Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes – Robert M. Emerson
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Chapter 1: Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives. Carrying out such research involves two distinct activities. First, the ethnographer enters into a social setting and gets to know the people involved in it; usually, the setting is not previously known in an intimate way. The ethnographer participates in the daily routines of this setting, develops ongoing relations with the people in it, and observes all the while what is going on. Indeed, the term "participant-observation" is often used to characterize this basic research approach. But, second, the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of life of others. Thus the researcher creates an accumulating written record of these observations and experiences. These two interconnected activities comprise the core of ethnographic research: Firsthand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation. In the following sections we examine in detail each of these activities and then trace out their implications for writing fieldnotes.

ETHNOGRAPHIC PARTICIPATION

Ethnographers are committed to going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people. "Getting close" minimally requires physical and social proximity to the daily rounds of people's lives and activities; the field researcher must be able to take up positions in the midst of the key sites and scenes of other's lives in order to observe and understand them. But getting close has another, far more significant component: The ethnographer seeks a deeper immersion in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important. With immersion, the field researcher sees from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so. In this way immersion gives the fieldworker access to the fluidity of others' lives and enhances his sensitivity to interaction and process.

Furthermore, immersion enables the fieldworker to directly and forcibly experience for herself both the ordinary routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives, and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject. Goflman (1989:125) in particular insists that field research involves "subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation." Immersion in ethnographic research, then, involves both being with other people to see how they respond to events as they happen and experiencing for oneself these events and the circumstances that give rise to them.

Clearly, ethnographic immersion precludes conducting field research as a detached, passive observer; the field researcher can only get close to the lives of those studied by actively participating in their day-to-day affairs. Such participation, moreover, inevitably entails some degree of resocialization. Sharing everyday life with a group of people, the field researcher comes "to enter into the matrix of meanings of the researched, to participate in their system of organized activities, and to feel subject to their code of moral regulation" (Wax 1980:272-73). In participating as fully and humanly as possible in another way of life, the ethnographer learns what is required to become a member of that world, to experience events and meanings in ways that approximate members' experiences. Indeed, some ethnographers seek to do field research by doing and becoming-to the extent possible-whatever it is they are interested in learning about. Ethnographers, for example, have become skilled at work activities they are seeking to understand (Diamond 1993; Lynch 1985) or in good faith have joined churches or religious groups (Jules-Rosette 1975; Rochford 1985) on the grounds that by becoming members they gain fuller insight and understanding into these groups and their activities. Or villagers may assign an ethnographer a role, such as sister or mother in an extended family, which obligates her to participate and resocialize herself to meet local expectations (Fretz n.d.).

In learning about others through active participation in their lives and activities, the fieldworker cannot and should not attempt to be a fly on the Wall. No field researcher can be a completely neutral, detached observer, outside and independent of the observed phenomena (Pollner and Emerson 1988). Rather, as the ethnographer engages in the lives and concerns of those studied, his perspective "is intertwined with the phenomenon which does not have

objective characteristics independent of the observer's perspective and methods" (Mishler 1979: 10). The ethnographer cannot take in everything; rather, he will, in conjunction with those in the setting, develop certain perspectives by engaging in some activities and relationships rather than others. Moreover, it will often be the case that relationships with those under study follow political fault lines in the setting, exposing the ethnographer selectively to varying priorities and points of view. As a result, the task of the ethnographer is not to determine "the truth" but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives.

Furthermore, the ethnographer's presence in a setting inevitably has implications and consequences for what is taking place, since the fieldworker must necessarily interact with and hence have some impact on those studied. "Consequential presence:' often linked to reactive effects (that is, the effects of the ethnographer's participation on how members may talk and behave), should not be seen as "contaminating" what is observed and learned. Rather, these effects are the very source of that learning and observation (Clarke 1975:99). Relationships between the field researcher and people in the setting do not so much disrupt or alter ongoing patterns of social interaction as reveal the terms and bases on which people form social ties in the first place. For example, in a village based on kinship ties, people may adopt a fieldworker into a family and assign her a kinship term which then designates her rights and responsibilities toward others. Rather than detracting from what the fieldworker can learn, first-hand relations with those studied may provide clues to understanding the more subtle, implicit underlying assumptions that are often not readily accessible through observation or interview methods alone. Consequently, rather than viewing reactivity as a defect to be carefully controlled or eliminated in entirety, the ethnographer needs to become sensitive to and perceptive of how she is seen and treated by others.

To appreciate the unavoidable consequences of one's own presence strips any special merit from the highly detached, "unobtrusive," and marginal observer roles that have long held sway as the implicit ideal in field research. Many contemporary ethnographers advocate highly participatory roles (Adler, Adler, and Rochford 1986) in which the researcher actually performs the activities that are central to the lives of those studied. In this view, assuming real responsibility for actually carrying out core functions and tasks, as in service learning internships, provides special opportunities to get close to, participate in, and experience life in previously unknown settings. The intern with real work responsibilities or the researcher participating in village life actively engage in local activities and are socialized to and acquire empathy for local ways of acting and feeling.

Finally, close, continuing participation in the lives of others encourages appreciation of social life as constituted by ongoing, fluid processes. Through participation, the field researcher sees first-hand and up close how people grapple with uncertainty and confusion, how meanings emerge through talk and collective action, how understandings and interpretations change over time. In all these ways, the fieldworker's closeness to others' daily lives and activities heightens sensitivity to social life as process.

INSCRIBING EXPERIENCED/OBSERVED REALITIES

Even with intensive resocialization, the ethnographer never becomes a member in the same sense that those "naturally" in the setting are members. The fieldworker plans on leaving the setting after a relatively brief stay, and his experience of local life is colored by this transience. As a result "the participation that the fieldworker gives is neither as committed nor as constrained as the native's" (Karp and Kendall 1982:257). Furthermore, the fieldworker orients to many local events not as "real life" but as objects of possible research interest, as events that he may choose to write down and preserve in fieldnotes. In these ways, research and writing commitments qualify ethnographic immersion, making the field researcher at least something of an outsider and, at an extreme, a cultural alien .

Fieldnotes are accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner. But writing descriptive accounts of experiences and observations is not as straightforward and transparent a process as it might initially appear. For writing description is not merely a matter of accurately capturing as closely as possible observed reality, of "putting into words" overheard talk and witnessed activities. To view the writing of descriptions simply as a matter of producing texts that correspond accurately to what has been observed is to assume that there is but one "best" description of any particular event. But in fact, there is no one "natural" or "correct" way to write about what one observes. Rather, because descriptions involve issues of perception and interpretation, different descriptions of "the same" situations and events are possible.

Consider, for example, the following descriptions of moving through express checkout lines in three different Los Angeles supermarkets, written by three student researchers. These descriptions share a number of common

features: all describe events from the point of view of shoppers/observers moving through express checkout lines; all provide physical descriptions of the other major players in the lines - the checker, other shoppers - and of at least some of the items they are purchasing; and all attend closely to some minute details of behavior in express lines. Yet each of these fieldnote accounts takes a different tack in describing a supermarket express line. Each selects and emphasizes certain features and actions, ignoring and marginalizing others. Furthermore, these descriptions are written from different points of view, and they shape and present what happened on the express lines in different ways - in part because the researchers observe different people and occasions, but also in part because they make different writing choices:

Mayfair Market Express Line

There were four people in line with their purchases separated by an approx. 18" rectangular black rubber bar. I put my frozen bags down on the "lazy susan linoleum conveyor belt" and I reached on top of the cash register to retrieve one of the black bars to separate my items. The cashier was in her mid thirties, approx., about 5'2" dark skinned woman with curly dark brown hair. I couldn't hear what she was saying, but recognized some accent to her speech. She was in a white blouse, short sleeved, with a maroon shoulder to mid thigh apron. She had a loose maroon bow tie, not like a man's bow tie, more hangie and fluffy. Her name tag on her left chest side had red writing that said "Candy" on it.

[Describes the first two men at the front of the line.] The woman behind him was dark skinned with straight dark brown hair cut in a page boy. She was wearing a teal blue v-neck knit sweater with black leggings. In her section was juice, a can of pineapple juice, and a six-pack of V-8 tomato juice. The guy in front of me had a pink polo shirt on and tan shorts. He was about 6'2", slender, tan with blond short hair with a gold 18 gauge hoop in his left ear (I thought he was gay). In his triangle of space he had packaged carrots, a gallon of whole milk, and a package of porkchops.

Candy spent very little time with each person, she gave all a hello, and then told them the amount, money was offered, and change was handed back onto a shelf that was in front of the customer whose turn it was. Before Candy had given the dark-haired woman her change back, I noticed that the man in the pink shirt had moved into her spatial "customer" territory, probably within a foot of her, and in the position that the others had taken when it was their turn, in front of the "check writing" shelf. (I thought it was interesting that the people seemed more concerned about the proper separation of their food from one another's than they did about body location.) ...

As I walk up to the shelf (where it all seems to happen), I say "Hi", and Candy says "Hi" back as she scans my groceries with the price scanner...

This observer describes the line spatially in terms of individual people (particularly physical appearance and apparel) and their groceries as laid out before being rung up ("in his triangle of space he had . . . "). Indeed, this account notes as an aside the contrast between the care taken to separate grocery items and the seeming disregard of physical space that occurs at the "check writing shelf' as one shopper is about to move on and the next-in-line to move in.

Ralph's Express Line, Easter Morning

I headed east to the checkout stands with my romaine lettuce, to garnish the rice salad I was bringing to brunch, and my bottle of Gewurtztraminer, my new favorite wine, which I had to chill in the next half hour. As I approached the stands, I realized that the 10-items-or-less-cash-only line would be my best choice. I noticed that Boland was behind the counter at the register-he's always very friendly to me - "Hey, how you doing?"

I got behind the woman who was already there. She had left one of the rubber separator bars behind the things she was going to buy, one of the few personal friendly moves one can make in this highly routinized queue. I appreciated this, and would have thanked her (by smiling, probably), but she was already looking ahead, I suppose in anticipation of checking out. I put my wine and lettuce down. There was already someone behind me. I wanted to show them the courtesy of putting down a rubber separator bar for them too. I waited until the food in front of mine was moved up enough for me to take the bar, which was at the front of the place where the bars are (is there a word for that? bar bin?), so that I wouldn't have to make a large, expansive move across the items that were'nt mine, drawing attention to myself I waited, and then, finally, the bar was in sight. I took it, and then put it behind my items, looking at the woman behind me and smiling at her as I did so. She looked pleased, and a bit surprised, and I was glad to have been able to do this small favor. She was a pretty blonde woman, and was buying a bottle of champagne (maybe also for Easter brunch?). She was wearing what looked like an Easter dress - it was cotton, and pretty and flowery. She looked youngish. Maybe about my age. She was quite tall for a woman, maybe 5'10" or so.

The woman in front of me didn't take long at all. I've learned quite well how to wait in queues and not be too impatient. Boland, the checker, saw me, and said, "Hi! How's it going?" or something like that....

This observer describes moving through the line as she experienced the process on a moment by moment basis, framing her accounts of others' behaviors as she received, understood, and reacted to them. This style of description gives the reader unique access to the observer's thoughts and emotions; for example, while space is an issue, it is framed in terms not of distance but of its implications for self and feelings (e.g., avoiding "a large expansive move across the items that were'nt mine").

In the next excerpt, the writer shifts his focus from self to others:

Boy's Market Express Line

     ... I picked a long line. Even though the store was quiet, the express line was long. A lot of people had made small purchases today. I was behind a man with just a loaf of bread. There was a cart to the side of him, just sitting there, and I thought someone abandoned it (it had a few items in it). A minute later a man came up and "claimed" it by taking hold of it. He didn't really try to assert that he was back in line-apparently he'd stepped away to get something he'd forgotten-but he wasn't getting behind me either. I felt the need to ask him if he was on line, so I wouldn't cut him off. He said yes, and I tried to move behind him - we were sort of side by side - and he said, "That's okay. I know where you are."

     An old woman was behind me now. She had her groceries in one of those carts that old people tend to use to wheel their groceries home. She was thumbing through the National Enquirer, and was clutching a coupon in her hand. She scanned a few pages of the paper, and then put it back in the rack. I looked ahead at the person whose groceries were being checked out-she was staring at the price for each item as it came up on the register.

     At this point the guy who I'd spoken to earlier, the guy who was right in front of me, showed a look of surprise and moved past me, over to an abandoned cart at the end of the aisle. He was looking at what was in it, picking up the few items with interest, and then put them back. I thought he'd seen something else he wanted or had forgotten. He came back over to his cart, but then a supermarket employee walked by, and he called out to the man, walking over to the cart and pointing at it, "Do you get many items like this left behind;," The employee hesitated, not seeming to understand the question, and said no. The guy on line said, "See what's here? This is formula [cans of baby formula]. That's poor people's food. And see this [a copper pot scrubber]? They use that to smoke crack." The employee looked surprised. The guy says, "I was just wondering. That's very indicative of this area." The employee: "I live here and I didn't know that." The guy: "Didn't you watch Channel 28 last night?" Employee: "No." Guy: "They had a report about inner city problems." Employee, walking away as he talks: "I only watch National Geographic, the MacNeil-Lehrer Hour, and NPR." He continues away...

     Meanwhile the man with the bread has paid. As he waits momentarily for his change, the "guy" says, "Long wait for a loaf of bread:' Man says, "Yeah:' and then adds, jokingly (and looking at the cashier as he says it, as if to gauge his reaction), "these cashiers are slow." The cashier does not appear to hear this. Man with bread leaves, guy in front of me is being checked out now. He says to the cashier, "What's the matter, end of your shift? No sense of humor left?" Cashier says, "No. I'm tired:' Guy: "I hear you." Guy then says to the bagger: "Can I have paper and plastic please, Jacob" (he emphasizes the use of the baggees name)? Jacob complies, but shows no other sign that he's heard the man. Guy is waiting for transaction to be completed. He's sitting on the railing, and he is singing
the words to the Muzak tune that's playing. Something by Peabo Bryson. Guy's transaction is done. He says thank you to the bagger, and the bagger tells him to have a good day.

     Cashier says, "How are you doing?" to me....

In these notes the observer initially writes himself into a prominent role in the line, but then he moves himself offstage by spotlighting another character who says and does a number of flamboyant things as he waits and then gets checked out. This express line becomes a mini-community, first marked by ongoing exchanges between those in line, then drawing in a passing store employee, and culminating in interactions between this character and the checker and bagger.

Writing fieldnote descriptions, then, is not so much a matter of passively copying down "facts" about "what happened Rather, such writing involves active processes of interpretation and sense-making: noting and writing down some things as "significant:' noting but ignoring others as "not significant and even missing other possibly significant things altogether. As a result, similar (even the "same") events can be described for different purposes, with different sensitivities and concerns.

In this respect, it is important to recognize that fieldnotes involve *inscriptions* of social life and social discourse. Such inscriptions inevitably *reduce* the welter and confusion of the social world to written words that can be reviewed, studied, and thought about time and time again. As Geertz (1973:19) has characterized this core ethnographic process: "The ethnographer 'inscribes' social discourse; *he writes it down*. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscription and can be reconsulted."

As inscriptions, fieldnotes are products of and reflect conventions for *transforming* witnessed events, persons, and places into words on paper. In part, this transformation involves inevitable processes of selection; the ethnographer writes about certain things and thereby necessarily "leaves out" others. But more significantly, descriptive fieldnotes also inevitably *present or frame* objects in particular ways, "missing" other ways that events might have been presented or framed. And these presentations reflect and incorporate sensitivities, meanings, and understandings the field researcher has gleaned from having been close to and participated in the described events.

There are other ways of reducing social discourse to written form. Survey questionnaires, for example, record "responses" to pre-fixed questions, sometimes reducing these answers to numbers, sometimes preserving something of the respondents' own words. Audio and video recordings, which seemingly catch and preserve almost everything occurring within an interaction, actually capture but a slice of ongoing social life. What is recorded in the first place depends upon when, where, and how the equipment is positioned and activated, what it can pick up

mechanically, and how those who are recorded react to its presence. Further reduction occurs with the representation of a recorded slice of embodied discourse as sequential lines of text in a "transcript, " For while talk in social settings is a "multichanneled event," writing "is linear in nature, and can handle only one channel at a time, so must pick and choose among the cues available for representation" (Walker 1986:211). A transcript thus selects particular dimensions and contents of discourse for inclusion while ignoring others, for example, nonverbal cues to local meanings such as eye gaze, gesture, and posture. Researchers studying oral performances spend considerable effort in developing a notational system to document the verbal and at least some of the nonverbal communication; the quality of the transcribed "folklore text" is critical as it "represents the performance in another medium" (Fine 1984:3). The transcript is never a "verbatim" rendering of discourse, because it "represents ... an analytic interpretation and selection" (Psathas and Anderson 1990:75) of speech and action. That is, a transcript is the product of a transcriber's ongoing interpretive and analytic decisions about a variety of problematic matters: how to transform naturally occurring speech into specific words (in the face of natural speech elisions); how to determine when to punctuate to indicate a completed phrase or sentence (given the common lack of clear-cut endings in ordinary speech); deciding whether or not to try to represent such matters as spaces and silences, overlapped speech and sounds, pace stresses and volume, and inaudible or incomprehensible sounds or words.' In sum, even those means of recording that researchers claim come the closest to realizing an "objective mirroring" necessarily make reductions in the lived complexity of social life similar in principle to those made in writing fieldnotes.

Given the reductionism of any method of inscription, choice of method reflects researchers' deeper assumptions about social life and how to understand it. Fieldwork and ultimately the fieldnote are predicated on a view of social life as continuously created through people's efforts to find and confer meaning on their own and others' actions. Within this perspective, the interview and the recording have their uses. To the extent that participants are willing and able to describe these features of social life, an interview may prove a valuable tool. Similarly, a video recording provides a valuable record of words actually uttered and gestures actually made. But the ethos of fieldwork holds that in order to fully understand and appreciate action from the perspective of participants, one must get close to and participate in a wide cross-section of their everyday activities over an extended period of time. Ethnography, as Van Maanen (1988:ix) insists, is "the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others." Fieldnotes are distinctively a method for capturing and preserving the insights and understandings stimulated by these close and long-term experiences. Thus fieldnotes inscribe the sometimes inchoate understandings and insights the fieldworker acquires by intimately immersing herself in another world, by observing in the midst of mundane activities and jarring crises, by directly running up against the contingencies and constraints of the everyday life of another people. Indeed, it is exactly this deep immersion - and the sense of place that such immersion assumes and strengthens-that enables the ethnographer to inscribe the detailed, context-sensitive, and locally informed fieldnotes that Geertz (1973) terms "thick description."

This experiential character of fieldnotes is also reflected in changes in their content and concerns over time. Fieldnotes grow through gradual accretion, adding one day's writing to the next's. The ethnographer writes particular fieldnotes in ways that are not pre-determined or pre-specified; hence fieldnotes are not collections or samples in the way that audio recordings can be, i.e., decided in advance according to set criteria. Choosing what to write down is not a process of sampling according to some fixed-in-advance principle. Rather it is both intuitive, reflecting the ethnographer's changing sense of what might possibly be made interesting or important to future readers, and empathetic, reflecting the ethnographer's sense of what is interesting or important to the people he is observing.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING FIELDNOTES

We draw four implications from our understanding of ethnography as the inscription of participatory experience: (1) What is observed and ultimately treated as "data" or "findings" is inseparable from the observational process. (2) In writing fieldnotes, the field researcher should give special attention to the indigenous meanings and concerns of the people studied. (3) Contemporaneously written fieldnotes are an essential grounding and resource for writing broader, more coherent accounts of others' lives and concerns. (4) Such fieldnotes should detail the social and interactional processes that make up people's everyday lives and activities.

Inseparability of "Methods" and "Findings"

Modes of participating in and finding out about the daily lives of others make up key parts of ethnographic methods. These "methods" determine what the field researcher sees, experiences, and learns. But if substance ("data", "findings", "facts") are products of the methods used, substance cannot be considered independently of method; what the ethnographer finds out is inherently connected with how she finds it out. As a result, these methods should not be ignored. Rather, they should comprise an important part of written fieldnotes. It thus becomes critical for the ethnographer to document her own activities, circumstances, and emotional responses as these factors shape the process of observing and recording, others' lives."

From this point of view, the very distinction between fieldnote "data" and "personal reactions", between "fieldnote records" and "diaries" or "journals" (Sanjek 1990c), is deeply misleading. Of course, the ethnographer can separate what he says and does from what he observes others saying and doing, treating the latter as if it were unaffected by the former. But such a separation distorts processes of inquiry and the meaning of field "data" in several significant ways. First, this separation treats data as "objective information" that has a fixed meaning independent of how that information was elicited or established and by whom. In this way the ethnographer's own actions, including his "personal" feelings and reactions, are viewed as independent of and unrelated to the events and happenings involving others that constitute "findings" or "observations" when written down in fieldnotes. Second, this separation assumes that "subjective" reactions and perceptions can and should be controlled by being segregated from "objective", impersonal records. And finally, such control is thought to be essential because personal and emotional experiences are devalued, comprising "contaminants" of objective data rather than avenues of insight into significant processes in the setting.

Linking method and substance in fieldnotes has a number of advantages: it encourages recognizing "findings" not as absolute and invariant but as contingent upon the circumstances of their "discovery" by the ethnographer. Moreover, the ethnographer is prevented, or at least discouraged, from too readily taking, one person's version of what happened or what is important as the "complete" or "correct" version of these matters. Rather, "what happened" is one account, made by a particular person to a specific other at a particular time and place for particular purposes. In all these ways, linking method and substance builds sensitivity to the multiple, situational realities of those studied into the core of fieldwork practice.

The Pursuit of Indigenous Meanings

In contrast to styles of field research which focus on others' behavior without systematic regard for what such behavior means to those engaged in it, we see ethnography as committed to uncovering and depicting indigenous meanings. The object of participation is ultimately to get close to those studied as a way of understanding what their experiences and activities *mean to them*.

Ethnographers should attempt to write fieldnotes in ways that capture and preserve indigenous meanings. To do so, they must learn to recognize and limit reliance upon preconceptions about members' lives and activities. They must become responsive to what others are concerned about, in their own terms. But while fieldnotes are about others, their concerns and doings gleaned through empathetic immersion, they necessarily reflect and convey the ethnographer's understanding of these concerns and doings. Thus, fieldnotes are written accounts that filter members' experiences and concerns through the person and perspectives of the ethnographer; fieldnotes provide the ethnographer's, not the members', accounts of the latter's experiences, meanings, and concerns.

It might initially appear that forms of ethnography concerned with "polyvocality" (Clifford and Marcus 1986:15), or oral histories and feminist ethnographies (Stacey 1991) which seek to let members "speak in their own voices," can avoid researcher mediation in its entirety. But even in these instances, researchers continue to select what to observe, to pose questions, or to frame the nature and purpose of the interview more generally, in ways which cannot avoid mediating effects (see Mills 1990).

Writing Fieldnotes Contemporaneously

In contrast to views holding that fieldnotes are crutches at best and blinders at worst, we see fieldnotes as providing the primary means for deeper appreciation of how field researchers come to grasp and interpret the actions and concerns of others. In this respect, fieldnotes offer subtle and complex understandings of these others' lives, routines, and meanings.

As argued earlier, the field researcher comes to understand others' ways by becoming part of their lives and by learning to interpret and experience events much as they do. It is critical to document closely these subtle processes of learning and resocialization *as they occur*; continuing time in the field tends to dilute the insights generated by initial contact with an unknown way of life. Long-term participation dissolves the initial perceptions that arise in adapting to and discovering what is significant to others; it blunts early sensitivities to subtle patterns and underlying tensions. In short, the field researcher does not learn about the concerns and meanings of others all at once, but in a constant, continuing process in which she builds new insight and understanding upon prior insights and understandings. Researchers should document these emergent processes and stages rather than attempt to reconstruct them at a later point in light of some final, ultimate interpretation of their meaning and import. Fieldnotes provide a distinctive resource for preserving experience close to the moment of occurrence and, hence, for deepening reflection upon and understanding of those experiences.

Similar considerations hold when examining the ethnographer's "findings" about those studied and their routine activities. Producing a record of these activities as close to their occurrence as possible preserves their idiosyncratic, contingent character in the face of the homogenizing tendencies of retrospective recall. In immediately written fieldnotes, distinctive qualities and features are sharply drawn and will elicit vivid memories and images when the ethnographer rereads notes for coding and analysis. Furthermore, the distinctive and unique features of such fieldnotes, brought forward into the final analysis, create texture and variation, avoiding the flatness that comes from generality.

The Importance of Interactional Detail

Field researchers seek to get close to others in order to understand their ways of life. To preserve and convey that closeness, they must describe situations and events of interest in detail. Of course, there can never be absolute standards for determining when there is "enough detail ' " How closely one should look and describe depends upon what is "of interest" and this varies by situation and by the researcher's personality, orientation, and discipline. Nonetheless, most ethnographers attend to observed events in an intimate or "Microscopic" manner (Geertz 1973:20-23) and in writing fieldnotes seek to recount "what happened" in fine detail.

Beyond this general "microscopic" commitment, however, our specifically interactionist approach leads us to urge writers to value close, detailed reports of interaction. First, interactional detail helps one become sensitive to, trace, and analyze the interconnections between methods and substance. Since the fieldworker discovers things about others by interacting with them, it is important to observe and minutely record the sequences and conditions marking such interactions. Second, in preserving the details of interaction, the researcher is better able to identify and follow processes in witnessed events and hence to develop and sustain processual interpretations of happenings in the field. Field research, we maintain, is particularly suited to documenting social life as process, as emergent meanings established in and through social interaction (Blumer 1969). Attending to the details of interaction enhances the possibilities for the researcher to see beyond fixed, static entities, to grasp the active "doing" of social life. Writing fieldnotes as soon and as fully as possible after events of interest have occurred encourages detailed descriptions of the processes of interaction through which members of social settings create and sustain specific, local social realities.

REFLECTIONS: WRITING FIELDNOTES AND ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICE

Ethnography is an active enterprise. Its activity incorporates dual impulses. On the one hand, the ethnographer must make her way into new worlds and new relationships. On the other hand, she must learn how to represent in written form what she has come to see and understand as the result of these experiences.

It is easy to draw a sharp contrast between these activities, between doing fieldwork and writing fieldnotes. After all, while in the field, ethnographers must frequently choose between "join(ing) conversations in unfamiliar places" (Lederman 1990:72) and withdrawing to some more private place to write about these conversations and witnessed events. By locating "real ethnography" in the time spent talking with and listening to those studied, many ethnographers not only polarize but also discount writing notes as a central component of fieldwork. "Doing" and "writing" should not be seen as separate and distinct activities, but as dialectically related and interdependent activities. Writing accounts of what happened during face-to-face encounters with others in the field is very much part of the doing of ethnography; as Geertz emphasizes, "the ethnographer 'inscribes' social discourse; he writes it down" (1973:19). This process of inscribing, of writing fieldnotes, helps the field researcher to understand what he

has been observing in the first place and, thus, enables him to participate in new ways, to hear with greater acuteness, and to observe with a new lens.

While ethnographers increasingly recognize the centrality of writing to their craft, they frequently differ on how to characterize that writing and its relation to ethnographic research. Some anthropologists have criticized Geertzs notion of "inscription" as too mechanical and simplistic, as ignoring that the ethnographer writes not about a "passing event" but rather about "already formulated, fixed discourse or lore"; hence, inscription should more aptly be termed "transcription" (Clifford 1990:57). "Inscription" has also been criticized as being too enmeshed in the assumptions of "salvage ethnography," which date back to Franz Boas's efforts to "write down" oral cultures before they and their languages and customs disappeared (Clifford 1986:113). Indeed, ethnographers have suggested a number of alternative ways of characterizing ethnographic writing. Anthropologists frequently use "translation" (or "cultural translation") to conceptualize writing a version of one culture that will make it comprehensible to readers living in another. Clifford (1986) and Marcus (1986) use the more abstract term "textualization" to refer to the generic processes whereby an ethnography "translates experience into text" (Clifford 1986:115). And sociologists, notably Richardson (1990), describe the core of ethnographic writing as "narrating."

In general, however, these approaches conflate writing final ethnographies with writing ethnographic fieldnotes; thus, they fail to adequately illuminate the key processes and features of producing fieldnotes. Yet, each approach has implications for such contemporaneous writing about events witnessed in the field. First translation entails reconfiguring one set of concepts and terms into another; that is, the ethnographer searches for comparable concepts and analogous terms. In a sense, while writing fieldnotes an ethnographer is always interpreting and translating into text what she sees, even when writing notes for herself. Of course, in composing the final ethnography, the writer not only translates concepts but also a whole way of life for a future audience who may not be familiar with the world she describes. Second, narrating often aptly characterizes the process of writing a day's experiences into a fieldnote entry. However, not all life experiences are well represented as cohesive stories: a narrative could push open-ended or disjointed interactions into a coherent, interconnected sequence. Thus, while many fieldnotes tell about the day in a storytelling mode, recounting what happened in a chronological order, most entries lack any overall structure which ties the day's events into a story line with a point. As a result, the storytelling of fieldnotes is generally fragmented and episodic. Finally, textualization clearly focuses on the broader transformation of experience into text, not only in final ethnographies, but especially so in writing fieldnotes. Indeed, such transformation first occurs in the preliminary and varied writings in the field. Moreover, these fieldnotes often prefigure the final texts!

In sum, the fluid, open-ended processes of writing fieldnotes resonate with the imagery of all these approaches. Never a simple matter of inscribing the world, fieldnotes do more than record observations. In a fundamental sense, they constitute a way of life through the very writing choices the ethnographer makes and the stories she tells; for, through her writing she conveys her understandings and insights to future readers unacquainted with these lives, people, and events, In writing a fieldnote, then, the ethnographer does not simply put happenings into words. Rather, such writing is an interpretive process: it is the very first act of textualizing. Indeed, this often "invisible" work - *writing ethnographic fieldnotes* - is the primordial textualization that creates a world on the page and ultimately shapes the final ethnographic, published text.

Chapter 2: In the Field: Participating,Observing, and Jotting Notes

Ethnographers ultimately produce some sort of written account of what they have seen, heard, and experienced in the field. But different ethnographers, and the same ethnographer at different times, turn experience and observation into written texts in different ways. Some maximize their immersion in local activities and their experience of others' lives, deliberately suspending concern with the task of producing written records of these events. Here the field researcher decides where to go, what to look at, what to ask and say, so as to experience fully another way of life and its concerns. She attends to events with little or no orientation to "writing it down" or even to "observing" in a detached fashion. Indeed, an ethnographer living in rather than simply regularly visiting a field setting, particularly in non-Western cultures where language and daily routines are unfamiliar, may have no choice but to participate fully and to suspend immediate concerns with writing. A female ethnographer studying local women in Africa, for example, may find herself helping to prepare greens and care for children, leaving no time to produce many written notes. Yet in the process of that involvement she may most clearly learn how women simultaneously work together, socialize, and care for children. Only in subsequent reflection might she fully notice the subtle changes in herself as she learned to do and see these activities as the women do.

Field researchers using this style value relating naturally to those encountered in the field; they focus their efforts on figuring out - holistically and intuitively - what these people are up to. Any anticipation of writing fieldnotes is postponed (and in extreme cases, minimized or avoided altogether) as diluting the experiential insights and intuitions that immersion in another social world can provide. Only at some later point does the ethnographer turn to the task of recalling and examining her experiences in order to write them down.

But the ethnographer may also participate in ongoing events in ways that directly and immediately involve inscription. Here the field worker is concerned with "getting into place" to observe interesting, significant events in order to produce a detailed written record of them. As a result, participation in naturally occurring events may come to be explicitly oriented toward writing fieldnotes. At an extreme, the field worker may self-consciously look for events that should be written down for research purposes; he may position himself in these unfolding events to be able to observe and write; and he may explicitly orient to events in terms of "what is important to remember so that I can write it down later."

Both modes of participation have strengths and drawbacks. The former allows an intense immersion in daily rhythms and ordinary concerns, increasing openness to others' ways of life. The latter can produce a more detailed, closer-to-the-moment record of that life. In practice, most field researchers employ both styles at one time or another, now participating without thought about writing up what is happening, now focusing closely on events in order to write about them. Indeed, the fieldworker may experience a shift from one mode to another as events unfold in the field. Caught in some social moment, for example, the field researcher may come to see deep theoretical relevance in a mundane experience or practice. Conversely, a researcher in the midst of observing in a more detached, writing-oriented mode may suddenly be drawn directly into the center of aCtiVity.2

In both styles, the ethnographer writes fieldnotes more or less contemporaneously with the experience and observation of events of interest, in the spirit of the ethnographer who commented, "Anthropologists are those who write things down at the end of the day" (Jackson 1990b: 15). In the experiential style, writing may be put off for hours or even days, until the field researcher withdraws from the field and, relying solely on memory, sits down at pad or computer to reconstruct important events.' In the participating-to-write style, writing - or an orientation to writing - begins earlier, when the researcher is still in the field, perhaps in the immediate presence of talk and action that will be inscribed. The ethnographer may not only make mental notes or "headnotes" to include certain events in full fieldnotes, but he may also write down, in the form of jottings or scratch notes, abbreviated words and phrases to use later to construct full fieldnotes.

Furthermore, in both styles field researchers are deeply concerned about the quality of the relationships they develop with the people they seek to know and understand. In valuing more natural, open experience of others' worlds and activities, field researchers seek to keep writing from intruding into and affecting these relationships. They do so not only to avoid distancing themselves from the ongoing experience of another world, but also because writing and research commitments more generally may engender feelings of betraying those with whom one has lived and shared intimacies. Ethnographers who participate in order to write, in contrast, pursue and proclaim research interests more openly as an element in their relationships with those studied. But these field researchers too experience moments of anguish, of uncertainty about whether to include intimate or humiliating incidents in their fieldnotes. Moreover, they often become very sensitive to the ways in which the stance and act of writing are very visible to and can influence the quality of their relationships with those studied.

In the remainder of this chapter we focus on a participating-in-order-to-write fieldwork style which confronts writing issues directly and immediately in the field. This style brings to the fore the interconnections between writing, participating, and observing as a means of understanding another way of life: this approach focuses on learning how to look in order to write, while it also recognizes that looking is itself shaped and constrained by a sense of what and how to write. In examining these issues, we initially consider choices confronting field researchers in deciding how, where, and when to make jottings in field settings. Next we offer suggestions on what to observe when participating with an eye to writing fieldnotes. We then present illustrations of actual jottings made in different field settings and discuss a number of considerations that might guide the process of making jottings.

MAKING JOTTINGS: HOW, WHERE, AND WHEN

In attending to ongoing scenes, events, and interactions, field researchers take mental note of certain details and impressions. For the most part these impressions remain "headnotes" only. In some instances, the field researcher

makes a brief written record of these impressions by jotting down key words and phrases. Jottings translate to-be-remembered observations into writing on paper as quickly rendered scribbles about actions and dialogue. A word or two written at the moment or soon afterwards will jog the memory later in the day and enable the fieldworker to catch significant actions and to construct evocative descriptions of the scene. Or, more extensive jottings may record an ongoing dialogue or a set of responses to questions. Particularly when learning a new language, the ethnographer should jot key expressions and terms.

Through trial and error field researchers evolve distinctive practical styles for writing jottings. An initial choice involves the selection of writing materials. Many fieldworkers use small notepads that fit easily in pocket or purse. Others prefer even less obtrusive materials, using folded sheets of paper, to record jottings about different topics on specific sides. Writers also frequently develop idiosyncratic preferences for particular types of pens or pencils.

Field researchers actually write jottings in different ways. It is time consuming and cumbersome to write out every word fully, and many fieldworkers develop their own private systems of symbols and abbreviations. Some even learn a formal transcribing system such as shorthand or speedwriting. These procedures not only facilitate getting words on a page more quickly; they also make jotted notes incomprehensible to those onlookers who ask to see them and hence provide a means for protecting the confidentiality of these writings.

Field researchers must also decide when, where, and how to write jottings. Far from simply mundane matters, such decisions can have tremendous import for relations with those in the field. The researcher works hard to establish close ties with participants so that she may be included in activities that are central to their lives. In the midst of such activities, however, she may experience deep ambivalence: on the one hand, she may wish to preserve the immediacy of the moment by jotting down words as they are spoken and details of scenes as they are enacted; on the other hand, she may feel that taking out a note pad and writing jottings will ruin the moment and plant seeds of distrust. Participants may now see her as someone whose primary interest lies in discovering their secrets and turning their most intimate and cherished experiences into objects of scientific inquiry.

Nearly all ethnographers feel torn at times between their research commitments and their desire to engage authentically those people whose worlds they have entered. Attempting to resolve these thorny relational and moral issues, many researchers hold that conducting any aspect of the research without the full and explicit knowledge and consent of those studied violates ethical standards. In this view, local assistants must be understood as collaborators who actively work with the researcher to tell the outside world about their lives and culture. Such mutual collaboration requires that the researcher ask permission to write about events and also respect people's desire not to reveal aspects of their lives.

Other field researchers feel less strictly bound to seek permission to conduct research or to tell participants about their intention to record events and experiences. Some justify this stance by insisting that the field researcher has no special obligations to disclose his intentions; all social life involves elements of dissembling, as no one ever fully reveals all his deeper purposes and private activities. Other researchers point out that jottings and fieldnotes written for oneself as one's own record will do no direct harm to others. This approach, of course, puts off grappling with the tough moral and personal issues until facing subsequent decisions about whether to publish or otherwise make these writings available to others. Finally, some advocate withholding knowledge of their research purposes from local people on the grounds that the information gained will serve the greater good. Researchers, for example, can only describe and publicize the conditions under which undocumented factory workers or the elderly in nursing homes live if they withhold their intentions from the powerful who control access to such settings.

Many beginning researchers, wanting to avoid open violations of trust and possibly awkward or tense encounters, are tempted to use covert procedures and to try to conceal the fact that they are conducting research or to wait until they leave the field to jot notes. While these decisions involve both the researcher's conscience and pragmatic considerations, we recommend as a general policy that the fieldworker inform people in the setting of the research, especially those with whom he has established some form of personal relationship. In addition to making these relations more direct and honest, openness avoids the risks and likely sense of betrayal that might follow from discovery of what the researcher has actually been up to. Concerns about the consequences-both discovery and ongoing inauthenticity - of even this small secret about research plans may mount and plague the fieldworker as time goes on and relations deepen.

Of course, strained relations and ethical dilemmas are not completely avoided by informing others of one's research purposes. While participants may have consented to the research, they might not know exactly what the research involves or what the researcher will do to carry it out. They might realize that the fieldworker is writing fieldnotes at the end of the day, but they become used to his presence and "forget" that this writing is going on. Furthermore,

marginal and transient members of the setting may not be aware of his research identity and purposes despite conscientious efforts to inform them.

By carrying out fieldwork in an overt manner, the researcher gains flexibility in when, where, and how to write jottings. In many field situations it may be feasible to jot notes openly. In so doing the fieldworker should act with sensitivity, trying to avoid detracting from or interfering with the ordinary relations and goings-on in the field. If possible, the fieldworker should start open jottings early on in contacts with those studied. If one establishes a "note-taker" role, jotting notes comes to be part of what people expect from the fieldworker. Here it helps to offer initial explanations of the need to take notes; an ethnographer can stress the importance of accuracy, of getting down exactly what was said. People often understand that such activities are required of students and, therefore, tolerate and accommodate the needs of researchers who, they believe, want to faithfully represent what goes on. When learning a new language in another culture, the field researcher can explain that she is writing down local terms in order to remember them. By saying the word as she writes, people might offer new terms and become further interested in teaching her.

Although taking down jottings may at first seem odd or awkward, after a time it often becomes a normal and expected part of what the fieldworker does. In the following excerpt from a Housing and Urban Development [HUD] office, the office manager and a worker jokingly enlist the fieldworker as audience for a self-parody of wanting to "help" clients:

> Later I'm in Jean's office and Ramon comes up and waxes melodramatic. Take this down, he says. Jean motions for me to write, so I pull out my notepad. "I only regret that I have but eight hours to devote to saving" . . . He begins to sing "Impossible Dream" in his thick, goofy Brooklyn accent. . . . "Feel free to join in:' he says....

Here, the ethnographer and his note-taking provide resources for a spontaneous humorous performance.'

Yet even when some people become familiar with open writing in their presence, others may become upset when the researcher pulls out his pad and begins to write down their words and actions. Ethnographers may try to avoid the likely challenges and facilitate open, extensive notetaking by positioning themselves on the margins of interaction. Even then, they may still encounter questions, as reflected in the following comment by a field researcher observing divorce mediation sessions:

> I tried to take notes that were as complete as possible during the session. My sitting behind the client had probably more to do with wanting to get a lot of written notes as unobtrusively as possible as with any more worthy methodological reason. While taking copious amounts of notes (approximately 50 pages per session) did not seem to bother the clients, a few mediators became quite defensive about it. One mediator wanted to know how I "decided what to write down and what not to write down:' At staff meetings this same mediator would sit next to me and try to glance over to see what I had written in my notebook.

Given the delicacy of this and similar situations, fieldworkers must constantly rely upon interactional skills and tact to judge whether or not taking jottings in the moment is appropriate.

Furthermore, in becoming accustomed to open jotting, people may develop definite expectations about what events and topics should be recorded. People may question why the fieldworker is or is not taking note of particular events, and they may feel slighted if she fails to make jottings on what they are doing or see as important. Consider the following exchange, again described by the field researcher studying divorce mediation, which occurred as she openly took notes while interviewing a mediator about a session just completed:

> On one occasion when finishing up a debriefing, . . . [the mediator] began to apply some eye make-up while I was finishing writing down some observations. She flashed me a mock disgusted look and said, "Are you writing this down too!" indicating the activity with her eye pencil.

Open jotting, then, has to be carefully calibrated to the unfolding context of the ongoing interaction.

Open jottings not only may strain relations with those who notice the writing; jottings can also distract the ethnographer from paying close attention to talk and activities occurring in the setting. A field researcher will inevitably miss fleeting expressions, subtle movements, and even key content in interactions if his nose is in his notepad. Taking open jottings is not always advisable for other reasons as well. In some settings the fieldworker's participation in ongoing interaction may be so involving as to preclude taking breaks to write down jottings; in such instances, he may have to rely more upon memory, focusing on incidents and key phrases that will later trigger a fuller recollection of the event or scene. For example, in a setting where only a few people write and do so only on

rare occasions, an ethnographer who writes instead of participating in an all-night village dance may be perceived as failing to maintain social relationships, a serious offense in a close-knit village.

As a result of these problems, even ethnographers who usually write open jottings may at other times make jottings privately, out of sight of those studied. Waiting until just after a scene, incident, or conversation has occurred, the ethnographer can then go to a private place to jot down a memorable phrase. Here it is often useful for the fieldworker to adopt the ways members of the setting themselves use to take "time out" or "get away." Fieldworkers have reported retreating to private places such as a bathroom (Cahill 1985), deserted lunchroom, stairwell, or supply closet to record such covert jottings. Depending upon circumstances, the fieldworker can visit such places periodically, as often as every half hour or so, or immediately after a particularly important incident. Other researchers avoid all overt writing in the field setting; but immediately upon leaving the field, they pull out a notebook to jot down reminders of the key incidents, words, or reactions they wish to include in full fieldnotes. This procedure allows the fieldworker to signal items that she does not want to forget without being seen as intrusive.

An ethnographer may write jottings in ways intermediate between open and hidden styles, especially when note-taking becomes a part of her task or role. Those in the field may or may not know explicitly that the fieldworker is writing jottings for research purposes. In one instance, for example, a student in a law office who was asked to take notes during client interviews used the assignment as an opportunity to take down research jottings. This student reported that while she did not make explicit when she wrote jottings, both the attorney and clients knew of her research. Though many activities do not so easily lend themselves to writing jottings, fieldworkers can find other naturally occurring means to incorporate jottings. For example, fieldworkers often learn about settings by becoming members. For the fieldworker who assumes the role of a novice, the notes which as a beginner he is permitted or even expected to write may become the jottings for his first fieldnotes.

Strategies for how, where, and when to jot notes change with time spent in the field and with the different relationships formed between fieldworker and people in the setting. Even after the ethnographer has established strong personal ties, situations might arise in fieldwork when visibly recording anything will be taken as inappropriate or out of place; in these situations, taking out a notebook would generate deep discomfort to both fieldworker and other people in the setting. One student ethnographer studying a campus bookstore who had grown quite friendly with bookstore workers - with whom she had spoken openly about her study - nonetheless reported the following incident:

> One of the younger cashiers came up to me after having seen me during two of my last observation sessions. She approached me tentatively with a question about me being a "spy" from the other campus bookstore or possibly from the administration. Trying to ease the situation with a joke, I told her I was only being a spy for sociology's sake, But she didn't understand the joke, and it only made the situation worse.

Sometimes people may be uncomfortable with a jotting researcher because they have had little experience with writing as a part of everyday life. Especially in oral cultures, watching and writing about people may seem like a strange activity indeed. In other instances, people have unpleasant associations with writing and find jottings intrusive and potentially dangerous. On one occasion an elder in a Zambian village became very hesitant to continue speaking after the ethnographer jotted down his name on a scrap of paper, simply to remember it. She later learned that government officials in colonial times used to come by and record names for tax purposes and to enlist people into government work projects.

Finally, even with permission to write openly, the tactful fieldworker will want to remain sensitive to and avoid jotting down matters which participants regard as secret, embarrassing, too revealing, or which puts them in any danger. In other instances, the people themselves may not object and in fact urge the researcher to take notes about sensitive matters. Even though she thinks they may be embarrassing or bring them harm if they were to be made public, the researcher might take jottings but then later decide not to use them in any final writing.

All in all, it is a defining moment in field relations when an ethnographer takes out a pad and begins to write down what people are saying and doing in the presence of those very people. Therefore, fieldworkers take very different approaches to jottings, their strategies both shaping and being shaped by their setting and by their relationships. Hence, decisions about when and how to take jottings must be considered in the context of the broader set of relations with those in the setting. In some situations and relations, taking open jottings is clearly not advisable. In others, fieldworkers decide to take jottings but must devise their own unique means to avoid or minimize awkward interactions that may arise as a result. When deciding when and where to jot, it is rarely helpful or possible to specify in advance one "best way." Here, as in other aspects of fieldwork, a good rule of thumb is to remain open and flexible, ready to alter an approach if it adversely affects people.

PARTICIPATING IN ORDER TO WRITE

Deciding whether or not to make jottings presupposes some sense for what to observe and write about in the first place. But in the flux of their field settings, beginning students are often hesitant and uncertain about what they should pay attention to as potential issues for writing. We have found a number of procedures to be helpful in advising students how initially to look-in-order-to-write.

First, ethnographers should take note of their initial impressions. These impressions may include those things available to the senses - the tastes, smells, and sounds of the physical environment, the look and feel of the locale and the people in it. Such impressions may include details about the physical setting, including size, space, noise, colors, equipment, and movement, or about people in the setting, such as number, gender, race, appearance, dress, movement, comportment, and feeling tone. Recording these impressions provides a way to get started in a setting that may seem overwhelming. Entering another culture where both language and customs are incomprehensible may present particular challenges in this regard. Still, the ethnographer can begin to assimilate strange sights and sounds through writing about them.

Furthermore, this record preserves these initial and often insightful impressions, for observers tend to lose sensitivity for unique qualities of a setting as these become commonplace. Researchers who are familiar with the setting they study, perhaps already having a place in that setting as workers or residents, have lost direct access to these first impressions. However, such fieldworkers can indirectly seek to recall their own first impressions by watching any newcomers to the setting, paying special attention to how they learn, adapt, and react.

Second, field researchers can focus on observing key events or incidents. Fieldworkers may at first have to rely on their own experience and intuition to select noteworthy incidents out of the flow of ongoing activity. Here, for example, the fieldworker may look closely at something that surprises or runs counter to her expectations, again paying attention to incidents, feeling tones, impressions, and interactions, both verbal and nonverbal.

Similarly, field researchers may use their own personal experience of events that please, shock, or even anger them to identify matters worth writing about. A fieldworker's strong reaction to a particular event may well signal that others in the setting react similarly. Or a fieldworker may experience deeply contradictory emotions-for example, simultaneously feeling deep sympathy and repulsion for what he observes in the field. These feelings may also reflect contradictory pressures experienced by those in the setting.

To use personal reactions effectively, however, requires care and reflection. Many beginning ethnographers take note of such experiences, but tend to judge the actions of people in the setting, for better or worse, by their own rather than the others' standards and values. Prejudging incidents in outsiders' terms makes it difficult to cultivate empathetic understanding and to discover what import local people give to them (see chapter 5). The field researcher should be alive to the possibility that local people, especially those with very different cultures, may respond to events in sharply contrasting ways. For example, an ethnographer in a Chokwe village may react with alarm to an unconscious man drugged by an herbal drink in a trial-for-sorcery court, only to realize that others are laughing at the spectacle because they know he will soon regain consciousness.

Yet fieldworkers should not go to the other extreme and attempt to manage strong personal reactions by denial or simply by omitting them from fieldnotes. Rather, we recommend that the ethnographer register her feelings, then step back and use this experience to increase sensitivity to the experiences of others in the setting. Are others in the setting similarly surprised, shocked, pleased, or angered by an event? If so, under what conditions do these reactions occur, and how did those affected cope with the incidents and persons involved? Whether an ethnographer is working in a foreign or familiar culture, she needs to avoid assuming that others respond as she does. Third, field researchers should move beyond their personal reactions to an open sensitivity to what those in the setting experience and react to as "significant" or "important." The sorts of actions, interactions, and events that catch the attention of people habitually in the setting may provide clues to these concerns. The field researcher watches for the sorts of things that are meaningful to those studied. Specifically: What do they stop and watch? What do they talk and gossip about? What produces strong emotional responses for them? "Troubles" or "problems" often generate deep concern and feelings. What kinds occur in the setting? How do people in the setting understand, interpret, and deal with such troubles or problems? Such "incidents" and "troubles" should move the field researcher to jot down "who did what" and "how others reacted." Since a researcher in an unfamiliar setting often pays close attention to others' actions in order to imitate and participate, she can augment her learning by

writing down what others do and how they respond. A follow-up strategy that we strongly recommend is to talk to those involved and those witnessing the incident about their impressions.

In this way, the field researcher attends not only to the activities local people engage in but also to the particular meanings they attribute to these activities. She seeks and discerns local knowledge and meanings, not so much by directly asking actors what matters to them, but more indirectly and inferentially by looking for the perspectives and concerns embedded and expressed in naturally occurring interaction. A field researcher, for example, might give close attention to evaluations and distinctions made by members in the course of their daily activities. By way of illustration, those in a work setting may regularly contrast "good" workers and "bad" workers. By noting such distinctions, the researcher learns something about what matters to those in the setting. In addition, by attending closely to how, in conversation, people apply these distinctions to particular workers, the fieldworker may learn how these reputations become resources used to find meaning.

In this sense, the ethnographer is concerned not with members' indigenous meanings simply as static categories but with how members of settings invoke those meanings in specific relations and interactions. This requires, then, not just that the ethnographer describe interactions, but that she consistently attend to "when, where, and according to whom" in shaping all fieldnote descriptions. Those in different institutional positions (e.g., supervisors and workers, staff and clients), for example, may evaluate different workers as "good" (or "bad") and may do so by invoking different evaluative criteria. Indigenous meanings, then, rarely hold across the board but rather reflect particular positions and practical concerns that need to be captured in writing fieldnotes.

When first venturing into a setting, field researchers should "cast their nets" broadly; they should observe with an eye to writing about a range of incidents and interactions. Yet forays into a setting must not be viewed as discrete, isolated occasions that have little or no bearing on what will be noted the next time. Rather, observing and writing about certain kinds of events foreshadow what will be noticed and described next. Identifying one incident as noteworthy should lead to considering what other incidents are similar and hence worth noting. As fieldwork progresses and becomes more focused on a set of issues, fieldworkers often selfconsciously collect a series of incidents and interactions of the "same type" and look for regularities or patterns in them.

Even when looking for additional examples of a similar event, the field researcher is open to and indeed searches for different forms of that event, for variations from or exceptions to an emerging pattern. Beginning field researchers are often discouraged by such discoveries, fearing that exceptions to a pattern they have noted will cast doubt upon their understanding of the setting. This need not be the case, although noting differences and variations should prod the field researcher to change, elaborate, or deepen her earlier understanding of the setting. The field researcher, for example, may want to consider and explore possible causes or conditions that would account for difference or variation: Are the different actions the result of the preferences and temperaments of those involved or of their different understandings of the situation because they have different positions in the local context? Or the ethnographer may begin to question how she decided similarity and difference in the first place, perhaps coming to see how an event that initially appeared to be different is actually similar on a deeper level. In these ways, exploring what at least initially seem to be differences and variations will lead to richer, more textured descriptions and encourage more subtle, grounded analyses in a final ethnography (see chapter 7).

In summary, ethnographic attention involves balancing two different orientations. Especially on first entering the field, the researcher identifies significant characteristics gleaned from her first impressions and personal reactions. With greater participation in some local social world, however, the ethnographer becomes more sensitive to the concerns and perspectives of those in the setting. She increasingly appreciates how people have already predescribed their world in their own terms for their/own purposes and projects. A sensitive ethnographer draws upon her own reactions to identify issues of possible importance to people in the setting but privileges their "insider" descriptions and categories over her own "outsider" views.

TWO ILLUSTRATIONS OF JOTTINGS

In order to convey how field researchers actually write and use jottings, we provide two illustrations. Both focus on scenes, observed actions, and dialogue rather than on evaluation or psychological interpretation. The two researchers approach interaction in their settings in very different ways, noting different sensory and interpretive details.

"they're not very good"

The following jotted notes focus on meeting a would-be promotor of Spanish-language rock music in a club:

> Jorge = at table   doesn't introduce me to anyone
> now only speaks in Spanish
>   chit chat - who's playing
>   "they're not very good" - apology

These jottings preserve a number of incidents in the club, including where Jorge is seated and the fact that he has switched to Spanish after having previously spoken English. A general sequence of events is laid out: Jorge does not introduce the observer, who has come in his company; there is general conversation ("chit chat"); someone (not specified here) asks "who's playing" (presumably the name of the band is given, but is mentally marked as easily remembered and not recorded); someone (not the field worker!) makes an evaluative comment about the band, and the observer notes her sense that this remark was an "apology" (for having brought her to this club), thus providing interactional context for interpreting its import.

"you can call his doctor"

The following jottings concern a woman who is seeking a temporary restraining order against her two landlords, one of whom is not present in the courtroom. The landlord who is present disputes the woman's testimony that the missing landlord is "well enough to walk" and hence could have come to court:

> you can call his doctor at UCLA and
> he can verify all this
> I just don't call people on the
> telephone - courts don't operate that way –
> it has to be on paper or
> (in person)

These jottings represent a fragment of dialogue between the landlord defendant (the first two lines) and the judge (the last four lines; see chapter 3 for the full fieldnote written from this jotting). The jotting reflects an interest in the judge's insistence on legal procedure: he as judge ("courts") will not independently investigate litigants' claims; rather, litigants are responsible for presenting any evidence in the courtroom. Note that only spoken words are recorded; specific speakers are not indicated but can be identified by content or from memory. The words represent direct quotes, written down as accurately as possible when spoken; an exception occurs in the last line, where the observer missed the judge's exact words ending this sentence (because of jotting down the preceding dialogue) and inserted a paraphrase "in person" (indicated by parentheses).

JOTTINGS AS MNEMONIC DEVICES: WHAT WORDS AND PHRASES?

Each of the jottings in the previous illustrations is "a mnemonic word or phrase [written] to fix an observation or to recall what someone has just said" (Clifford 1990:5 1). As preludes to full written notes, jottings capture bits of talk and action from which the fieldworker can begin to sketch social scenes, recurring incidents, local expressions and terms, members distinctions and accounts, dialogue among those present, and his own conversations.

Making jottings, however, is not only a writing activity; it is also a mind-set. Learning to jot down details which remain sharp and which easily transform into vivid descriptions on the page results, in part, from envisioning scenes as written. Writing jottings that evoke memories requires learning what can be written about and how. We have found the following recommendations helpful for making jottings useful for producing vivid, evocatively descriptive fieldnotes.

First, jot down details of what you sense are key components of observed scenes or interactions. Field researchers record immediate fragments of action and talk to serve as focal points for later writing accounts of these events in as much detail as can be remembered. The field researcher studying Spanish rock music, for example, jotted that the promoter she accompanied to a club "now only speaks in Spanish" while he had spoken English in their prior,

less public contacts. She also wrote down a key direct quote - "they're not very good" - along with the term "apology" to remind her of the context and meaning of this remark.

Second, avoid making statements characterizing what people do that rely on generalizations. Many novice field researchers initially tend to jot down impressionistic, opinionated words which lend themselves better to writing evaluative summaries than to composing detailed, textured descriptions. For example, it is problematic for a field researcher to characterize the way someone works as "inefficient." Such cryptic, evaluative jottings are likely to evoke only a vague memory when the fieldworker later on attempts to write a full description of the social scene. Such jottings also convey nothing of how people in the setting experience and evaluate worker performance. Similarly, jottings that a probation officer "lectures about school" and that a youth is "very compliant-always agrees" during a probation interview are overly generalized; such summary statements are not helpful for writing close descriptions of how probation officer and youth actually talked and acted during a particular encounter.

Third, jot down concrete sensory details about actions and talk. Field researchers note concrete details of everyday life which show rather than tell about people's behavior (see chapter 4). By incorporating such details, jottings may provide records of actual words, phrases, or dialogue that the field researcher wants to preserve in as accurate a form as possible. It is not enough, for example, to characterize an emotional outburst simply as "angry words." Rather the ethnographer should jot the actually spoken words, along with sensual details such as gestures and facial expressions suggesting that the speaker's emotional experience involved "anger." Jotting these words should evoke recall not only of the details about what happened but also of the specific circumstances or context involved: who was present, what they said or did, what occurred immediately before and after, etc. In this way jottings may be used to reconstruct the actual order or sequence of talk, topics, or actions on some particular occasion.

Beginning ethnographers sometimes attempt to identify motives or internal states when recording observed actions. Having witnessed an angry exchange, for example, one is often tempted to focus on the source or reason for this emotional outburst, typically by imputing motive (e.g., some underlying feeling such as "insecurity") to one or both of the parties involved. Such psychologized explanations, however, highlight only one of a number of possible internal states that may accompany or contribute to the observed actions. Anger could, for example, result from frustration, fatigue, the playing out of some local power struggle, or other hidden factors; the ethnographer who simply witnesses a scene has no way of knowing which factors are involved."

Field researchers do not ignore emotions; they may well note feelings such as anger, sadness, joy, pleasure, disgust, loneliness, but they do so as such emotions are expressed and attended to by those in the setting. For example, in describing the emotional consequences of routinely "having to say no" to clients coming to a HUD office in desperate need of housing, an ethnographer wrote the following:

> Laura to me, slouched down on her desk, head in hands: "Sometimes I just don't feel like helping people, you know? You have to say no so often. That's a big part of this program. It gets to you psychologically. (How?) I didn't study psychology, but it affects you" (rolling her eyes).

Here the ethnographer writes not to explain why this HUD worker experienced or reported these emotions (although she herself points to a feature of her work - "You have to say no so often"), but to highlight how she expressed her feelings. He does so not only by direct quotation in her own words but also by providing vivid details of her body posture ("slouched," "head in hands") and by noting her accenting eye movements.

When witnessing social scenes, then, the ethnographer's task is to use his own sensibilities to learn how others understand and evaluate what happened, how they assess internal states and determine psychological motivation. Useful jottings should correspondingly reflect and further this process of writing textured, detailed descriptions of interactions rather than of individual motivation.

Fourth, jot down sensory details which you could easily forget but which you deem to be key observations about the scene. Jottings are devices intended to encourage the recall of scenes and events in the construction of some broader, fuller fieldnote account. Since jottings must later jog the memory, each field researcher must learn which kinds of details they best remember and make jottings about those features and qualities they easily forget. Thus, fieldworkers come to develop their own jotting styles reflecting their distinctive recall propensities, whether visual, kinetic, or auditory. Some focus on trying to capture evocative pieces of broader scenes, while some jot down almost exclusively dialogue; others record nonverbal expression of voice, gesture, movement; still others note visual details of color and shape. Through trial and error, field researchers learn what most helps them to recall field experiences once they sit down to write up full notes.

Jottings may serve more generally to remind the ethnographer of what was happening at a particular time, in this sense providing a marker around which to collect other remembered incidents. For example, one field researcher teaching in a Headstart Program described a series of incidents that occurred while supervising children playing in a sandbox. Included in her jottings but not in her full fieldnotes was the phrase, "Three new bags of sand were delivered to the sandbox." In discussing this scratch note later she commented: "I don't think it is so important as I would want to include it in my notes because I think it is just - I wrote it down to remind me more what the day was like, what was happening."

Fifth, jottings can be used to signal general impressions and feelings, even if the fieldworker is unsure of their significance at the moment. In some cases, the ethnographer may have only a vague intuitive sense about how or why something may be important. Such feelings might signal a key element that in the future could enable the field researcher to see how incidents "fit together" in meaningful patterns. For example, at another point the ethnographer in the Headstart Program made a jotting about a student, "Nicole showing trust in me," which she decided not to write up in her full notes: "It was just an overall feeling I had throughout the day; ... at that point when I wrote the jottings I couldn't remember an exact incident." But this jotting served as a mental note, subsequently stimulating her to appreciate (and record) the following incident as a revealing example of "children trusting teachers":

> At one point, Nicole got on the swings without her shoes on and asked me for a push. I told her that I would push her after she went and put her shoes on. Nicole paused and looked at me. I repeated my statement, telling her that I would save her swing for her while she was gone. Nicole then got off of the swing and put her shoes on. When she came back to the swing, I praised her listening skills and gave her a hug. I then gave her a push. I found this incident to be a significant accomplishment for Nicole, as usually she doesn't listen to the teachers."

Having thought about whether or not to write this jotting up as full notes made this student sensitive to the issue of "trust." The jotting later acted as a stimulus to observe and write up a "concrete event" involving such "trust." In summary, by participating in a setting with an eye to making jottings, an ethnographer experiences events as potential subjects for writing. Like any other writer, an ethnographer learns to recognize potential writing material and to see and hear it in terms of written descriptions. Learning to observe in order to make jottings thus is keyed to both the scene and to the page. Ethnographers learn to experience through the senses in anticipation of writing: to remember dialogue and movement like an actor; to see colors, shapes, textures, and spatial relations as a painter or photographer; and to sense moods, rhythms, and tone of voice like a poet. Details experienced through the senses turn into jottings with active rather than passive verbs, sensory rather than analytic adjectives, and verbatim rather than summarized dialogue.

REFLECTIONS: WRITING AND ETHNOGRAPHIC MARGINALITY

While a primary goal of ethnography is immersion in the life-worlds and everyday experiences of a group of people, the ethnographer inevitably remains in significant ways an outsider to the worlds of those studied. Immersion is not merging; the field researcher who seeks to "get close to" others usually does not become one of these others but rather continues to be a researcher interested in and pursuing research issues, albeit in close proximity to the ordinary exigencies of life that these others experience and react to (see Bittner 1988; Emerson 1987). The ethnographer, then, stays at least a partial stranger to the worlds of the studied, despite sharing in many aspects of their daily lives. The student-ethnographer working in a bookstore noted that the pull toward involvement as an insider was particularly strong and the researcher's stance difficult to maintain:

> There were times when I wanted to be free to listen to other individuals talk or to watch their activities, but friends and acquaintances were so "distracting" coming up and wanting to talk that I wasn't able to. Also, there was this concern on my part that, as I got to know some of the staff people better, their qualities as human beings would become so endearing that I was afraid that I would lose my sociological perspective-I didn't want to feel like in studying them, I was exploiting them.

Field researchers respond to these tensions in a variety of ways. Some try to maintain a detached, observational attitude even toward people whom they like and respect, seeking to keep research commitments somewhat separate from personal attachments. Others find themselves unable to sustain an invariably watching, distancing stance toward people they are drawn to and toward events which compellingly involve them. These ethnographers then take time out, either implicitly or self-consciously, by not observing and/or writing fieldnotes about selected portions of their field experience while continuing to do so about other portions. And finally, some ethnographers

may decide that the relationships they have formed in the field are more valuable and enduring than any research product, and eventually they come to abandon entirely the project as research activity.

But the ethnographer remains a stranger as long as, and to the extent that, she retains commitment to the exogenous project of studying or understanding the lives of others - as opposed to the indigenous project of simply living a life in one way or another. When living in a village on a long-term basis, the ethnographer may feel drawn into daily, intimate relations as a neighbor or perhaps even as a part of a family. On these occasions she may participate "naturally" - without a writing orientation or analytic reflection - in ongoing social life. But on other occasions, she participates in local scenes in ways directed toward making observations and collecting data. Here her actions incorporate an underlying commitment to write down and ultimately transform into "data" the stuff and nuances of that life. In this way, efforts to observe in order to write about shared experiences and witnessed events induce a distinctive ethnographic stance. In this sense, we can suggest that the ethnographer's strangeness is created and maintained exactly by writing fieldnotes; such notes reflect and realize this socially close but experientially separate stance.

This ethnographic marginality is often manifested interactionally when the fieldworker ceases simply doing what other people are doing and begins openly writing about these doings. In this sense, overtly writing jottings; is a critical, consequential ethnographic activity, publicly proclaiming and reaffirming fieldworkers' research commitments and hence their status as outsiders, as persons in the setting who have clearly delineated tasks and purposes that differ from those of members. Writing down jottings not only reminds ethnographers of their marginal social standing in settings but creates it as well, increasing immediate feelings of isolation and alienation.

I It should come as no surprise, then, that many ethnographers, both students and experienced practitioners, feel deeply ambivalent about jottings. Jottings interfere with their interactions with people in the field; they create difficulties in interacting with others while at the same time observing and writing down what is happening. Indeed, students who come back from the field without jottings usually report that taking jottings on the spot would have made others uncomfortable. These students, then, directly experience the distracting, alienating consequences of jotting notes.

Most ethnographers, however, try to balance and juggle these tendencies, sometimes participating without immediate thought about writing down what is occurring, sometimes temporarily withdrawing to some private place to write covert jottings, at other times visibly jotting notes. Several practical writing conflicts arise from these opposing pressures. The inclination to experience daily events either as a "natural" participant or as a researcher shows up in writing as shifts in point of view as well as in varying kinds of details considered significant for inscription. Even where and when to jot notes depends on the person's involvement at a particular moment as a participant or observer. Whether a researchers - neighbor in the village and researcher-as-intern on a job, the tension between the present-oriented day-to-day role and the future-oriented ethnographer identity appears in the practical choices in writing both jottings and more complete notes.

In sum, in most social settings writing down what is taking place as it occurs is a strange, marginalizing activity, marking the writer as an observer rather than as a full, ordinary participant. But independently of the reactions of others, participating in order to write leads one to assume the mind-set of an observer, a mind-set in which one constantly steps outside of scenes and events to assess their "write-able" qualities. It may be for this reason that some ethnographers try to put writing out of mind entirely by opting for the more fully experiential style of fieldwork. But this strategy puts off rather than avoids the marginalizing consequences of writing, for lived experience must eventually be turned into observations and reduced to textual form.

Chapter Six: Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing

At some point - after weeks or perhaps months of writing notes - the ethnographer needs to draw back from the field, to cease actively writing notes. He must shift gears and turn to the written record he has produced with an eye to transforming this collection of materials into writings that speak to wider, outside audiences. Efforts to analyze now become intense, concentrated, and comprehensive: the fieldworker begins to sift systematically through the many pages of fieldnote accounts of discrete and often loosely related incidents and happenings, looking to identify threads that can be woven together to tell a story (or a number of stories) about the observed social world. The ultimate goal is to produce a coherent, focused analysis of some aspect of the social life that has been observed

and recorded, an analysis that is comprehensible to readers who are not directly acquainted with the social world at issue.

The prospect of creating coherent, focused analyses from a mass of fieldnote data, which by now can easily number several hundred pages, overwhelms many students - even those who have been writing analytic commentaries all along. But fieldworkers have found that the task can be handled effectively by recognizing several distinct practices involved in carrying out analysis.

Initially, writing fieldnotes gives way to reading them: the ethnographer reads through all fieldnotes as a complete corpus, taking in the entire record of the field experience as it has evolved over time. He begins to elaborate and refine earlier insights and hunches by subjecting this broader collection of fieldnotes to close, intensive reflection and analysis.

Second, the researcher combines this close reading with procedures for a " analytically coding fieldnotes on an ongoing basis. Ethnographic coding involves line-by-line categorization of specific notes. In this process, the researcher's stance toward the notes changes: the notes, and the persons and events they recount, become textual objects (although linked to personal memories and intuitions) to be considered and examined with a series of analytic and presentational possibilities in mind.

Qualitative analytic coding usually proceeds in two different phases. In open coding the, ethnographer reads fieldnotes line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate, In focused coding the fieldworker subjects fieldnotes to fine-grained, line-by-line analysis on the basis of topics that have been identified as of particular interest. Here, the ethnographer uses a smaller set of promising ideas and categories to provide the major topic and themes for the final ethnography.

Reading through and coding fieldnotes on a line-by-line basis inundates the ethnographer with a mass of ideas, insights, and connections. While continuing to code, she elaborates these insights by writing theoretical memos. Early on in the process of analyzing data, fieldworkers write initial memos on a series of discrete phenomena, topics, or categories. Later, as the fieldworker develops a clearer sense of the ideas or themes she wants to pursue, memos take on a more focused character; they relate or integrate what were previously separate pieces of data and analytic points. These integrative memos seek to clarify and link analytic themes and categories.

The analytic practices that we present in this chapter draw heavily from methods developed by sociologists taking the "grounded theory" approach to analyzing qualitative data. Grounded theorists give priority to developing rather than to verifying analytic propositions. They maintain that if the researcher minimizes commitment to received and preconceived theory, he is more likely to "discover" original theories in his data. By making frequent comparisons across the data, the researcher can develop, modify, and extend theoretical propositions so that they fit the data. At the actual working level, the researcher begins by coding data in close, systematic ways so that he can generate analytic categories. He further elaborates, extends, and integrates these categories by writing theoretical memos.

The grounded theory approach depicts analysis as a clearcut, almost autonomous activity. In emphasizing "discovering" theory in fieldnotes and other qualitative data, practitioners of grounded theory treat sets of already collected fieldnote data as unproblematic starting points; they implicitly assume that such fieldnotes can be analyzed independently of the analytic processes and theoretical commitments of the ethnographer who wrote them. In contrast, we insist that data do not stand alone; rather analysis pervades all phases of the research enterprise - as the researcher makes observations, records them in fieldnotes, codes these notes in analytic categories, and finally develops explicit theoretical propositions. Viewed in this way, analysis is at once inductive and deductive, like someone who is simultaneously creating and solving a puzzle, or like a carpenter alternately changing the shape of a door and then the shape of the door frame to obtain a better fit.

In this chapter, we develop an approach to analyzing fieldnotes based on these ideas. Initially we suggest ways to begin the analysis of fieldnotes: close reading, open coding, and writing initial memos. We then consider procedures helpful in carrying out more specific, fine-grained analyses: focused coding and writing integrative memos. While we discuss reading, coding, and memoing as discrete steps in analytically processing fieldnotes, we want to emphasize that the researcher is not rigidly confined to one procedure at a time or to undertaking them in any particular order. Rather, she moves from a general reading to a close coding to writing intensive analyses and then back again. Said another way, from reading comes coding and written memos which direct and redirect attention to issues and possibilities that require further reading of the same or additional fieldnotes.

READING FIELDNOTES AS A DATA SET

The ethnographer begins concentrated analysis and writing by reading her fieldnotes in a new manner, looking closely and systematically at what has been observed and recorded. In so doing, she treats the fieldnotes as a data set, reviewing, reexperiencing, and reexamining everything that has been written down, while self-consciously seeking to identify themes, patterns, and variations within this record.

We strongly recommend reading line-by-line through as many pages of fieldnotes as possible, at least until coding seems to generate no new ideas, themes, or issues. Reading notes as a whole and in the order they were written confers a number of benefits. First, the fieldworker can perceive changes in her relations with those in the field over time. The gradual movement from distance to rapport, for example, may only become apparent when reading in a matter of hours a record of events which took place over weeks and months. Second, the ethnographer gains fresh insights as she changes in her own understanding and interpretation of people and events by reviewing the completed set of notes. Based upon what has subsequently been learned, initial interpretations and commentaries now reencountered may seem naive or erroneous. This contrast between initial and later understanding is often striking when working in a totally unfamiliar culture and language. The fieldworker begins to reinterpret the import and significance of events and actions in novel ways. She may feel that foreign concepts and terms have no equivalent in English. And patterns and tendencies recognized when reading all of the notes may suggest alternative interpretations of actions or talk previously understood in another way. Finally, working with the complete set of fieldnotes allows the ethnographer to take in for the first time, in a relatively concentrated time stretch, everything that she has been able to observe and record. Reading notes as a whole encourages recognizing patterns and making comparisons. She begins to notice how an incident is like others in previously reviewed notes. Conversely, she also begins to note important differences between incidents previously seen as similar.

To undertake an analytically motivated reading of one's fieldnotes requires the ethnographer to approach her notes as if they had been written by a stranger. Indeed, many fieldworkers find it difficult to achieve the sort of emotional distance required to subject to analysis those with whom she has been deeply immersed. Some fieldworkers report discomfort at "examining under a microscope" the lives of people with whom they have become deeply involved and in many cases care about. For some, analysis comes close to an act of betrayal; many fieldworkers report having taken several weeks or months after they stopped writing fieldnotes before they could begin their analyses. Indeed, a number of ethnographers find that relations with those in the setting have become primary. In that case the ethnographer may set the project aside for years or even abandon it altogether. Some researchers resolve this internal conflict by working collaboratively with people in the setting, even occasionally coauthoring their writing with a local assistant.

Although the deliberate and self-conscious analysis ethnography entails may contribute to feelings of estrangement, it may be helpful to remember that making sense of "what's going on" is an activity that members of the setting engage in and that it is one of the usual and expected, activities of social life. And it is also sometimes helpful to remember that while our analysis of patterns of social life in the field site is ordinarily for audiences and purposes outside of it, we seek to convey an appreciative understanding of the world and lives of persons under study.

ASKING QUESTIONS OF FIELDNOTES

Coding begins with the ethnographer mentally asking questions of specific pieces of fieldnote data. In asking such questions, the ethnographer draws on a wide variety of resources, including direct experience of life and events in the setting; sensitivity toward the concerns and orientations of members; memory of other specific incidents described elsewhere in one's notes; one's own prior experience and insights gained in other settings; and the concepts and orientation provided by one's own profession or discipline. Nothing is out of bounds!

But the secret of coding lies in turning the answers to these questions into a distinctive kind of writing - a word or short phrase that captures and signals what is going on in a piece of data in a way that links it to some more general analytic issue. Such writing is integrally linked to the processes of thinking and interpreting whereby the ethnographer "comes up with" a code to write down. In turn, writing down codes - putting an idea or intuition into a concrete, relatively concise word or phrase helps stimulate, shape, and constrain the fieldworker's thinking and reflection. This mutually necessary relationship between reflection and writing is expressed in John Forester's (n.d.) apt phrase, "thinking with your fingers."

We have found the following sorts of questions useful in beginning to examine specific fieldnotes:

- What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
- How, exactly, do they do this? What specific means and/or strategies do they use?
- How do members talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?
- What assumptions are they making?
- What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes?
- Why did I include them?

Such questions reflect and advance several specific concerns linked to our approach to ethnography and writing fieldnotes. First, these questions give priority to processes rather than to "causes" or internal psychological "motives." Specifically, this priority means asking questions that identify what is occurring and in what order, rather than "why" questions that ask what is causing or producing some outcomes. In this sense, we view open coding as a means for developing interpretations or analytic themes rather than causal explanations.

Second, these questions reflect a sensitivity to the practical concerns, conditions, and constraints that actors confront and deal with in their everyday lives and actions. This concern with the practical or the pragmatic requires paying attention to the mundane, ordinary, and taken-for-granted rather than looking only or primarily at the dramatic or exceptional action or event.

Finally, these questions can help specify the meanings and points of view of those under study. We try to frame questions that get at how members see and experience events, at what they view as important and significant, at how they describe, classify, analyze, and evaluate their own and others' situations and activities. Yet, to get at these matters, it is initially crucial to clarify what the ethnographer felt was significant about what occurred by asking: "Why did I include this item in my fieldnotes?" It is then important to ask whether or not and on what basis members seem to attribute this same significance to events or incidents. These procedures keep the ethnographer aware of the complexities involved in pursuing members' meanings; in other words, they remind the ethnographer that there is no "pure" way to capture what is important to members, their meanings or points of view. Rather, the ethnographer always writes her interpretation of what she feels is meaningful and important to them.

Such questions will lead to codes which the ethnographer writes in the margins of his fieldnotes. The following example, from a student whose ethnography examined her work as an usher, illustrates this process:

customer types: late arrivals	Dance audiences do tend to come right at curtain, so we have to hold many out. Tonight was no dif-
holding out audience members	ferent. I'd say we had about 50 people waiting in the lobby through the first number... One man
waiters: irate	we held out was irate. He had already been in but had come out for some reason. When we closed the door, he began yelling at the door attendant. He said
latecomer claims exception	he was already in-not like these other people who were "LATE." He was not late and shouldn't be
mgr intervenes	treated like them! The house manager came over and smiled and told him in a quiet voice why he
passing the buck	was being held out-that it was requested by the dancers. He calmed down but was still angry. He waited without another word, except when I came
calming latecomers *keeping occupied* *distracting*	around. I went around giving out programs so they could read something and so the ushers wouldn!t have to waste time doing that when these people charged their doors. I also asked people if I could tell them which aisle to go to so as to alleviate con- fusion for the door attendant. When I got to this man and asked him if he wanted me to tell him which door to enter through, he said in a huff that he had already been in and knew where to go.
smiling *minimizing the wait*	Other people were just as irritated. I just smiled and told them it would just be a few minutes. I think that calmed them a little, because the exasperated look left their faces.

This student ethnographer focused on the practical situation of ushers, implicitly asking how ushers understood and made sense of behavior and events and how they interacted with one another and with customers. Specifically, in the code "late arrivals" she identified the practical work consequences of the inevitable tendency for some ticket holders to come late. Furthermore, the codes "holding out audience members" and "calming latecomers" identify specific processes for dealing with and managing latecomers as practical work problems. The ethnographer then asked herself how these activities were actually done by ushers, which led to a series of more specific codes for "calming," e.g., "keeping occupied," "distracting"," smiling", "minimizing the wait."

These codes begin to identify and elaborate a variety of analytic distinctions. For example, the code "late arrivals" names a particular "type of customer"; in framing "late arrivals" as a "type," she asserts that coming late is a normal, routine event in this setting and that "late arrivals" are one among a range of customer types. In identifying one customer type, this code raises the possibility that other customer types exist and hence opens the question of just what these other "customer types" might be. That is, the process here is a dialectical one that consists of asking, "Of what more general category is this an instance?" In answering this question, the field researcher may draw upon a wide variety of experiences and different sorts of knowledge: her own experience as an usher, her awareness that dealing with people who come late is a practical matter that ushers must routinely confront, her experiences as someone who has come late to a performance, and her familiarity with sociological thinking about waiting as a key to power differences (e.g., Schwartz 1975).

But while latecomers are expected at dance performances, the code "irate waiters" distinguishes an audience type, a latecomer who is a source of trouble and special concern. The code "latecomer claims exception" identifies both the responses with which ushers have to deal and the categories and distinctions advanced by this particular latecomer. The next codes - "mgr intervenes," "passing the buck," "keeping occupied," and "distracting" - identify additional forms of "backup" responses. These responses include the manager's efforts to placate the disgruntled patron, and the writer's attempts to take waiting audience members' minds off the delay.

Codes, then, take a specific event, incident, or feature and relate it to other events, incidents, or features, implicitly distinguishing this one from others. By comparing this event with "like" others, one can begin to identify more general analytic dimensions or categories. One can do this by asking what more general category this event belongs to, or by thinking about specific contrasts to the current event. For example, the response of "holding out" customers would stimulate a concern with the reverse situation (e.g., "taking latecomers in during a performance") and, hence, would suggest looking for observations describing how this would have to be managed.

While many of the codes used here involve members' concerns and specific terms, we also see attention to members' meanings in the code "latecomer claims exemption." This code tries to capture the actual distinction that this audience member advances in trying to get back in to see the performance - that some people arrived after the show had begun, but he had arrived before, was now trying to reenter and, therefore, was "not late" and should be treated differently than those in the first category. In the staff response, we see the practical irrelevance of this distinction; to the staff, what presumably matters are not considerations of justice and fairness (such that "real latecomers" should be treated differently from those who had to leave momentarily and hence were returning) but the disruption that would be caused by anyone entering at this time.

Through an initial line-by-line reading of her fieldnotes, this student began to clarify the socially ordered work activities of an usher for dance audiences. As she continues through her notes, asking the question, "What are the processes by which the ushers accomplish their work?" she will generate more codes; some will be further instances or elaborations of earlier codes, while others will suggest entirely different themes and lines of analysis. Having identified, for example, "latecomers" as one group of dance audience members, she will proceed through her notes looking for other member types or categories. Similarly, having a code, "waiters: irate," implying that getting irate is only one response in the general category of audience responses, she could go on to look for others. She could also wonder: this goes on here, but does it always to on? What are the conditions under which it occurs?

Similarly, the student may identify an order or natural sequence of events or stages that make up the larger activity. She can further develop themes along these lines by continuing to look for expected or routine events that are problematic at each stage and the kinds of skills and practices used to respond to them. For example, the strategies noted in the codes - "keeping [customers] occupied," "distracting:' and "smiling" suggest that she look for further instances to illustrate the general issue of ways that ushers manage, respond, control, or cope with different types of audience members.

In creating codes, the fieldworker is engaged in an analytic process; she seeks to move beyond the particular event or situation in the fieldnotes to capture some more general theoretical dimension or issue. While it is often useful to

begin coding by focusing on a term in the notes - whether the fieldworker's or a member's - the fieldworker must transform that term so that it references a more general category. Yet, at the other extreme, it is not useful to use very general categories as codes. For example, it would not be helpful to code as "social control" staff procedures for searching residents' rooms for "buzzes" and other contraband in a reform school. This category is too general and without specific connection to the events described in the notes. But, a code like "staff control-room searches" would categorize these staff activities as a specific kind of control and perhaps stimulate the field researcher to think about and identify other forms of "staff control."

OPEN CODING

While subjecting fieldnotes to this careful, minute reading, the ethnographer begins to sift through and categorize small segments of the fieldnote record by writing words and phrases that identify and name specific analytic dimensions and categories, as these are suggested by the recorded observations. Such codings can be written in the margin next to the pertinent fieldnote, on a separate sheet of paper (with some marking of the location of the relevant fieldnote), or in a "comment" field in some word processing programs or a keyword field in a text database. In such line-by-line coding, the ethnographer entertains all analytic possibilities; he attempts to capture as many ideas and themes as time allows but always stays close to what has been written down in the fieldnote. He does so without regard for how or whether ideas and categories will ultimately be used, whether other relevant observations have been made, or how they will fit together.

Coding fieldnotes in this way differs fundamentally from coding in quantitative research. In quantitative coding, the researcher proceeds deductively by constructing questionnaires with categories derived from theory. He fits peoples' responses to the questionnaire into the already established categories in order to determine the frequencies of events within those categories. Qualitative research proceeds inductively by writing fieldnotes that reflect the significance of events and experiences to those in the setting. Qualitative coding is a way of opening up avenues of inquiry: the researcher identifies and develops concepts and analytic insights through close examination of and reflection on fieldnote data. Such coding is not fundamentally directed at putting labels on bits and pieces of data so that what "goes together" can be collected in a single category; the ethnographer is indeed interested in categories, but less as a way to sort data than as a way to name, distinguish, and identify the conceptual import and significance of particular observations. In contrast to quantitative coding, then, in qualitative coding we identify, elaborate, and refine analytic insights from and for the interpretation of data.

This view of qualitative coding implies that the same set of fieldnotes could be coded differently by ethnographers with different theoretical sensitivities and commitments. Disciplinary background and interests in particular will exert a deep influence on analytic coding: anthropologists working with the concept of culture, for example, might formulate different analytic categories than folklorists interested in performance and the dynamics of performer-audience interaction. Theoretical differences within a discipline may produce almost as marked variations in coding. For example, two sociological field researchers studying households might well write and code their fieldnotes quite differently (even, we would argue, were they to carry out their studies in the same setting); one might focus her coding on the consequences of economic policy on household relations and the division of labor, the other on women's invisible work in families. In sum, there is no single, correct way to code fieldnotes inasmuch as ethnographers ultimately decide which among a number of possible patterns and ideas, including member concerns and interests, to choose as a focus.

In open coding, the ethnographer should not use pre-established categories to read fieldnotes; rather he should read with an eye toward identifying events described in the notes that could themselves become the basis of categorization. Nor should code categories be avoided because they do not fit with the fieldworker's initial "'focus"; this focus will change as the researcher moves through the notes. Rather, the ethnographer should seek to generate as many codes as possible, at least initially, without considering possible relevance either to established concepts in one's discipline or to a primary theoretical focus for analyzing and organizing this ethnography. All ideas and concepts that can be linked to or generated from specific fieldnotes should be treated as of possible interest and should be framed and expressed as clearly and explicitly as possible. Hence, any particular code category need not necessarily connect with other codings or with other field data; integrating categories can come later, and one should not ignore or disregard codings because they suggest no obvious prospects for integration within a major focus or with other emerging categories.

By way of illustration, consider the following open coding of an incident from a support group for those taking care of family members afflicted with Alzheimer's disease:

trouble: memory loss;	Lucie says her husband is in good health, but his
bad driving	symptoms include memory loss and poor and dan-
dr does not "help"	gerous driving. The doctor does nothing to stop
asks advice	him from driving. She asks, "What does everyone
	else think?" Some other members say, "Change
	doctors, " Lucie explains the doctor is a friend of the
Jam pressures dr	family. Her son has stressed to the doctor that his
	father's driving is dangerous and they could be le-
med test --+ no results	gally involved. The doctor has done a catscan but
	there is no direction from that.
don't rely on dr	Pat, the group leader, recommends, "Take it into
cger to DMV	your own hands." She suggests that Lucie go to the
	DMV. Lou says she thinks there is a new law that
	states anyone with a mental deficiency, including
	Alzheimer's disease, is not supposed to drive. Lucie
no med dx	says, "But I don't have a name on it - that's what
	hinders action. I am so frustrated."
Advice: coalition w/dr	Vie says, -Isn't it important for the doctor to tell
	him not to drive?" Lucie says, "Why won't he do
	that? Maybe he's too close and he doesn't want to
	get involved." Lou: "What about Nicholson? He's
	a geriatric psychiatrist." Others suggest that she hide
practical remedy: deception	the car keys. Joey says, "You need to lie to him."
	Lucie says, "I must say I have been doing that." Joey
	says, "We all have." . . . Lucie says in terms of the
proposed remedy will not work	car keys, he knows there is a second set. Another
	woman says she talked with her husband and he
"talking to"	doesn't drive anymore. "I've done this. It is not
	working, " Someone says, "You need a good diag-
	nosis from a medical doctor." Lucie: "That's what I
	think." Others in the group agree.

Through these marginal codes the fieldworker has identified a variety of loosely related (or even unrelated) issues:

> • driving by Alzheimer's patients may be dangerous; family caregivers may have to actively manage those who insist on continuing to drive;
> • medical diagnoses may play a critical role in caregivers' efforts to manage patient activities;
> • caregivers may experience frustration with doctors who fail to be sensitive to and support family concerns;
> • support group members may suggest ways of getting around obstacles presented by doctors;
> • support group members may recommend various practical remedies that will prevent the person with Alzheimer's from driving.

Some of these codes reflect issues that the field researcher was interested in from the start: practical "troubles" and how people respond to or "remedy" such troubles (see Emerson and Messinger 1977). But many of these codes elaborate or specify a prior concept in original and unanticipated ways, e.g., "hiding the keys" as a practical remedy for dangerous driving. Other codes identify issues that are entirely unexpected; for example, doctors as both barriers and possible allies in handling unfit drivers.

By the time the ethnographer finishes reading the complete set of fieldnotes, her categories and themes will have fundamentally changed. And many of those categories will be dropped, in turn, as the researcher becomes more focused and aware of other, more interesting and recurrent issues. Furthermore, the process of generating codes may help clarify the meaning or import of previous as well as upcoming notes, for coding shapes and may alter the fieldworker's sense of what the notes "contained" in the first place. As one student commented: "You feel you know your notes because you wrote them, but the thing is you wrote them so long ago that it doesn't click."

Many students report that the evolving, seemingly unending character of coding initially proved discouraging and upsetting:

> The coding process, it happened once and then it happened again. I ended up coding again and again and again.... I had to get over the fact that I would do it the wrong way, or I wouldn't really find any good categories or things wouldn't relate to one another. I had to get over the fear of thinking that there was nothing there.

Coding is indeed uncertain, since it is a matter not simply of "discovering" what is in the data but more creatively of linking up specific events and observations to more general analytic categories and issues. Though researchers inevitably draw on concepts from their particular disciplines to develop linkages, coding keeps them focused on and anchored in their data. Often the researcher is already familiar with the key concepts and interests of her discipline and quickly sees how a given piece of data is relevant to them; but at other times the researcher may have to turn to specific writings that she has not previously read to find pertinent concepts. With time, practice, and wider exposure within a discipline, the researcher gains confidence that she can make analytic connections, and coding becomes less threatening and uncertain.

This open-ended approach can lead to anxiety on several different levels: some students fear they may never come up with a specific focus for a paper. Others, finding line-by-line coding time consuming and tedious, want to focus on a smaller number of themes in order to move ahead quickly, without a lot of "wasted" effort. Still others express concern over a procedure that, in seeking to generate so many different codes, contradicts what they have been taught about "logical" (i.e., carefully planned in advance) thinking and writing. Consider the comments of two students:

> I didn't have any categories before I began. I just was looking at the notes and jotting down codes, but it didn't seem that I was going about it in a very logical way. I went through two or three sets of notes and there were so many random, recurring themes and not anything that was organized.

But the fact that fieldnotes seem unwieldy, with codings leading in many different directions, is actually a good thing at this stage; such codings will suggest a myriad of possible issues and directions. Especially early on in the process of open coding, we recommend resisting these inclinations to focus on specific themes and topics while continuing to go through the fieldnote record and generating additional codes.

Yet, we have also found that continuous open coding can generate a great deal of frustration as ideas begin to coalesce; continuous open coding may actually discourage developing a specific focus when it would be possible and useful to do so. A strategy of selective open coding, in which the fieldworker uses these procedures at different times and with discrete sets of fieldnotes, may therefore be advisable. For example, one may begin with systematic open coding, but then after going through a significant portion, code remaining notes and recode previously coded notes selectively, focusing on "key," "rich," or "revealing" incidents.

WRITING INITIAL MEMOS

Inspired by reading and coding fieldnotes, the fieldworker begins to entertain a wide variety of ideas and insights about what is going on in the data. He can preserve and elaborate these ideas by writing initial theoretical memos. We encourage writing memos about as many ideas, issues, and leads as possible. While some of these ideas reflect concerns and insights the fieldworker brings to the reading, others grow out of reengaging the scenes and events described in the fieldnotes.

Memos written while coding fieldnotes are generally more analytic than in-process commentaries. At times, it is helpful to take a specific, "rich" fieldnote and explore its theoretical implications. The ethnographer studying family members caring for persons with Alzheimer's disease composed the following memo as a series of "observations" on a single, brief but "suggestive:' fieldnote excerpt:

> Fieldnote: During the support group Furniko comments on her husband's behavior: "Once in a while he is a pussycat" (laughter), "but he was a raging bull when the VNA came to give him a bath." She adds that recently he has fought her shaving him, but "this morning he let me do it:'
> Memo: Note how this description suggests that caregivers recognize that cooperation can vary independently of ability or condition for the person with Alzheimer's. Thus, it is one issue whether or not the person with Alzheimer's can feed or bathe him/herself, shave himself, etc.; the stance the person with Alzheimer's takes toward these helping/caring for activities is another matter.
> Note also how unpredictable these matters may be for the caregiver, bathing and shaving go smoothly on some occasions, but produce major hassles on others. And the caregiver does not seem able to find a reason or explanation for when and why one outcome rather than another occurs.

Furthermore, it may well be uncooperativeness or resistance in caregiving matters, rather than the amount or kind of help per se, that generates critical problems and burdens for caregivers. in this respect, the core of a caregiving management regime may rest in those devices and practices that inhibit, overcome, or sidestep resistance. With someone with Alzheimer's who is cooperative (or nonresistant)-in most matters-the caregiver can say: "I can still guide him:' Similarly, a person with Alzheimer's who is cooperative is one who can be "talked to:' i.e. convinced to make changes in his/her daily life, more or less "voluntarily."

In this memo the fieldworker identifies two initial, somewhat unrelated issues in the fieldnote: some caregivers report that patient cooperation can vary independently of physical condition and that cooperation may wax or wane unpredictably. In the final paragraph, she speculates on the possible relevance of one of these issues-cooperation (and its counterpart, resistance) - in shaping the broader pattern and course of family caregiving for persons with Alzheimer's disease.

At other times, the ethnographer can use an initial memo to try to name and specify a particular analytic issue that cuts across a number of particular incidents. Here, for example, one might try to identify and explore a general pattern or theme, drawing upon and attempting to link a number of disparate incidents or events. Along these lines, consider the following memo from a study of support and interaction among courtroom personnel (clerks, recorder, bailiff), which explores patterns of "sustaining community and insideness" in courtroom proceedings:

> Examples of "sustaining community and insideness" tend to occur during dead time (recess), on easy days with little business and also after session ends for the day... For example, after today's session, all of the participants except the judge, who always leaves, were actively looking for interactions. Their methods included making eye contact with each other, walking toward each other, making jokes, and interrupting conversations. In this way, information could be shared and opinion's could be aired.
> This category can be distinguished from idle chatter during recess by the involvement of the participants in the events. High involvement equals community and insideness; low involvement, which is evidenced by briefness of interaction and lack of emotion and eye contact, equals idle chatter.

Here the field researcher identifies a regular pattern of more intense, animated talk and action between courtroom workers which she contrasts with other occasions of less engaging interaction ("idle chatter"). In writing she offers some initial observations on when this pattern of relating occurs (during recesses, on slow court days, etc.), as well as on what it involves (actively seeking out others, joking, etc.).

In sum, initial coding and memoing require the ethnographer to step back from the field setting to identify, develop, and modify broader analytic themes and arguments. Early on, these efforts should remain flexible and open, as the ethnographer reads, codes, and analyzes fieldnotes to foster a wide range of new ideas, linkages, and connections. Eventually, however, the ethnographer will move beyond these open, inclusive procedures to pursue more focused, analytic themes more intensively. Initially, this narrowing and focusing process involves selecting a small number of core themes which the researcher will subsequently pursue through focused coding and integrative memoing.

SELECTING THEMES

Through initial coding and memoing the ethnographer identifies many more ideas and themes than she will actually be able to pursue in one paper or monograph. Hence she must decide which ideas to explore further and which to put on the back burner, at least for the moment.

Field researchers have different ways of selecting core themes. One consideration is to give priority to topics on which a substantial amount of data has been collected and which reflect recurrent or underlying patterns of activities in the setting under study. Fieldworkers may also give priority to what seems significant to members, whether it is what they think is key, what looks to be practically important, or what engages a lot of their time and energy. For example, one student who wrote fieldnotes while an intern at a county probation office described the following process:

> I was going through [the notes] and kept thinking of things like we have all this paper work to do, and people have to sign this and that and I started to get the sense of this larger issue-how is the department dealing with so much paper work? And as I went through it, I found, "Oh, well, a lot of times we help each other out." One probation officer will say I saw your client yesterday on the Commons; that will count as a collateral contact [a kind of contact that must be noted in the paperwork] for you because I saw him. There are shortcuts that way. There are summary reports called "quarterlies" that summarize basically three or four months' worth of work into one sheet. So three or four things like that are subtopics of this larger issue.

This student, in going through her notes, began to notice the different tasks that probation officers must accomplish with a sensitivity to the conditions and constraints that accompany the work. Looking at what probation officers actually did amid the practical constraints and opportunities offered by other agencies-police, clinics, etc. - provided a frame for drawing together what had initially seemed like discrete tasks. Discovering additional themes of this sort provided a guide to reading and coding the rest of her notes.

The fieldworker must also consider how a selected theme can be related to other apparent themes. A theme that allows the researcher to make linkages to other issues noted in the data is particularly promising. Finding new ways of linking themes together allows for the possibility that some of the themes that might have been seen as unrelated and possibly dropped can in fact be reincorporated as "subthemes."

In the process of identifying promising themes and trying to work out possible linkages, the fieldworker may lose for the moment a sense of focus and have to rework ideas until she can re-clarify matters. A student who studied the band at a public high school started coding with a good sense of what her paper would be about only to find her direction changed. She reflected on these processes in an interview:

> I first thought I would explain how, in the face of budget cuts, somebody could keep a program, an extracurricular program like this going. And then in listing the ways that the teacher does that, I came across the idea that he has to do things to get all of these kids to be friends together. And then I thought, wait a minute, that could be a whole topic of its own. There's so many things going on. How do I explain in my paper the different social cliques with 110 kids; there's so many social cliques? And then I just started looking at the relationships that students have with each other inside band and outside. It was just the weirdest thing - I lost my paper! The more I coded, the more I lost my paper.

Eventually, this student shifted her focus from the many differences between social cliques to how the teacher kept the program going both in the face of budgetary cuts and the divisive tendencies of these different cliques. What was reported negatively as "having lost her paper" really indicates an openness to new meanings and ways of putting things together.

Students engaged in this process often talk about a particular theme "jumping out at them" or, alternatively, of the "focus" for the ethnography "disappearing." This experience is so strong and pervasive that it is important to recall two closely related issues that were touched on previously. First, while the ethnographer's experience is often one of "something going on in the notes," neither the fieldnotes nor their meanings are something "out there" to be engaged after they are written. Rather, as creator of the notes in the first place, the ethnographer has been creating and discovering the meaning of and in the notes all along. Particular sensitivities led to writing about some topics rather than others; these sensitivities may derive from personal commitments and feelings as well as from insights gained from one's discipline and its literature and/or the course instructor. Second, when an ethnographer thinks he has "a substantial amount of data" on a topic, it is not so much because of something inherent in the data; rather it is because the ethnographer has interpreted, organized, and brought the data to bear on the topic.

Once the ethnographer has identified a set of core themes for further analysis, he may find it useful to sort fieldnotes on the basis of these themes. Here, the fieldworker breaks down the corpus of fieldnotes into smaller, more manageable sets, collecting together, in one place, all those pieces that bear on each core issue. This sorting or retrieving procedure involves physically grouping segments of the data on a theme in order to more easily explore their meanings. Sorting into one place or pile facilitates analysis by concentrating fieldnotes relevant to an emerging issue.'

In sorting fieldnotes, it is advisable to use themes that are inclusive, allowing for notes that may have been identified with different but related codes to be grouped together. In the study of family caregiving for persons with Alzheimer's disease, for example, after extensive open coding the researcher decided upon "management practices" as one core theme. Management practices were to include any actions caregivers took to manage and control the patient's circumstances and behavior. This category was intentionally inclusive, and it allowed the researcher to incorporate fieldnotes given widely varying codes; thus, under the rubric, "management practices," she collected incidents including: incessant monitoring of the patient; warning or "talking to" the patient; and deliberately deceiving the patient in order to manage troublesome behavior. The analysis at this stage is still preliminary, and the meaning and significance of any fieldnote is open to further specification and even fundamental reinterpretation. For this reason, the ethnographer should feel free to include any particular fieldnote excerpt in multiple categories.

Sorting requires physical movement of the data in ways that alter the narrative sequence of the fieldnotes. In the past, fieldworkers often cut up a copy of their fieldnotes and sorted the pieces into piles which would then be repeatedly rearranged as analysis proceeded. A variety of computer programs can now perform the sort function very quickly and efficiently, although some fieldworkers still prefer the flexibility that an overview of fieldnotes spread out on a table or the floor affords. We strongly recommend that those who use this later method keep either a computer copy (with a backup) or a hard copy of the original notes intact for later reference.

FOCUSED CODING

Having decided on core themes and perhaps having sorted the fieldnotes accordingly, the ethnographer next turns to a fine-grained, line-by-line analysis of the notes in focused coding. This involves building up and elaborating analytically interesting themes, both by connecting data that initially may not have appeared to go together and by delineating subthemes and subtopics that distinguish differences and variations within the broader topic.

As an example, the fieldworker whose research focused on caregivers looking after family members with Alzheimer's disease became aware of the stigma frequently attached to the latter's condition and behavior. Sorting all fieldnotes on stigma (broadly conceived) into one long document, she then reread and recoded all these materials, in the process developing a series of subthemes of stigma. For example, she came to distinguish "passing" - efforts to prevent the stigma from becoming publicly visible - from "covering" - efforts to cover up, normalize, or distract attention from visible stigmatizing behavior. She also recognized and coded for situations in which the caregiver cooperated with the person with Alzheimer's to manage stigma and for situations in which the caregiver entered into some kind of "collusion" with others to apologize for or manage the stigmatizing incident and its social effects. In focused coding, the researcher constantly makes comparisons between incidents, identifying examples that are comparable on one dimension or that differ on some dimension and hence constitute contrasting cases or variations. When the ethnographer identifies such variation, he asks how the instance differs and attempts to identify the conditions under which these variations occur.

By breaking down fieldnotes even more finely into subcodes, the ethnographer discovers new themes and topics and new relationships between them. The same openness to new ways to understand and fit pieces of data together that we encouraged earlier applies to focused coding as well. In some cases, this process generates new issues or opens up new topics that carry the analysis in an entirely different direction and may even require a rethinking and regrouping of the fieldnotes. One student ethnographer reported:

> You're both discovering and creating the pattern as you create the pieces – the initial codes - and these begin to structure and frame what the other pieces are going to be and how they will fit together. You have one note and you say to yourself, "Oh, this note seems to fit and be similar to the first note, but it's slightly different and that's what I mean by variation. But somehow they seem to follow one another." Then you continue and read and maybe 15 pages later there's something that seems like it follows or fits. You begin to find pieces that fit together in some kind of way. Don't worry how they all fit in the total paper, just keep fitting them together even if you don't have the connections between them. The aim is to identify what is going on irrespective of whether you will use it later on.

Another student, initially overwhelmed by the number of preliminary codes, said: "I felt that there were so many codes that it wasn't very logical." But she persevered until she could begin to see that there was more to discover in the notes: "I did see that within the more general codes I could see how that once I cut them up I could separate them out into smaller subgroups. What I need to do is do them again." Through the process of focused coding, the ethnographer begins to recognize a pattern in what initially looks like a mass of confusing data. With focused coding, the ethnographer may also begin to envision possible ways of making an argument or telling a story.

Students often express concern when they have only one example of a particular kind of incident or issue. They are concerned that writing about just one instance may distort their analysis if it reflects the response of only a few of those in the setting. Finding only one example would be a problem if the field researcher's purpose were to make claims about frequency or representativeness. But frequency is only one dimension for analysis. While the researcher delights in numerous examples of a theme or topic, the goal in ethnographic analysis is not representativeness. Rather, the ethnographer seeks to identify patterns and variations in relationships and in the ways that members understand and respond to conditions and contingencies in the social setting. That there is "only one case" often does not matter . When the ethnographer is fortunate enough to find more than one instance, it is important to note how they are the same and how they vary. Useful questions to keep in mind at this point include:

How is this example the same and different? What were the conditions under which differences and' variations occurred?

INTEGRATIVE MEMOS

As the ethnographer turns increasingly from data-gathering to the analysis of fieldnotes, writing integrating memos which elaborate ideas and begin to link or tie codes and bits of data together becomes absolutely critical. In writing integrating memos, the ethnographer seeks to explore relationships between coded fieldnotes and to provide a more sustained examination of a theme or issue by linking together a variety of discrete observations. At this point, many ethnographers continue to write primarily for themselves, focusing on putting the flow of their thoughts on paper and maintaining the loose, "note this" and "observe that" style characteristic of several of the memos we have considered to this point. Others, however, find it useful to begin to write with future audiences explicitly in mind. For these researchers, integrating memos provide a first occasion to begin to explicate contextual and background information that a reader unfamiliar with the setting would need to know in order to follow the key ideas and claims. Imagining this future readership within a particular discipline spurs the ethnographer to write in a more public voice, that is, to word ideas in concepts and language that approximate the analytic writing in a final text. It is a first attempt to formulate a cohesive idea in ways that would organize a section of the final ethnography (see the discussion in chapter 7). Thus, such memos sound more polished.

Substantively, integrative memos may move through a series of fieldnote incidents, linking these incidents by connecting sentences. We examine the following extended memo on "remedial covering" by family members caring for persons with Alzheimer's disease to illustrate these processes:

Remedial covering involves attempts to correct the troublesome behavior once it has occurred. Caregivers take it upon themselves to watch over the family member and attempt to "smooth over things" in a variety of public places. For example, Laura explains what she does in the presence of friends:

> He may take the cup off the saucer and just put it somewhere else on the table. And I'll say, "I think you'd probably get that cup back over here because it'll get tipped over, and it's easier if you have it close to you like that." . . . I try to smooth over these things.

In a similar case, Carol recounts how Ned embarrasses her by removing his dentures in a restaurant and how she handles this:

> I got up real quick and stood in front of him and said, "Get your teeth in your mouth." Then she explains to me, "I felt I had to protect him. What if the waitress came?"

In this first segment, the ethnographer links two separate incidents occurring in restaurants through the themes of "watching over" and "smoothing over things." In doing so, differences between the incidents - for example, in the first instance, that something untoward is prevented from happening, while in the second the untoward action has occurred but is literally "covered" and then corrected-are subordinated to these commonalities.

The researcher then takes up a further dimension of remedial covering, specifying the contrast between covering that relies upon the cooperation of the person with Alzheimer's and covering that is carried out directly by the caregiver:

Remedial covering involves having to negotiate the individual's cooperation when he or she is capable of doing so. For example, Laura describes her husband in a local restaurant, how she instructs and physically maneuvers him through various eating tasks ("puppeteering:' Pollner and McDonald-Wikler 1985) and how he responds. Her description of their interaction gives a real flavor of the minute detail to which the caregiver must attend:

> I'll say, "Now turn around some more so that your legs are under the table and then move over so that you're in front of the placemat." . . . Then he would set the beer out very perilously near the edge, and I'd move it back.... And then I'd have to arrange things ... he picked up the tortilla, and it wasn't appropriate. And if anybody were watching, they'd say, "Tsk tsk."

While Laura suggests remedial practices to William in the above example, Tess in her situation takes over and attempts to remedy the situation on her own. She describes going to a buffet restaurant with some of her co-workers, where she tries to cover her father's mistakes so the co-workers are less likely to notice:

> Him and I go to buffets all the time ... and I watch him. I make him go ahead of me so I can fix everything he screws up. He like takes the spoon, puts some cheese on his salad, puts the spoon on his plate.... And I grab the spoon and put it back ... all the employees that I work with are behind me....

Here the ethnographer sets up a contrast between two different responses to the problematic acts of a person with Alzheimer's. First, she notes Laura's handling of her husband by means of orders; in so doing she sees and marks a parallel with the concept of "puppeteering" developed in an article she is familiar with. Second, she examines Tess's ways of managing her father by directly "taking over." She then continues by considering the conditions under which one or the other form of remedial covering is likely:

As the person with Alzheimer's is less and less able to cooperate with the caregiver in these covering practices, the caregiver is forced to take more control of the situation. For example, Carol states, "I'm more ready to be the ultimate authority... This is the way it's going to be done. In other words, take total control."

In composing this memo, then, the writer outlines a progression from milder to more active and restrictive forms of remedial covering likely to occur as the disease progresses. She ends by arguing that this progression fundamentally involves increasing control over the behavior of the person with Alzheimer's disease; she quotes a caregiver who talks openly of her need to now "take total control."

In writing analytic, integrative memos of this sort, the central task is to develop theoretical connections between fieldnote excerpts. In so doing, the ethnographer confronts difficult analytic choices. One major issue is deciding which theme to make the primary focus, which to include as subthemes, and which to exclude entirely. To return to the dilemma of the student who "lost her paper" while focusing and sorting her notes: one strategy was to divide the paper up into different sections, such that the issues of the teacher's strategies for managing the band and of the students' grouping themselves into cliques would be analyzed as a topics unto themselves. A second possibility was to see these strategies as different aspects of the more general theme. Here, the paper would focus on how the teacher managed to keep an extracurricular program going in the face of overwhelming odds - declining resources and a large and heterogeneous group of students. Specific subtopics would include how he tried to motivate kids to spend extra time on weekends or extra time during the week, and how he managed the tensions and different interests between the various student cliques.

Deciding how to frame an analysis often requires taking a step back from the particulars of the analysis in order to answer the question: What is the larger, more encompassing question(s) I am responding to? One student who studied an alternative school, for example, was able, once she clarified the story she wanted to tell, to incorporate themes from the following incident involving negotiations over the use of a chair at an all-school meeting:

> The chair was just sitting there, and I was sitting behind a group of guys who were saving chairs, and this girl took this chair and started to put her feet on it, and the guy says, "Hey, someone's sitting there." She said, "Well, can't I just use it until he comes back?" Then a student teacher comes along, and you can see him eyeing the chair, and he says, "Can I use your foot rest?" She said, "Someone's sitting there." He said, "Well, I'll just use it until he comes back," and then he sits down. But the first guy says, "Excuse me, someone is sitting there." He says, "Well, I'll give it back when he gets back," The student [whose chair it is] comes back and the teacher just got up and left.

The student ethnographer saw in this fieldnote ways the students at the school negotiated with one another and with a student teacher over seating. But while she found the incident and several like it of interest with regard to relations between students and between students and teachers, she struggled with how to link such incidents to a variety of other themes. She decided at this point to step back and attempt to relate the incident more broadly to what she knew and found interesting about the school. She thought, for example, about the pride that both students and teachers at the alternative public school took in the ethic of "democratic decision making" and "shared power." She contrasted this with many more traditional schools where teachers readily exert authority. With the more general issue of this contrast in mind, the student saw that, on some occasions, teachers in the alternative school may not hold or choose to exercise authority but rather negotiate or defer to student claims to space. This led the student to see that she could tie negotiating for space to a range of other incidents that were decided in non-authoritarian ways. She also began to look for contrasts in this theme and specifically for examples of matters that were closed to negotiation. By pursuing this line of analysis, the student saw that what initially might have seemed an isolated, mundane incident was related to larger questions of power and authority. More fundamentally, finding a frame for this incident helped her not to take teacher and student claims to "democracy" and "power sharing" at face value or as givens but rather as achievements that were variously honored in the setting.

Again, there is no single, correct way to organize themes and subthemes. Part of the decision about which course to take depends on the kind of data that has been recorded. In the study of the high school band, very rich and

detailed notes on types of students in the school would allow focusing on student cliques. But if such observations are lacking, cliques must move from the center of the picture and become part of the context or background with something else in the foreground. It is usual for ethnographers to try on, modify, discard, and reconsider several possibilities before deciding which tells the best story. As was the case when writing fieldnotes in the first place, organizational decisions will be influenced by factors that range from how inclusive an organizational scheme is to how well it highlights particular theoretical and substantive interests and preferences.

REFLECTIONS: CREATING THEORY FROM FIELDNOTES

Analysis of ethnographic data begins with concepts that are grounded in and reflect intimate familiarity with the setting or events under study. From close, systematic attention to the fieldnotes as data, the ethnographer seeks to generate as many ideas, issues, topics and themes as possible. This is an inductive process.

Ethnographers differ from other social scientists who proceed deductively with a theory that explains phenomena and attempt to find instances in the data that illustrate or disprove it. While fieldnotes may privilege certain kinds of events - those of significance to members or that illustrate social processes, for example - the ethnographer proceeds in a more open-ended way, seeking to identify issues and ideas by a careful sifting through and piecing together of fieldnotes. The ethnographer remains open to other possibilities and gives serious consideration to processes and issues that become apparent as she reviews the data.

This should not be understood to mean that the fieldworker completely ignores existing theory and has no theoretical commitments prior to reading through the notes. It does suggest, however, that for the ethnographer, theory does not simply await refinement as analysts test concepts one by one against events in the social world; nor do data stand apart as independent measures of theoretical adequacy. Rather, the ethnographer's assumptions, interests, and theoretical commitments enter into every phase of writing an ethnography and influence decisions that range from selecting which events to write about to those that entail emphasizing one member's perspective on an event over those of others. The process is thus one of reflexive or dialectical interplay between theory and data whereby theory enters in at every point, shaping not only analysis but how social events come to be perceived and written up as data in the first place.

The goal in fieldwork, then, is to generate theory that grows out of or is directly relevant to activities occurring in the setting under study. This contrasts not only with those who practice deduction from received theory but with proponents of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). As suggested earlier, grounded theorists focus on the "discovery" and modification of theory through the close examination of qualitative data. But such an approach dichotomizes data and theory as two separate and distinct entities; it avoids seeing theory as inherent in the notion of data in the first place. But as we have emphasized, data are never pure; they are ripe with meanings and always products of prior interpretive and conceptual decisions. Grounded theory slights the processes whereby data are assembled, processes that build concepts into the data from the start in the very process of writing fieldnotes.

In this respect, it is something of a distortion to talk about "discovering theory," as we often are tempted to do. For while reading our fieldnotes carefully and reflectively, we frequently feel that we "discover theory" in the data contained in those notes. But theory only seems to jump out of the data and hit the researcher in the face; this flash of insight occurs only because of the researcher's prior analytic commitments built into the notes, the theoretical concerns and commitments she brings to the reading, and the connections made with other "similar events" observed and written about. Thus, it is more accurate to say that the ethnographer creates rather than discovers theory. She does so not simply in the culminating moment of reading and reflecting on what she has seen and written about previously, but also throughout that prior process of seeing as she writes fieldnotes. In fieldwork, then, events and actions become meaningful in light of an emerging meaningful whole. The analysis of fieldnotes is not just a matter of finding what the data contain. Rather, the ethnographer selects out some incidents and events, gives them priority, and comes to understand them in relationship to others. Grasping the continuously analytic character of fieldwork often entails a shift in the ways we often think of the ethnographer's relationship both to the fieldnotes and to analysis of them. One student describes the process of finding her "ethnographic voice":

> At first, I wanted the paper to emerge through the notes in the sense that it had its own story, and I was supposed to tell its story. But I had to make the shift from just wanting to talk about what was in the notes to making something solid out of them-my ideas, instead of thinking that it's hidden somewhere in the notes.

Rather than simply tracing out what the data tell, the fieldworker renders the data meaningful. Analysis is less a matter of something emerging from the data, of simply finding what is there; it is more fundamentally a process of creating what is there by constantly thinking about the import of previously recorded events and meanings.