies around is not what makes art out of fieldwork. Nevertheless, one can offer suggestions as to how to move about with sufficient grace as to be perceived graciously by those with whom we hope to interact. I have identified four areas of social behavior that seem especially important for the successful and satisfactory conduct of fieldwork—its *performance* aspects, if you will. None is unique to fieldwork. I regard them collectively as no more than the demonstration of everyday courtesy and common sense.

1. *Gaining entrée and maintaining rapport.* These two terms, joined so often as to have become a single and sometimes trite phrase in fieldworker accounts, mask a great deal of the angst associated with fieldwork, especially among those who have never done it and who worry that they may not be successful in achieving its personal dimensions. I remember a young graduate student in anthropology who returned from a difficult (not impossible, just difficult) year of fieldwork in the Canadian Far North anxious to communicate to his fellow students not only how terribly important this aspect of fieldwork was but also that these were critical aspects for the *duration* of fieldwork, not just a pair of tasks to be attended to first thing on arrival.

Maintaining rapport presents a continuing challenge through the very presence of an intrusive and inquiring observer forever wanting to know more and to understand better. The long-term nature of fieldwork, and the likelihood of both physical and emotional/intellectual isolation, exacerbate interpersonal tensions: Fieldwork can be its own worst enemy. I know because I've been there. No one was stealing my mail during the year of my induction into fieldwork as village teacher on a Canadian Indian reserve. There simply were times when there was no mail for anyone to bring, or only unimportant mail when important mail hadn't been sent. A couple of families *were* regularly relieving the school of a few gallons of fuel oil; I needed to maintain perspective more than I needed to maintain rapport, for I had not been sent to the village as an agent of the government with a primary responsibility for safeguarding that fuel supply.

2. *Reciprocity.* There is an art to gift giving. There is something of an art to gift receiving. These arts are by no means unique to the conduct of fieldwork, but fieldwork entails a subtle kind of exchange, one that often involves gifting across cultural boundaries where exchange rates may be ambiguous or one wonders what to offer in exchange for intangibles such as hospitality or a personal life history. Whether, and how much, to pay key informants, for example, always presents a problem. Grant-rich investigators are concerned that they may offer too much, while resource-poor graduate students are concerned that any payment at all is a further drain on already overtaxed resources. Employing local field assistants, or choosing a dwelling to rent or a family with whom to reside, invariably puts

researchers at risk of siding with factions or otherwise being accused of being partial, parsimonious, or extravagant—and perhaps all of these at once.

Conventional wisdom cautions fieldworkers to remain as neutral as possible, especially when new to a site, but that option is not always open in the field. Conversely, one must learn how to manage being "put upon" by those who recognize the inherent fieldworker vulnerability to requests, when success depends on being able to make requests of others. If as fieldworker I am unsure what I may need from you by way of help or information at some future time, I have to be cautious in turning down requests you make of me at present. At the same time, I dare not fully reveal how vulnerable I feel, lest you impose unduly. Such decisions are not made easily. Along with extending the depth of one's understanding, long-term commitment extends both the depth and the duration of one's vulnerability.

One-shot interviewers or pollsters have it easy. At most, they may be hit up for a cigarette or a ride to town. They don't stay around long enough for requests to start escalating, as they inevitably do over time. Questions such as whether to pay a standard rate for interviewee time ought already to have been worked out as a matter of project policy. On the other hand, a request for food, money, medical assistance, or a job can put a resident fieldworker in an awkward bind, damned if you do, damned if you don't. In the abstract, a firm policy seems advisable ("Sorry, I just don't loan money—to anyone."), but in the world of diplomacy, everything remains negotiable, and fieldwork requires the art of diplomacy. One seeks knowledge in the professional role of researcher but prays for wisdom in the personal roles that make it possible.

3. *A tolerance for ambiguity.* Another admonition that becomes trite in the saying but essential in the doing is the need to remain as adaptable as one is humanly capable of being, to exhibit a "tolerance for ambiguity." In terms of priorities, perhaps this point deserves mention first, yet one can hardly claim that all fieldworkers exhibit this quality or that only fieldworkers need it.

There is no way anyone can train or prepare another for all the vagaries of fieldwork any more than one can train or prepare another for the vagaries of life. Of course, there is no way one can pass on to another the quality of tolerance, either: Merely saying it does not make it so. But there have been times in my own fieldwork (and life) that with nothing more than the cliché

to sustain me, I have managed to eke out just a bit more patience than I thought I could muster. Someday the admonition to develop a "tolerance for ambiguity" may be helpful in your own work (and life). Simply suppressing a too-hasty comment or reaction is a good step in this direction.

Fieldworkers would hardly go wrong to take "tolerance for ambiguity" as their *professional* mantra if it is not by nature a personal one. I have seen it treated exactly that way in a summer workshop designed to help prepare teachers for assignments in the Alaskan bush. I was unable to think of any other phrase that might someday have proven more helpful. The workshop instructor used the expression so often that participants groaned every time he repeated it, and they presented him with a special T-shirt designed with that slogan on it. By the following winter, I assume that his message took on more significance as daylight hours and patience shortened and the realities of bush living began to take their toll.

I have heard the phrase "life shock" in reference to a related problem. Those of us who make our entry into the real world via protected mainstream lives and respectable academic routes—the usual pool from which fieldworkers are recruited—are not necessarily well versed in the harsher realities associated with life itself. During those years we spent in the library *studying* about life, everybody else was knocking about in it. We may never have witnessed anyone dying, the sort of thing genteel folk do in hospitals, out of sight. We were even less likely to have witnessed a birth, especially in my day. The ragged and deformed may also have remained out of sight. All those statistics we read—poverty, illness, accidents, violence, abuse—may suddenly materialize for a fieldworker whose most traumatic experience to date had been a ticket for speeding.

The ambiguity comes in the meaning of human life, which proves not to be endowed with such universal reverence as we ourselves have been schooled to believe. "How many children do you have?" you inquire of your Ndebele informant in southern Africa. "Six, maybe five," he responds, leaving you to wonder if he really does not know how many children he has. But that is exactly why he has answered with such calculated ambiguity. When he last saw his children, there were six. In the interim, something may have happened to one of them, even if they all were OK this morning. And anyway, one does not want to provoke fate by taking anything for granted.

Not even natural disasters—fires, floods, earthquakes—shake us from our Western belief, or faith, that essentially we humans remain in control. We have the proof. Even our language comforts us: fireproof, earthquake proof. Foolproof! Fieldwork can sorely test the belief that we exert such control. A tolerance for ambiguity is an essential element in the art of participant observation.

4. *Personal determination coupled with faith in oneself.* Self-doubt must be held in check so that you can go about your business of conducting research, even when you may not always be sure what that entails. In part this means being able to maintain balance in the face of what anthropologists have termed "culture shock." Michael Agar describes it this way:

> The shock comes from the sudden immersion in the lifeways of a group different from yourself. Suddenly you do not know the rules anymore. You do not know how to interpret the stream of motions and noises that surround you. You have no idea what is expected of you. Many of the assumptions that form the bedrock of your existence are mercilessly ripped out from under you. (Agar 1980:50)

And that's only half of it; whatever shocks you probably was not what you originally set out to understand. The complexity of your task grows before your eyes, with more and more you want to understand as you realize you understand less and less. At such times you cannot help wondering if any fieldworker before you has confronted anything quite like this!

Rest easy—no one about to undertake fieldwork can ever answer exactly what will be encountered or exactly what is to result from a descriptive inquiry. If they could, there would be no point in doing the research this way, for our studies are constructed in the doing. Even hard-nosed experimentalists recognize, as Ludwik Fleck observed 60 years ago, that if a research experiment were well defined, it should be altogether unnecessary to perform it (Fleck 1979[1935]:86). The more that is known about a topic, the less likely a qualitative broadside of the kind that results from fieldwork may be best suited to explore it further. There is a becoming level of uncertainty in this work, but you must be prepared for the unsettling experience of constantly having to set and reset your course.

Should you feel so baffled by what confronts you that the only recourse you see is to record "everything," you will realize that certain "everythings"

take precedence over others. What do you see and hear that strikes you as most important? How might you direct the attention of a newcomer to this setting? How can you best distill its essence for a reader who will only be able to "see" through your eyes or "hear" through your ears? Description is the starting point, Square One. You need never be at a loss as long as you remember you can always go back to description when you feel stuck.

Being There

Used in its broadest sense, participant observation is so all-encompassing that it can refer to virtually everything qualitative researchers do in pursuing descriptive/naturalistic inquiry, cultural anthropologists do in pursuing ethnography, sociologists do in pursuing a field study, and so forth.

Here I take participant observation in a somewhat narrower sense that makes it the complement to interviewing rather than inclusive of it, although that still leaves it to cover any field activity not specifically related to some form of interviewing. Its essence is captured, although oversimplified, in the phrase "being there." In a chapter with that title, Clifford Geertz offers a lighthearted image of the "proper" role of the fieldworker:

> What a proper ethnographer ought properly to be doing is going out to places, coming back with information about how people live there, and making that information available to the professional community in a practical form . . . (Geertz 1988:1)

Somewhere between "going out to places" and "coming back with information . . . ," every fieldworker has to achieve some workable balance between participating and observing. There is always a question of whether those two processes constitute discrete functions or are hopelessly intertwined in the very act of anyone being anywhere, but it is comforting to have our own special label for what we do to reassure ourselves that *our* being there is different from anyone else's. That self-conscious role is what we examine when discussing participant observation—how we can realize the potential not simply of "being there" but of being so agonizingly self-conscious about it.

How to participate effectively, how to observe effectively (especially that), how to keep the one from interfering with the other, and how to get others to act "naturally" while we try to appear nonchalant about our own

presence—those are the confusions and challenges of the *participant* dimensions of the participant observer role. They, in turn, are confounded by the perennial problems of the process of observation. Those include what to look at, what to look for, and the never-ending tension between taking a closer look at *something* vs. taking a broader look at *everything*.

Many sources are devoted to the topic of field observations and participant observation (two recent additions are Adler and Adler 1994, and Jorgensen 1989). I, too, have joined in efforts to demystify that which cannot necessarily be explained, in a recently revised paper, "Confessions of a 'Trained' Observer" (HFW 1994a[1981]). My purpose in that writing was to help neophyte fieldworkers recognize what the problems are, rather than to offer simple solutions for resolving them. Each of us addresses the problems in specific ways in specific cases; there are more-or-less appropriate adaptations, not definitive answers. But no old-timer is going to forsake an opportunity to offer a bit of advice. My suggestions here underscore the dilemmas and inventory the options that confront the participant observer.

Doing Better Participant Observation; Using Participant Observation Better

- You may tell others you are "just observing" and may satisfy their curiosity, but do not believe for a minute that there is any such thing as "just observing." A lens can have a focus and a periphery, but it must be pointed somewhere, it cannot "see" everywhere at once; in Kenneth Burke's aphorism, "A way of seeing is a way of not seeing" (1935:70). Our marvelous human eye has its scotoma, its blind spot; the analogy to fieldwork has been duly noted (for example, by Crapanzano 1980:ix).

  When you are not sure what you *should* be attending to, turn attention back on yourself to see what is it you *are* attending to, and try to discern how and why your attention has been drawn as it has. What are you observing and noting; of that, what are you putting in your notes, at what level of detail; and at what level are you tracking your personal reactions to what you are experiencing? Kleinman and Copp (1993) suggest that note taking is not complete until you go back over your notes to make

"notes-on-notes." The point is to ensure that you are coupling your analysis to your observations (rather than putting that task off until later), and to help you remain attentive to your own processes as a human observer. Don't worry about all that you are *not* getting; focus on what you *are* getting: Observe yourself observing.

- Review constantly what you are looking *for* and whether or not you are seeing it or are likely to see it. You may need to refocus your attention to what is actually going on and discard some overconceptualized ideas you brought into the field (such as "watching" decision-making or "observing" discrimination). Begin by looking for recurring patterns or underlying themes in behavior or action. That should include patterns of things *not* happening as well as things that are happening. The latter kind of observations are most likely to be made comparatively, for example, "Back home this would be a major source of stress, but here no one seems to concern themselves." You will probably catch yourself becoming prematurely evaluative, particularly when righteous indignation tells you what people *should* be doing but are not. In case you don't recognize it, that's culture at work. Yours, not theirs! Tracking your own "shoulds" and "oughts" may provide valuable insight into your own processes as an observer.

  Another kind of comparative question that can help focus your observations is to reflect on what a fieldworker of another persuasion within your discipline, or schooled in a different discipline entirely, might find of interest in a setting. Take the economist's concern for the allocation of scarce resources, for example. Questions addressing the distribution of resources can prompt fresh insight for a fieldworker who may not have thought about what is in short supply in a seemingly affluent community (for instance, time) or what seems to be in abundance (perhaps time, once more) in one stretched for resources.

  In the course of opportunities for fieldwork, watch also for recurring themes in your own evolving career that lend focus and

continuity to it. A common thread running through my own work is a focus on cultural acquisition. In any setting where I am an observer, I find myself asking, What do people (individually, collectively) have to know to do in order to do what they are doing here? And how do they seem to be transmitting or acquiring that information, especially in the absence of didactic instruction?

- I doubt that any observer can sustain attention for any great length of time. Be prepared to discover that observation itself is a mysterious process. At the least, it is something we do "off and on," and mostly off; we cannot meaningfully sustain passive attention. We compensate for that by "averaging out" our observations, reporting at a seemingly constant level of detail that implies we are keener at this than we are. A realistic approach for the fieldworker is to recognize and capitalize on the fact that our observations—or, more accurately, our ability to concentrate on them—are something comparable to a pulse: short bursts of attention followed by inattentive rests.

  Capitalize on the bursts. Be especially observant about capturing little vignettes or short (but complete) conversational exchanges in careful detail. You could never capture all the conversation you hear about you, and you neither want nor need to. But what conversation you do record needs to be recorded in sufficient detail that you can report it verbatim. Beginners often gloss their observational efforts in a way that leaves them with no *reportable* data. Every statement they record is paraphrased *in their own words*, rather than in segments of conversation as actually spoken. A guideline I suggest is: What you do record, record in sufficient detail that, should the need arise, you would be able to report it directly from your notes. I am not suggesting that you actually report that way—fieldnotes don't usually make for great reading—but I urge you to record pertinent information at that level of detail. Otherwise, why bother?
- Try to assess what you are doing (that is, your participation), what you are observing, and what you are recording, in terms of the kind of information you will *need to report* rather than the

kind of information you feel you *ought to gather*. (More on this idea of remaining goal-oriented is coming in Chapter 9.) If you think you might need certain information, by all means record it, but keep asking yourself whether or how you intend to use it.

- Reflect on your note taking and subsequent writing-up practices as a critical part of your fieldwork "work." There is a balance to be struck with writing up fieldnotes. For some, note taking is one (and perhaps the only) activity in which they feel they are really "doing" research. They may be tempted to overwrite because of the satisfaction note making brings. I worry about them less than I worry about those who resent the time that must be devoted to writing and who procrastinate and thus make the task increasingly formidable. If you are one of the latter, I suggest you try to discover how short you can make entries that nonetheless satisfy you for their adequacy, and then find a way to make that level of note making part of your daily routine (e.g., finishing up yesterday's notes while having your second cup of morning coffee). However you approach it, you must make note making sufficiently "doable" that you always do it, rather than put it off. It may prove to be a chore, but it need not become a dreaded one if you follow the simple rule of keeping your entries up to date. There isn't much sense to go out and get more if you haven't digested what you took in last time. (For more on fieldnotes, see Sanjek 1990; for more on writing them, see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995.)

  Most of what you observe will remain in a form that Simon Ottenberg calls "headnotes" (1990:144-146), but some of it must make it into written jottings, whether simple or elaborate, that will eventually prove invaluable. Your elaborated note making also provides a critical bridge between what you are experiencing and how you are translating that experience into a form in which you can communicate it to others. Make a practice of including in your notes not only standard entries about day, date, and time, accompanied by a simple coding system for keeping track of entries, but also reflections on and about yourself—your mood,

personal reactions, even random thoughts—that may later help you recapture detail not committed to paper but not "lost," either.

Note taking is not the only kind of writing for you to consider at this stage. There is something temporary about any kind of notes that effectively says the "real" writing will come later. What is to prevent you from doing some of that "real" writing as fieldwork proceeds? Instead of putting everything in an abbreviated note form, take time frequently to draft expanded pieces written in rich detail in such a way that they might later be incorporated into your final account. Disabuse yourself of any idea that as long as you are doing fieldwork, note taking is the only kind of writing you should do.

The key to participant observation as a fieldwork strategy is to take seriously the challenge it poses to participate more, and to play the role of the aloof observer less. Do not think of yourself as someone who needs to wear a white lab coat and carry a clipboard to learn about how humans go about their everyday lives. If you find you are comfortable only by remaining distant and aloof, why do you insist on describing yourself as a participant observer? Perhaps a more formal approach will get you what you want to know, far more efficiently. Fieldwork entails more than data gathering. If you just want "data," turn your emphasis to activities that get you data. Semistructured interviewing might be a good compromise. If that doesn't do it, turn to more structured forms of interviewing (to be discussed next) that lead to questionnaires and surveys. Consider also the possibility that you may not have a natural affinity for fieldwork, especially if you begin to feel that it is getting in your way rather than helping you *make* your way.

At the time this manuscript was undergoing its major revisions (academic year 1994–95), I had the good fortune to be corresponding with Peter Demerath who, with his wife Ellen, was conducting fieldwork in Papua New Guinea. The Demeraths were more dramatically situated than any other beginning fieldworkers I knew at the time, and I was anxious to solicit their thoughts on the essence of fieldwork while they were deeply immersed in it. Peter's response gives a sense of the fieldworker's participation as performance, making oneself "believable."

> When I think of the "art" in fieldwork, and ways in which the artist rather than the scientist is called for, I think primarily of how much of what we are trying to do here is to present, or compose, both personas and projects that are appealing and attractive (or at least comprehensible) enough, so that people will talk with us and ultimately participate in our research. In this sense, perhaps much of the art of fieldwork lies in effective public relations.
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> We find that we do many things—housework, pumping water, chewing betelnut, playing soccer and volleyball, chatting, greeting, poling a canoe, eating sea turtle stew after having just seen the animal slowly and painfully butchered—with an eye on how these things are perceived by the people here. We hope they will regard us and our actions as attractive (or non-threatening) to the extent that they will regard us as fellow human beings. It seems to us that the anthropologist must constantly attend to the "composition" of this public persona, and perhaps this is one of the areas where the art of fieldwork is visible. (Peter Demerath, personal communication, February 1995)

The Demeraths did not go halfway around the world to chat, play volleyball, or pump water, and ordinarily they would have had no opportunity at all to pole canoes or eat sea turtle stew. They were doing whatever intuition and common sense guided them to do as "fellow human beings," participating in the activities of others in the hope that those others would participate in their research. Their strategy addresses the concerns reviewed at the beginning of the chapter: gaining entrée and maintaining rapport, reciprocity, a tolerance for ambiguity, and personal determination coupled with faith in themselves. There are no guarantees. But any experienced fieldworker will recognize that this is what genuine *participant* observation entails.

Getting Nosy

A ready topic for debate among experienced fieldworkers is whether interviewing or participant observation is the key dimension in the work; which is "more important"; and which logically should precede the other when initiating a new inquiry. Again, the best answer seems to be "It depends." Interviewing, the other major fieldwork activity to be discussed, includes a broad spectrum of activities, but it is easier to define. Participant

observation remains as the residual fieldwork category that includes anything that is not some kind of interviewing.

I distinguish between the two in recognition of the profound difference in what fieldworkers do when engaging in participant observation—used here in the sense of experiencing—and interviewing. It is the difference between passively accepting what comes along, information that is virtually handed to us, and aggressively seeking information by "getting nosy."

In the simple act of *asking*, the fieldworker makes a 180-degree shift from observer to interlocutor, intruding into the scene by imposing onto the agenda what he or she wants to know. That does not make questioning a sinister business, but there is a quantum difference between taking whatever happens to come along and taking charge of the agenda. The difference might be likened to the contrast between being served an institutional or hosted meal and ordering from the à la carte menu of a restaurant. In the first case, one takes what is offered; in the second, one makes personal preferences known.

There are artful ways to conduct interviews, artful ways to ask questions, artful ways to make informants more comfortable when using a tape recorder, artful ways to check the accuracy of informant responses. Decisions about how much to record from informal conversations, how much to transcribe from formally recorded ones, or how long to conduct interviews in the course of an inquiry, all require judgment calls. One needs to develop a "sixth sense" about which data may ultimately prove most useful, toward the objective of accumulating less data rather than more. I will highlight a few points deserving of special mention, but I offer no magic formula for turning a poor interviewer into a better one. We all can improve our interview style by attending as carefully to our own words recorded in transcribed interviews as we attend to the words of our interviewee.

Longtime fieldwork allows a researcher to develop a keen sense of what, when, and under what circumstances it is appropriate to ask something, and when it is better to remain quiet. That requires distinguishing between what you would like to know and how to go about making that interest known. Sometimes that means holding questions for later; sometimes it means holding them forever; as often, it means recognizing the moment to raise a question because circumstances open a window of opportunity on a normally taboo or sensitive issue.

I recognize a cultural norm that guides my own behavior in this regard, one that makes *all* fieldwork a dilemma for me and rears itself on every occasion when I want to interrupt with a question, even in ordinary conversation: Do not intrude. In *Halfway Home*, novelist Paul Monette describes the reluctance to intrude as "the first WASP commandment." This is why the most thorough and inquisitive of researchers might be aghast at the suggestion that they ought to seek the same level of intimate information about their own colleagues or students at home that they feel professionally obliged to achieve in the field. Anthropologist Fred Gearing reveals the uneasiness he felt from the first moments of his introduction to fieldwork:

> During the next several days I sought out certain Indians, and we talked. Our conversations were typically low-keyed, filled with long silences. I never quite felt that I was intruding, but was never fully confident that I was not. (Gearing 1970:9)

Asking does more than merely intrude, however—at least when it goes beyond exchanging pleasantries of the day. And even exchanging pleasantries can lead to unexpected awkwardness, as when a friendly Thai asks, "Where are you going?" in the custom of a people for whom this, rather than our innocuous "How are you?" is the proper greeting in passing. Our questions as fieldworkers become increasingly intrusive as we seek to understand what is going on. Too easily we may put informants on the defensive by insisting or implying that they should be able to explain not only *what* is going on but *why*. In framing our questions we also tip our hands in ways that subtly influence the future course of our work. While we almost routinely insist that we are interested in "everything" about the lives of our informants, our questions belie that claim by revealing that some "everythings" are of more consequence than others.

Years ago, writing what turned out to be a spectacular chapter on interviewing in general but was intended only as a methodological preface to their pioneer study of male sexual behavior, Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues pointed out that although their questions were on sensitive topics, the very act of questioning can make *any* topic sensitive. (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948:Chapter 2). Through interviewing, we risk turning any topic about which we express interest into a sensitive one,

inadvertently alerting informants to issues of our special concern. At the same time, local issues of purely academic concern to us may be fraught with political or economic overtones for respondents. We cannot naively assume, for example, that informants are delighted to be asked about the value of their personal possessions, the size of their livestock herds, or the amount they pay in taxes (Christensen 1993).

Let me offer an illustration of the difficulties in obtaining sensitive information. I was invited to comment on a redrafted proposal for researching condom use in AIDS prevention among minority populations. Indicative of the influence qualitative approaches now exert—even among agencies that insist on final reports with totally quantifiable results—researchers in the process of applying for a grant had been directed to augment their essentially quantitative approach by including semistructured interviewing among their data gathering strategies. I noted that the way the interview schedule had been designed required the researchers to introduce the topic of condoms early in the interviews. Thus interviewers were likely to lead respondents to answer along socially acceptable lines that did not necessarily square with actual behavior.

The underlying question is one of the most difficult in nondirective interview strategies: how to find out what you want to know without framing questions in a way that you, rather than your informants, introduce and pursue topics? How can the context remain theirs, rather than your own? In this case, with one-time interviews, some possibilities presented themselves. Interviewers might ask respondents to name (free list) all the "safe sex" practices they could think of, returning to those of special interest to the project only later in the interview, and perhaps prompting with other practices not mentioned. Or they might provide a comprehensive list of their own, "burying" items of concern to the researchers, as, for example, a list that included but did not specifically highlight condom use. In addition, specific questions on that topic could be introduced near the end of each interview, so that interviewers (and coders) would be able to track when, where, and how in the course of an interview the topic was formally introduced.

It has taken years for me to become so bold that I risk the disapproval of dental hygienists by looking them directly in the eye and stating flatly that I do not now and never intend to floss! Why would a minority

respondent, answering intimate personal questions about sexual practices, want to disappoint a researcher by claiming to be socially irresponsible about the risk of transmitting a disease as devastating as AIDS? Further, if you tell interviewers what you think they want to hear, maybe they will go away sooner. Interviewing is not all that difficult, but interviewing in which people tell you how they really think about things you are interested in learning, or how they think about the things that are important to them, is a delicate art. My working resolution to the dilemma of assessing what informants say is to recognize that they are always telling me *something*. My task is to figure out what that *something* might be.

What interviewing can do, of course, is introduce efficiency into fieldwork. That "efficiency" can reach a point in which fieldwork itself—the participating kind that is the focus of this discussion—may be eliminated altogether. If the questions to be asked can be tightened up enough, perhaps the principal investigator need not enter the field at all. Research assistants, even contract pollsters, can get the needed information.

One cannot do participant observation without "being there," although, as pointed out in the previous chapter, fieldwork consists of more than "just" being in the field. On the other hand, one can conduct fieldwork through extensive interviews that do not assume or require residency on the part of the fieldworker, if sufficient time is allowed for research in depth, as with the collection of life history data. I think most qualitative researchers consider participant observation and interviewing to be complementary, but that does not require drawing on them equally or necessarily even drawing on both of them at all in every study. Fieldworkers invest more heavily in whichever of the two better accommodates their research style and their research question.

Some fieldworkers do little or no *formal* interviewing, maintaining instead a casual, conversational approach in the manner of Gearing's "low-keyed conversations." Mike Agar takes a strong position that underscores his ethnographic concern with meanings: "Ethnographic question-asking is a special blend of art and science. . . . Ethnography without questions would be impossible" (1980:45). If his statement is too strong to apply to all fieldwork, we must at least recognize that fieldworkers who ask no questions are sorely tempted to become their own informants.

I take interviewing to include any situation in which a fieldworker is in a position to, and does, attempt to obtain information on a specific topic through even so casual a comment or inducement as, "What you were telling me the other day was really interesting. . . ." or "I didn't have a chance to ask you about this before, but can you tell me a bit more about . . . ." To categorize the major types of "asking" in which fieldworkers engage, I offer the following list. Descriptive titles make the categories seem obvious, yet each is worthy of the scholarly attention it has received in the extensive literature devoted specifically to aspects of interviewing:

- Casual or conversational interviewing
- Life history/life cycle interviewing
- Semistructured (i.e., open-ended) interviewing
- Structured interviewing, including formal eliciting techniques
  - Survey
  - Household census, ethnogenealogy
  - Questionnaire (written or oral)
- Projective techniques
- Standardized tests and other measurement techniques

The list could easily be expanded or collapsed, depending on one's purposes. My bias toward ethnographic research shows through with the inclusion of two categories. One is the category for household census and ethnogenealogy, once a mainstay in initiating community studies and still a good starting place when conducting them. Another is the category for projective techniques. That category accommodates the once-fashionable fieldwork practice of collecting Rorschach or Thematic Apperception Test protocols (see, for example, Henry and Spiro 1953), as well as more recent interests in projective interviewing such as the Spindlers' Instrumental Activities Inventory (1965) or Robert Textor's work in Ethnographic Futures research. There has been a longtime practice of asking informants straightforward but nonetheless projectively aimed questions about the foreseeable future: "Ten years from now, what do you think things will be like?"

Work in educational research leads me to include as a separate category the kind of tests associated with schooling, and thus my inclusion of the category "Standardized tests and other measurement techniques." For the fieldworker, however, such measurement techniques should be regarded as *a special type of interview*. What makes standardized tests different from other forms of interviewing is that the interviewee supplies an answer already known to the person administering the test. As a general rule, fieldworkers ask questions to find out what informants know and know about, not to "test" their knowledge. The questions we ask, the manner in which we ask them, and what we do with the information given are intended to signal our interest in and regard for what people know. In spite of experiencing too many years under the tyranny of testing in their own lives, practitioners of the *art* of fieldwork never, *never* "put down" those among whom they study. Fieldworkers as attuned to the art of teaching as to the art of fieldwork are able to follow that practice in their classrooms as well. It is critical to keep in mind that testing is a very special kind of interviewing, designed for assessment in terms of normative standards. Although fieldwork cannot help but have evaluative overtones, formal testing arises out of a quite different tradition, and one hopes that fieldworkers make nontraditional use of whatever test data they collect.

One way we show appreciation for what informants tell us is the serious respect accorded to the information they provide. I felt I had conveyed that idea to two African field assistants assigned to help me conduct a questionnaire survey in my study of the beer gardens of Bulawayo (HFW 1974). As soon as we started interviewing, however, I heard each of them roaring with laughter at responses to the questions they posed, in marked contrast to the studied reactions they had displayed during an earlier practice session. Out in the real world—we were conducting our interviews in urban, municipally operated beer gardens—their better judgment took over. It was risky to ask anything of total strangers, they explained, and if you wanted to keep respondents talking, you had better make sure they understood how appreciative you were of their responses. They weren't laughing *at* their respondents, they wanted me to understand, they were laughing *with* them. And how were *my* somber interviews going, they inquired tactfully?

The convenience of gathering any type of systematic interview data is always undertaken at the risk of losing rapport, although we can never

anticipate exactly what anyone's reaction will be. For every individual too busy to talk, someone else may be reluctant to bring the interview to a close. For someone annoyed with questions too personal, another may insist on volunteering far more, and far more personal, information than that requested. Adherents of particular approaches have their stories to offer as testimonial. Chances are that approaches and questions that make the researcher uncomfortable will have a similar effect on respondents.

I know that fieldworkers have sometimes gone out of their way not to appear too inquisitive, too "pushy," too calculating in their approach, too like teachers giving examinations, journalists tracking down a story, or government agents ready to impose more taxes or exert more control. Most people are uncomfortable with the notion of a "file" being kept on them, a universal and growing discomfort as we realize how commonplace this has become in an age of information processing. The experienced longtime fieldworker is not likely to make his or her first appearance at the door with a questionnaire to be answered. The researcher who does show up at the door with a questionnaire is not likely to stick around to learn any more than what is asked on the questionnaire form.

Do I seem to be advocating a fieldwork approach, particularly in regard to interviewing, in which "slow is beautiful" and therefore "fast is bad"? Frankly, when thinking about what fieldwork can and cannot accomplish, that *is* my position. Issues surrounding the topic of interviewing help me to clarify it. There are things one can learn quickly by asking direct questions revealing of what one wants to know. There are things one can ask directly without much assurance about the answer. There are things about which we do not ask, guided by our own standards, or about which interviewees do not offer answers, guided by theirs. And there are underlying questions, often the kind of question that undergirds social research, that can neither be asked nor answered directly (for example, "Please tell me your world view," or "Why do we have schools at all?" or "When everyone seems so dissatisfied, why do you continue with your form of government?").

In a hurry-up world, with technologies that devour information byte by byte, there is constant pressure to get the facts and get on with it. Fieldworkers are in an excellent position not only to get facts but to be able to put facts in context. But fieldwork is a grossly inefficient way simply to gather factual data. When time is of the essence—as it is so often perceived

to be—then fieldwork as represented here is out of the question, even when field-based research for collecting necessary data is essential. It is only the integrity of the label *fieldwork* that I seek to protect, however. There is no mandate that says if you can't devote at least a year, you shouldn't bother to go into the field at all. I agree with Russ Bernard, who *insists* on participant observation in the conduct of all scientific research about cultural groups and who argues more generally that "it is possible to do useful participant observation in just a few days" (1994b:140).

Contemporary fieldworkers have responded to the need for speed by incorporating survey-type techniques into their standard repertory, although there is nothing new about having to compress a heavy dose of fieldwork into a short period of time. As with any human activity, there are times when everything seems to be happening at once, or a brief foray is all that time or resources allow. Robert Redfield was so pleased with a 3-day field survey he conducted in 1941 with his then student and field assistant Sol Tax that he coined the term Rapid Guided Survey. However, the document that resulted from the work retained "Report of a 3-Day Survey" in its title, and the researchers had a clear idea of the information they sought, for their fieldwork was then in its seventh year (see Rubinstein 1991:297, 304). At that, they attributed their success at least in part to sheer luck.

Rapid Appraisal or Rapid Rural Appraisal became more commonplace in development projects in the Third World during the 1970s and 1980s when Appropriate Technology was the buzzword; Rapid Rural Appraisal itself has been recognized as a form of appropriate technology. Today there are numerous variations on "R.R.A." in both name and application, including Rapid Anthropological Assessment, Rapid Ethnographic Assessment, and Ethnographic Reconnaissance. Practicing anthropologists have their own handbook, *Soundings* (van Willigen and Finan 1991; see also Beebe 1995), that outlines and illustrates a number of "rapid and reliable" research methods. These procedures can retain something of a fieldwork flavor through what is described—or rationalized—as an iterative and exploratory team approach. In this approach, the research begins with (but moves rapidly beyond) preliminary observations and semistructured interviews with key informants. These preliminary data are used to guide the

construction of appropriate survey or questionnaire instruments, the entire process to be completed in a limited time.

To an old-time and old-fashioned ethnographer like me, terms like *ethnography* or *fieldwork* join uneasily with a qualifier like *rapid*. Then again, I've never been in a hurry to do things. My motto, to "Do less, more thoroughly," may be nothing more than rationalization for my preferred and accustomed pace. Perhaps I envision a fieldwork entirely of my own making, having mistakenly accepted pronouncements about its duration (such as "one year at the least, and preferably two") as minimum standards when today's fieldworkers regard them as impractical and unnecessary. Russ Bernard now proclaims *three months* as the minimum time "to achieve reasonable intellectualized competence in another culture and be accepted as a participant observer" (Bernard 1994b:151). I heartily agree that *any* amount of time a researcher in our "rushy culture" (Dianne Ferguson's phrase) can devote to participant observation should prove useful for gaining a sense of context. But I am concerned whenever participant observation is simultaneously portrayed and faulted as a quickie exercise. Similar efforts have been directed at determining how *few* informants one really needs in gathering technically reliable information about a cultural domain (e.g., Bernard 1994b:Chapter 8; Romney, Weller, and Batchelder 1986). It is hardly surprising that these researchers are strong advocates for the efficiency of formal procedures and structured interview schedules. I hope Bernard has not inadvertently foreshortened the acceptable period for fieldwork for those who will carefully misread his statement to reassure themselves that the three months he says is adequate to *establish* oneself in the field is all the time one needs to devote to a study.

Although I am not an advocate for finding faster ways to do fieldwork, neither am I committed to making fieldwork more time-consuming simply for its own sake. Time in the field is no guarantee of the quality of the ensuing reports. Nor need efforts to speed things up and find ways to get better data in less time be seen as detracting from efforts to make interviewing a better art as well. With that in mind, I offer some suggestions about interviewing, accompanied by a reminder that this topic has been well served in the vast "methods" literature, including early statements still brimming with cautions and insights (e.g., Paul 1953) and more recent how-to-do-it monographs (e.g., Seidman 1991; Spradley 1979). My comments relate especially to semistructured interviewing of the sort that virtually all field researchers employ, whether constructing a rapid survey or embarking on a long-term inquiry into world view.

Doing Better Interviewing; Using Interviews Better

- *Recognize listening as an active and creative role.* I once heard the late educational historian Lawrence Cremin eulogized for his capacity as a "creative listener," a phrase that lingered in my mind as both an unusual compliment and a wonderful insight into the art of interviewing. Creative listener. Certainly that includes being an attentive listener. But it seems to imply more, a listener able to play an interactive role, thereby making a more effective speaker out of the person talking. An interview ought to be a satisfactory experience for listener and speaker alike.

  I regard myself as a listener, but that is not the same as being a creative listener. I confess that I frequently tire of listening, although surely Cremin must have experienced some of those same feelings, especially after assuming the role of college president. There are a few individuals for whom I seem to play the role of creative listener, and there are a few individuals who play that role for me; on either end of such conversations, I find the interaction not only satisfying but intensely stimulating. To consciously strive to become a creative listener seems a wonderful talent for any fieldworker to develop, especially anyone who depends on semistructured interviewing as a major field technique.

- *Talk less, listen more.* If the idea of creative listening seems too elusive, try simply talking less and listening more during any interview. As an easy first step, practice waiting one thousandth of a second longer before intruding on a momentary pause to introduce a comment or new question. Interviewers are reminded to distinguish between a "pregnant" silence and a dead one. A lengthened pause on the researcher's part may be enough to prompt the interviewee to pick up the conversation again. Our own conversational patterns display a certain inertia: A

conversation in motion tends to remain in motion. Silence poses a threat. We can become our own worst enemies during the interview process by rushing to fill in the pauses. If the researcher does not immediately plug the gap, the interviewee is likely to do it instead, without even realizing why.

- *Make questions short and to the point.* If necessary to repeat, do exactly that. Do not expand or elaborate, for in doing so you are likely either to start an answer or to change the question. This is usually done inadvertently, in the spirit of helping both the respondent and the dialogue. If you study interview protocols—and I particularly urge you to study your own—you are likely to discover that one simple question usually becomes two or three competing and increasingly complex ones through the course of the solicitous prompting that follows.

- *Plan interviews around a few big issues.* Successful interviewers return again and again to develop dimensions of an issue, rather than detailing myriad little questions to ask. For initial interviewing, anthropologist James Spradley recommended what he termed Grand Tour questions (Spradley 1979) of the sort, "So, tell me something about yourself" or "How did you happen to get here?" The interviewer might then have several major topics in mind to which attention can be turned repeatedly in minor variation. For example, family and kin might be the central topic in the interviewer's mind, to be translated into more detailed questions about each family member, sometimes with a simple prompt such as, "Can you tell me anything more about that?"

- *As soon as possible after an interview, write it up.* Transcribe the interview, if it was taped, or index its contents (topics discussed and their location on the tape) if you do not intend to make full typescripts from each interview. If it was not taped, all the more reason for fleshing out your brief notes while your informant's words remain fresh in your mind. Then "study" the transcript, or listen to the tape, both to see how you are doing as an interviewer and to immerse yourself in what you are learning

from and about your informant. If time allows (as it should), do not proceed with the next interview until the previous one has been processed. Always be thinking about how you intend to use the information, both for the immediate purpose of guiding future interviews, and for your eventual incorporation of the material into your final account.

- *Anticipate and discuss the level of formality you plan for the interview.* If you intend semistructured interviews to be more formal than earlier dialogues—to be more than casual conversations that happen to be recorded—explain any shifting ground rules so your informant understands what may otherwise appear as a personality change that has suddenly come over you. Formal taped sessions can provide opportunity for a different kind of exchange, one in which the person being interviewed is clearly "in the know," and the researcher is the person who wants to find out. Michael Agar calls this the "one down" position, with the fieldworker assuming a subordinate role as learner rather than the one-up role assumed by the scientifically oriented hypotheses tester (Agar 1980:69).

  Recognize nonetheless that the person with the tape recorder ought to remain in charge of the setting. You may need to think through whether you can live with that. Perhaps you will have to give way to egalitarian urges to make the exchange more evenly reciprocal. Be advised that when you listen to the tape you may discover that *you* were the one being interviewed.

  I have always felt that a formal interview is and ought to be a special, asymmetrical form of conversation, one party seeking information, the other providing it. Work toward achieving that format if it suits your style and purposes. Explain that in your formal interviews you want your interviewee's words and explanations recorded, even if your informant wants it understood that some comments may be declared "off the record." Offer to turn off the tape recorder any time your interviewee prefers to speak off the record, desires a break, or wishes to discuss the interview process with you. You might also suggest that if your questions

prompt similar questions your informant might like to ask of you, they can be noted for discussion later.

Conversational approaches in tape-recorded interviewing are less efficient, and may not be necessary if your informant understands how you distinguish between ordinary conversation and a formal interview in which you will take special care to record the interviewee's exact words. You may have to overcome an urge to be more casual, but both you and your informant probably need to remember that your association, while friendly, is essentially professional. Someday you will go away, and you intend to take the interview with you.

Make informants aware of the importance of their interviews to your work by your actions as well as your expressions of appreciation. Better to err on the side of being too formal than to create the impression of being too casual. Try to use a tape recorder, if possible. Augment that with brief notes, if possible. Conduct the interview in private, if possible. Formalize the occasion with a formally arranged appointment that you yourself (rather than an assistant or secretary) have arranged, if possible, perhaps even suggesting in advance the major topics you would like to discuss. And leave the tape recorder running after the formal interview ends, if possible, in the likelihood that although the interview is finished, your informant may not be.

If such formality seems the very antithesis of the kind of interpersonal exchange you want to foster, then follow your intuition to find a style more suitable. There is no rule against being more interactive, no rule insisting that somewhere in your report you must include the words of your informants. Perhaps the idea of "capturing" someone else's words precisely is precisely the kind of fieldworker you did not want to become. As integral as formal interviewing is to fieldwork in general, you must always consider the possibility that it is not for you.

- If you are not under the gun to work through your interview data as rapidly as possible, see how long you can hold off before you develop a questionnaire or a tightly structured interview sched-

ule. The question of when and how interview schedules are developed reveals a major difference between fieldworkers and survey researchers. The survey researcher typically enters the field with a prepared schedule. Fieldworkers are more likely to administer such an instrument near the conclusion of the field research, when they know the questions that have yet to be asked and have a clearer idea of how best to ask them. The exception might be a household census or similar inventory through which the researcher also introduces the research project, gathers relevant basic demographic data, and looks for knowledgeable informants willing to be interviewed in depth. Even under those circumstances, try to keep the interview open. Ask as few specific questions as necessary, and include an open-ended question or two to invite respondents to say what is on their mind or to help provide context for the research topic.

A maxim directed at quantitative researchers (although too seldom heeded) holds in our work as well: Behind every question asked, there ought to be a hypothesis. We don't have to be that sticky about formalizing hypotheses, but data should never be gathered simply for the sake of gathering them or because it is so easy to add another question or two. If it doesn't really matter whether respondents own their own home, graduated from high school, or have ever been arrested, don't ask. If it does matter, give ample opportunity for them to explain, and include their explanations in the information you record. That's the difference between hit-and-run surveys and the fieldworker who intends to stick around to try to figure out how things fit together.

- Invite informants to help you become a better researcher. Agar's notion of the interviewer in the one-down position can be extended to the research process itself. Keep in mind that your interviewees have "views" about your interview techniques as well as about the scope of your questions. Don't fish for compliments, but a direct question such as "Do you have any suggestions about these interviews?" may prove immediately helpful as well as lend insight into how the interviewee is feeling as a participant in the

research process. A further question can get directly at content: "Are there topics we might explore that I haven't asked about?" Should you get no response at first, you nonetheless are emphasizing the extent of your interest and effort at thoroughness and your respect for the intelligence of your informant; suggestions may follow later.

- Search for patterns in responses, not only for what is there but for cutoff points in discussion, or topics consistently skirted or avoided—on your part as well as on the part of your informants. Don't forget to go back through *all* your interviews if you work with an informant over a period of time. I have often discovered that informants gave important information, and important clues to what they felt was important, in early interviews. Everything was new, coming at me so fast that I failed to pick up on much of the information and clues the first time around.

  In studying interview protocols, I find it useful to distinguish between what informants are telling me and what else, if anything, they may be *trying* to tell me. In one sense, everything an informant tells you can be taken as a fact—a linguistic fact, if no other kind. But informants make choices, sometimes leading us, sometimes leading us astray. Occasionally I find myself anticipating what they will say next, as a way to assess whether my informant and I are on the same wavelength. I believe it important to be able to quote back to informants, in their exact words, topics mentioned or alluded to in earlier conversations. There may also be times, however, when an ambiguous reference to an earlier topic is a more appropriate way to reintroduce it. That approach keeps you from leading the discussion or from phrasing questions in such a way that the only response needed is a yes or no.

- Finally, do not become so committed to the qualitative dimensions of responses that you fail to count and measure those aspects that warrant being counted and measured. Keep your research purposes clearly in mind in deciding what and how much to analyze. Carefully recorded language, for example, lends itself to rigorous analysis, but the rigor can set up an illusive smoke screen of carefully conducted but totally inappropriate analyses, lending an aura of science but indicative of a poor artistic choice. Behind every decision intended to advance science lies an opportunity for exercising sound human judgment.

Looking Over Others' Shoulders

Data gathering is not limited to information that fieldworkers gather through participant observation and interviewing while actively on site. There are additional, often critical, sources of information, especially but not limited to personal documents and other written records. This third category, archival research, concludes this review of the basic arts in the fieldwork part of fieldwork.

I used to think there was a degree of art involved in searching out information in a library; today I am willing to concede that task to science. I watch in dismay as students run enormous computer searches on unfamiliar topics, perhaps hoping that if they can press the right combination of keys at their terminal, information will spew forth like coins from a slot machine. Given the exponential increase in recorded information, we can be thankful that the technologies that helped create problems are also available to help resolve them.

There is still some art required in using archives, however. The most obvious art clearly parallels the problem one faces in the field: How wide a swath to cut, how deep to burrow; in short, "What counts"? "No depth of commitment and sense of responsibility will ever be enough to permit any individual to do what is there to be done," Margaret Mead cautioned fieldworkers a quarter of a century ago (1970:258), and today it is quite thinkable that a fieldworker determined to get a thorough grounding in library research might, in Mead's words, be so "attracted by the inexhaustibility of the task" (p. 258) as to never leave the library at all. As with everything else about fieldwork, one needs to recognize how to focus and when to stop.

Libraries and the proliferation of information are everybody's problem, but those attracted to fieldwork probably are not going to get stuck in the library. We still hear arguments about whether we should go into the field

well informed or should consult what others have said only after forming our own impressions. I believe the better argument can be made for being well informed, as long as being informed is accompanied with the same healthy skepticism befitting all scholarly research. That is the first of the three suggestions discussed below for making the most artful use of secondary sources.

Making the Best Use of the Work of Others

- *Be as skeptical of anything you read as you are of anything you are told.* A lesson we learn too well as schoolchildren must be cast aside in scholarly pursuit, that printed texts are sacred texts. Most certainly, what earlier fieldworkers have reported may no longer be true, even if it was accurate at one time. Skepticism is absolutely essential to all aspects of fieldwork, including any use made of printed sources.

  A skeptical stance does not give license to demean all prior efforts, however; academics sometimes get carried away in their truth-seeking zeal. It is tempting, for younger scholars especially, to find fault with earlier reports and "bring down the elders." I think it far more constructive, and more consistent with a spirit of inquiry, to take the position that earlier researchers did not quite get it right, just as future researchers will probably show that we did not quite get it right, either. If it is any comfort, know that fieldwork's "greats" continue to take their licking, as in this passage from Clifford Geertz, "Firth, not Malinowski, is probably our best Malinowskian. Fortes so far eclipses Radcliffe-Brown as to make us wonder how he could have taken him for his master. Kroeber did what Boas but promised" (1988:20).

  A healthy skepticism must always be maintained, even when everything seems to be checking out perfectly, past with present, established landmark studies with your own embryonic inquiries. While Ron Rohner and I were doing our fieldwork on the Northwest Coast, Ron discovered an excellent informant in Bill Scow and was sometimes surprised at how consistently Bill's accounts validated the early work of Franz Boas. But one of Ron's questions stumped Bill one day, and he explained, "I can't answer

that one, Ron. I'll have to look it up." Only then did Ron realize that the old informant and the young anthropologist were using the same references; an earlier descriptive ethnography had now become a prescriptive one!

- *Look far afield for all you might include as "the work of others."* Sometimes anthropologists join the "stack rats" to do their work entirely through library scholarship, but fieldworkers are more likely to be sensitive to any suggestion that they never, or hardly ever, go to the library. Whether they spend much time in the library or not, most fieldworkers make use of a vast array of materials in addition to the customary library resources. (See Hill's useful guide for conducting original archival research "with quality and dispatch," 1993.)

  Personal documents are especially high on the list of non-library sources: correspondence, diaries, travelers' journals, any sort of written account that might never find its way into a formal collection but can be invaluable to understanding everyday life or special events. Government records, newspaper accounts, surveyor reports—there is no end to the possible resources to be considered. Similarly, fieldworkers examine, and frequently collect, artifacts of all sorts, things in addition to words.

  Fieldworkers need to think creatively about available sources of information that are not ordinarily regarded as data, to avoid falling victim to habits that find us invariably gathering the same limited information in the same limited ways. In my study of a school principal, for example, I was interested in getting some sense of how the principal's professional relationships with other teachers and administrators overlapped with his personal relationships among family and friends (HFW 1973). An opportunity to get some "hard data" on the topic occurred when his oldest daughter announced her forthcoming wedding. I asked the principal if he would be willing to review the wedding list and say something about everyone invited, paying particular attention to invitations extended by the parents of the bride rather than to the young couple's own social network. I might

have obtained similar information by going over the list of people to whom the principal and his wife regularly sent Christmas cards. Personal documents such as these are not likely to end up at the Smithsonian, yet they are a ready source of data about social networks. Wouldn't a list of the telephone numbers frequently dialed, or a directory of e-mail correspondents for anyone who keeps such a record, provide similar insight into professional and/or personal networks?

- *Think about new ways to use data easily at hand.* The previous point emphasized looking at sources of data easily overlooked, so that we do not take too constricted a view of what constitutes data. The complement to that is to be equally creative about using readily available data in unusual ways.

  It may, for example, be easier to document, and even to discern, patterns or trends by looking at the frequency or space devoted to certain kinds of events in the local newspaper over a period of years than by having to rely solely on the impressions of older informants. Margaret Mead was able to give a historical perspective to her interest in child training by comparing the range and detail of topics discussed in government manuals throughout a period of several decades. The changing tables of contents in introductory texts in fields like anthropology or sociology provide an excellent basis for watching the evolution of those disciplines. Old catalogues or photographs offer evidence of changing fashions in clothing, hair style, and the like. That such sources of data exist is hardly a revelation, but it doesn't hurt to remind fieldworkers to remind themselves that participant observation and interviewing are not the only ways to get information. Such extraneous sources also invite researchers to compare what they are being told with sources less susceptible to being reinterpreted with a knowing backward look.

This chapter has reviewed some basic arts in fieldwork, as perceived by a fieldworker committed to a personal investment of sufficient duration that data gathering is subordinated to insight born of, or informed by, direct

experience. Potential problems were recast as challenges to be recognized and reckoned with. I turn next to examining some related problems from what might be called the dark side of fieldwork. Given the focus of the book, I refer to them as the Darker Arts.

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