requires careful observation, focused selection and verification of detail, and a deep awareness of the role of the self in writing about the other.

FIELDCRITIQUE: CAPTURING CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, we've shared several ways to record your spatial gaze: mapping space, writing a visual snapshot, finding a focal point, looking for power dynamics at your fieldsite that might reveal relationships of colonization. Capturing how people view and use their surroundings not only allows us to create a study but allows us to understand the cultural implications of what's going on there. To discover implications and generate hunches about how people use their space in one or two short visits, you must look closely, record what you see, and then look again.

Recording by writing is not the only way to capture what happens within a space or even what it looks like. Maps, photographs, videos, and sketches—yours or someone else's—can act as fieldnotes and provide you with information that you might not be able to collect otherwise. If you look at a picture long enough, it will reveal data that you can add to your analysis.

For example, Jennifer Hemmingsen's photograph of the carved, hundred-year-old cigar store Indian illustrates the stereotype she's attempting to describe within the culture of Pendleton itself and within American culture. Emily Wemmer's complete essay was full of visual data: reproductions of brochures, sketches of horses, and diagrams of the horse auction barn. The two maps she created (see pages 197–98) provide data for her analysis and help her readers understand the fieldsite. The visuals in Karen Downing's research portfolio act as data for her, and her portfolio reflection on page 231 shows how the items worked in her overall analysis: the maps of the PP store, the brochure checklist of photo options, the pages from the business and marketing documents, the poem hanging in Ginny James's office, and Karen's collage of words from fashion magazines. Karen's notes overlay each item and signal how each functions as data for her study. They show how Karen begins to know her fieldsite better through her careful recording of the Photo Phantasies spaces.

Look at space in as many ways as you can: the implications that you capture will teach you about how the culture operates in your fieldsite. With a careful critique of your written and visual data, you can begin to move from simple recording to thoughtful interpretation and analysis.

CHAPTER 5

Researching People: The Collaborative Listener

Ethnography is interaction, collaboration. What it demands is not hypotheses, which may unnaturally close study down, obscuring the integrity of the other, but the ability to converse intimately.

—HENRY GLASSIE

Researching people means stepping in to the worldviews of others. When we talk with people in the field or study the stuff of their lives—their stories, artifacts, and surroundings—we enter their perspectives by partly stepping out of our own. Insider and outsider stances are symbiotic; they support each other. You already know how to talk and listen to others from meeting new people. You've learned that you don't begin a conversation with a new person by talking only about yourself or failing to allow time or space for the other person to participate and collaborate in the conversation.

In an informal way, you are always gathering data about people's backgrounds and perspectives—their worldviews. "So where are you from?" "How do you like it here?" "How come someone from Texas wants to go to school in Minnesota?" "Did you know anyone when you first came here?" Not only do you ask questions about people's backgrounds, but you also notice their artifacts and adornments—the things with which they represent themselves: T-shirts, jewelry, particular kinds of shoes or hairstyles. The speculations and questions we form about others cause us to make hypotheses about the people we meet. We may ask questions, or we may just listen. But unless we listen closely, we'll never understand others from their perspectives. We need to know what it's like for *that* person in *this* place.

In the quotation that begins this chapter, folklorist Henry Glassie stresses the interactive nature of field research, suggesting that we shed hypotheses that close down study. You may have formulated a hunch about someone only to find out through new data that your hypothesis is off-base. For example, you may dismiss the middle-aged woman who sits in your political science class and reminds you of your mother. But when you're assigned to a study group with her, you discover that as an army nurse who has traveled all over the world, she knows more about international politics than anyone else in the group. Glassie warns us not to close down study and mask our informants' integrity because

this can prevent us from learning from them. The army nurse, as familiar as she may appear, turns into a great informant about international politics. The only way to learn with her is to be a listener. To learn from others, we must converse collaboratively. Fieldworkers and informants construct meaning together.

This chapter will help you strengthen the everyday skills of listening, questioning, and researching people who interest you. You'll experience interactive ways to conduct interviews and **oral histories**. You'll look for and discover meaning in your informants' everyday cultural artifacts. You'll gather, analyze, write, and reflect on family stories. And you'll read some examples of how other fieldworkers have researched and written about people's lives.

THE INTERVIEW: LEARNING HOW TO ASK

Fieldworkers listen and record stories from the point of view of the informant—not their own. Letting people speak for themselves by telling about their lives seems an easy enough principle to follow. But in fact, there are some important strategies for both asking questions and listening to responses. Those strategies are part of interviewing—learning to ask and learning to listen.

Interviewing involves an ironic contradiction: you must be both structured and flexible at the same time. While it's critical to prepare for an interview with a list of planned questions to guide your talk, it is equally important to follow your informant's lead. Sometimes the best interviews come from a comment, a story, an artifact, or a phrase you couldn't have anticipated. The energy that drives a good interview—for both you and your informant—comes from expecting the unexpected.

It's happened to both of us as interviewers. As part of a two-year project, Elizabeth conducted in-depth interviews with Anna, a college student who was a dancer. Anna identified with the modern dancers at the university and also was interested in animal rights, organic foods, and ecological causes. She wore a necklace that Elizabeth thought served as a spiritual talisman or represented a political affiliation. When she asked Anna about it, she learned that the necklace actually held the key to Anna's apartment—a much less dramatic answer than Elizabeth anticipated. Anna claimed that she didn't trust herself to keep her key anywhere but around her neck, and that information provided a clue to her temperament that Elizabeth wouldn't have known if she hadn't asked and had persisted in her own speculations.

In a shorter project, Bonnie interviewed Ken, a school superintendent, over a period of eight months. As Ken discussed his beliefs about education, Bonnie connected his ideas with the writings of progressivist philosopher John Dewey. At the time, she was reading educational philosophy herself and was greatly influenced by Dewey's ideas. To her, Ken seemed to be a contemporary incarnation of Dewey. Eventually, toward the end of their interviews, Bonnie asked Ken which of Dewey's works had been the most important to him. "Dewey?" he asked, "John Dewey? Never exactly got around to reading him."

No matter how hard we try to lay aside our assumptions when we interview others, we always carry them with us. Rather than ignore our hunches, we need to form questions around them, follow them through, and see where they will lead us. Asking Anna about her necklace, a personal artifact, led Elizabeth to new understandings about Anna's self-concept and habits that later became important in her analysis of Anna's literacy. Bonnie's admiration for Dewey had little to do directly with Ken's educational philosophy, but her follow-up questions centered on the scholars who did shape Ken's theories. It is our job to reveal our informant's perspectives and experiences rather than our own. And so our questions must allow us to learn something new, something that our informant knows and we don't. We must learn how to ask.

Asking

Asking involves collaborative listening. When we interview, we are not extracting information like a dentist pulls a tooth, but we make meaning together like two dancers, one leading and one following. Interview questions range between closed and open.

Closed Questions *Closed questions* are like those we answer on application forms or in magazines: How many years of schooling have you had? Do you rent your apartment? Do you own a car? Do you have any distinguishing birthmarks? Do you use bar or liquid soap? Do you drink sweetened or unsweetened tea, caffeinated or decaffeinated coffee? Some closed questions are essential for gathering background data: Where did you grow up? How many siblings did you have? What was your favorite subject in school? But these questions often yield single phrases as answers and can shut down further talk. Closed questions can start an awkward volley of single questions and abbreviated answers.

To avoid asking too many closed questions, you'll need to prepare ahead of time by doing informal research about your informants and the topics they represent. For example, if you are interviewing a woman in the air force, you may want to read something about the history of women in aviation. Reading a book about the WAFs (Women in the Air Force) will prepare you for your interview. You might also consult an expert in the field or telephone government offices to request informational materials so that you avoid asking questions that you could answer for yourself, like "How many years have women been allowed to fly planes in the U.S. Air Force?" When you are able to do background research, your knowledge of the topic and the informant's background will demonstrate your level of interest, put the informant at ease, and create a more comfortable interview situation.

Open Questions *Open questions,* by contrast, help elicit your informant's perspective and allow for more conversational exchange. Because there is no single answer to open-ended questions, you will need to listen, respond, and follow the informant's lead. Because there is no single answer, you can allow yourself to

engage in a lively, authentic response. In other words, simply being an interested "other" makes a good field interviewer. Here are some very general open questions—sometimes called *experiential* and *descriptive*—that encourage the informant to share experiences or to describe them from his or her own point of view:

- Tell me more about the time when…
- Describe the people who were most important to…
- Describe the first time you…
- Tell me about the person who taught you about…
- What stands out for you when you remember…
- Tell me the story behind that interesting item you have.
- Describe a typical day in your life.
- How would you describe yourself to yourself?
- How would you describe yourself to others?

When thinking of questions to ask an informant, make your informant your teacher. You want to learn about his or her expertise, knowledge, beliefs, and worldview. An interview can begin with a focus on almost any topic, as long as it involves the informant's point of view.

BOX 19

Using a Cultural Artifact in an Interview

Purpose

This exercise mirrors the process of conducting interviews over time with an informant. It emphasizes working with the informant's perspective, making extensive and accurate observations, speculating and theorizing, confirming and disconfirming ideas, writing up notes, listening well, sharing ideas collaboratively, and reflecting on your data.

To introduce interviewing in our courses, we use an artifact exchange. This exercise allows people to investigate the meaning of an object from another person's point of view. It follows the model we used when we interviewed our friend Danling in Chapter 6 about silk and silkworms. (see p. 326). This interview focuses on a concrete object, an artifact rather than language connotations.

Action

Choose a partner from among your colleagues. You will act as both interviewer and informant. Select an interesting artifact that your partner is either wearing or carrying: a key chain, a piece of jewelry, an item of clothing. Both partners should be sure the artifact is one the owner feels comfortable talking about. If, for example, the interviewer says, "Tell me about that pin you are wearing," but the informant knows that her watch has more meaning or her bookbag holds a story, the interviewer should follow her lead. Once you've each chosen an artifact, try the following process. Begin by writing observational and personal notes as a form of background research before interviewing:

1. *Take observational notes.* Take quiet time to inspect, describe, and take notes on your informant's artifact. Pay attention to its form and speculate about its function. Where do you think it comes from? What is it used for?
2. *Take personal notes.* What does it remind you of? What do you already know about things similar to it? How does it connect to your own experience? What are your hunches about the artifact? In other words, what assumptions do you have about it? (For example, you may be taking notes on someone's ring and find yourself speculating about how much it costs and whether the owner of the artifact is wealthy). It is important here to identify your assumptions and not mask them.
3. *Interview the informant.* Ask questions and take notes on the story behind the artifact. What people are involved in it? Why is it important to them? How does the owner use it? Value it? What's the cultural background behind it? After recording your informant's responses, read your observational notes to each other to verify or clarify the information.
4. *Theorize.* Think of a metaphor that describes the object. How does the artifact reflect something you know about the informant? Could you find background material about the artifact? Where would you look? How does the artifact relate to history or culture? If, for example, your informant wears earrings made of spoons, you might research spoon making, spoon collecting, or the introduction of the spoon in polite society. Maybe this person had a famous cook in the family, played the spoons as a folk instrument, or used these as baby spoons in childhood.
5. *Write.* In several paragraphs about the observations, the interview, and your theories, create a written account of the artifact and its relationship to your informant. Give a draft to your informant for a response.
6. *Exchange.* The informant writes a response to your written account, detailing what was interesting and surprising. At this point, the informant can point out what you didn't notice, say, or ask that might be important to a further understanding of the artifact. You will want to exchange your responses again, explaining what you learned from the first exchange.
7. *Reflect.* Write about what you learned about yourself as an interviewer. What are your strengths? Your weaknesses? What assumptions or preconceptions did you find that you had that interfered with your interviewing skills? How might you change this?
8. *Change roles and repeat this process.*

Response

Here is an excerpt from the artifact exercise, written by EunJoo Kang about Ming-Chi Own's watch. In the final draft of her essay, EunJoo, the interviewer, interweaves many of her original notes with information added by Ming-Chi from both the oral interview and the written exchange:

> When I tried to locate an artifact on my classmate, Ming-Chi, I was first caught by her necklace. It was golden and very thin. I asked if it had any story behind it, but she said that it did not, she just wore it. So I changed my eyes to a different object. I saw that she was wearing a watch.
>
> Ming-Chi's watch is small and gold-plated and square. It has seven colors: gold, steel, silver, dark gray, light gray, brown, and black on the band. It has a snake leather band with an omega symbol on it. The band does not look new and does not seem cheap either because I could read the omega symbol, which is [used by] one of the most famous Swiss watch companies. The band has seven holes and two loops. The watch itself was made in Japan by Seiko. I recognized Seiko as another good and famous watch company.
>
> How I saw this watch depended on what I was likely to look at, what I was oriented to seeing. I should confess that once I dreamed to be a fine artist. And I find I have a tendency to look at objects by their colors, shapes, design, and usage all at the same time. This was borne out by my noting the seven colors in the watch. Ming-Chi seemed surprised at my finding so many colors in her watch. That told me something. Not everyone sees the same things. To Ming-Chi, the color had little meaning. Instead, her watch focused on keeping schedules and being on time.
>
> Ming-Chi shared that the watch was purchased by her father in Singapore. She got the watch as a graduation gift. She attended college in Australia, far from her family in Singapore. It was not common for families to send their daughters to foreign countries to study, but Ming-Chi's father trusted her to be able to live by herself in Australia. Her father was happy with his grown daughter and bought her a watch that she could wear for a long time. And she did, as shown by the many scratches on it.
>
> The most obvious thing to associate Ming-Chi's watch with is a concept of time. Even though she is from another culture, she had obviously adjusted to Western ideas of time. She has adjusted to our culture in which time is counted as "length," but time can be considered either monochronic, which comes from Western Europe, or polychronic. In monochronic time, for example, a host expects his guest would visit and leave by set times. In contrast, polychronic time is measured by quality and not length. Polychronic time should be measured by substance and satisfaction and not just by beginnings and endings. This is clearly a more Eastern way of observing time. I wonder whether or not Ming-Chi has experienced this way of being in time.
>
> I am surprised at myself for finding this depth with an ordinary watch my classmate is wearing. This chance to look at a small artifact and describe it makes me understand what the ethnographic fieldworker does.

In interviews, researchers sometimes use cultural artifacts to enter into the informant's perspective. We might start by talking about something in our informant's environment: a framed snapshot, a piece of artwork on the wall, a CD or DVD collection, an interesting or unusual object in the room—anything that will encourage comfortable conversation. When we invite informants to tell stories about their artifacts, we learn about the artifacts themselves (Ming-Chi's watch) and, indirectly, about other aspects of their world that they might not think to talk about. Artifacts, like stories, can mediate between individuals and their cultures.

In their short, informal conversation that began with a wristwatch, EunJoo uncovered the story of Ming-Chi's multicultural life: from Singapore to Australia to the United States. The watch gave them both, as Eastern students living in the West, an opportunity to theorize about different cultural attitudes toward time. Using Ming-Chi's watch as a focal point gave both the interviewer and the informant intense interaction and talk. Stories surfaced from Ming-Chi about herself as a student, a daughter, a foreigner in two cultures, and an amateur philosopher. Without the watch as mediator, it would have taken much longer to achieve such collaboration. That's why EunJoo was so surprised to find herself learning so much from looking at, speculating on, and thinking about her classmate's "ordinary watch."

Cultural artifacts provide data for a fieldworking project, much as stories do. Fieldworkers try to describe a wide range of artifacts from their individual informants and the culture at large to document their findings. If EunJoo were to write a full oral history of Ming-Chi, she might choose to include descriptions of some of the following cultural artifacts: letters from Ming-Chi's father, a catalog and her school records from Australia, and her passport, family photos, or articles and books describing the complex mix of English and Chinese cultures in Singapore.

LEARNING HOW TO LISTEN

Although most people think that the key to a good interview is asking a set of good questions, we and our students have found that the real key to interviewing is being a good listener. Think about your favorite television or radio talk show personalities. What do they do to make their informants comfortable and keep conversation flowing? Think about someone you know who you've always considered a good listener. Why does that person make you feel that way?

Good listeners guide the direction of thoughts; they don't interrupt or move conversation back to themselves. Good listeners use their body language to let informants understand that their informants' words are important to them, not allowing their eyes to wander, not fiddling, not checking their watches. They encourage response with verbal acknowledgments and follow-up questions, with embellishments and examples. As Henry Glassie suggests in the quote that opens this chapter, interviewers need to keep the conversation open by keeping the "other" in the foreground.

But to be a good listener as a field interviewer, you must also have structured plans with focused questions. And you must be willing to change them as the conversation moves in different directions. With open questions, background research, and genuine interest in your informant, you'll find yourself holding a collaborative conversation from which you'll both learn. It is the process, not the preplanned information, that makes an interview successful.

A Successful Interview

Paul Russ conducted interviews with five AIDS survivors for an ethnographic film, *Healing without a Cure: Stories of People Living with AIDS,* sponsored by a local health agency. He developed a list of open and closed questions to prepare for and guide his interviewing process. Paul was a journalist teaching himself to do fieldwork and was very conscious of the difference between open and closed questions. He knew that closed questions would provide him with similar baseline data for all of his informants. For this reason, he formulated some questions that had one specific answer:

Paul's Closed Questions

- "How many months have you lived with your diagnosis?"
- "When did you first request a 'buddy' from the health service?"
- "Does your family know about your diagnosis?"

But the overall goal of his project was to capture how individuals coped with their diagnoses daily, drawing on their own unique resources. He wanted to avoid creating a stereotypical profile of a "day in the life of a person living with AIDS" since he knew that no one AIDS patient's way of coping could represent all other patients' coping styles.

The field interview draws on both collaboration and interaction. Being a good listener means becoming an active participant in the lives you're studying during the time you're in the field. It means posing questions from your informants' point of view, inviting them to answer from their perspective, from their own worldview. Paul constructed open questions to allow his informants to speak from their lived experiences.

Paul's Open Questions

- "What did you already know about AIDS when you were diagnosed?"
- "How did others respond to you and your diagnosis?"
- "What has helped you most on a day-to-day basis to live with the virus?"
- "Have people treated you differently since you were diagnosed?"

In the following excerpt from his hundreds of pages of transcripts, Paul talks with Jessie, a man who had been living with his diagnosis for eight years. For Paul, this interview was a struggle because Jessie hadn't talked much with others about AIDS. And because Paul chose to study people whose lives were very fragile, he paid particular attention to the interactive process between himself and his informants. In the following transcript, Paul uses Jessie's dog Princess just as another interviewer might have used an artifact to get further information:

P: What was your reaction when you were first diagnosed?
(This is one of the questions Paul posed to each of his five informants. Because he was making a training film for public health volunteers, he wanted to record people's initial reactions on discovering that they had a publicly controversial illness.)

J: My first reaction? How am I going to tell my family. And I put it in my mind that I would not tell anyone until it became noticeable. And I wondered who would take care of me....I knew sometimes AIDS victims go blind. I panicked a little bit, and I started thinking of all the things I have to do to make my life livable....I started thinking about the things I could do to make it go easier. And I started thinking of things I would miss.

P: Like Princess, your dog?
(Paul knew from previous talks that Jessie's dog was an important part of his daily life.)

J: I've had Princess for three years. I had another red dachshund, but she got away. I got Princess as a Christmas gift....She comforts me. She knows when I'm not feeling right. She comes and rubs me. She goes places with me. If I'm in the garden, she's right there. She can't let me out of her sight. Sometimes I talk to her, late at night, we just lay there. She seems like she understands....I don't think she can live without me. If something happens to me, she'll be so confused. I

think she'll be so lonely, she'll go off somewhere and just die....I want to give her to somebody. Maybe an older person, someone I believe will take care of her.

(By talking about his dog, Jessie opened himself up to Paul. By following up on Jessie's comment about "things he'd miss," Paul deepened their interaction and intensified their talk. It was not the dog herself that was important in this exchange but what Princess represented from Jessie's perspective. Paul did not intend to make Jessie talk about his fear of dying, but it happened naturally as he talked about Princess. At this point, Paul found a way to ask another one of the prepared questions that he used with each of his informants. And Jessie's answer brought them back to Princess.)

P: What's your typical day like?

J: My typical day is feeding Princess, letting her out, doing my housework. I like to do my work before noon because I'm addicted to soap operas....I like to work in the yard. I've got a garden. I have some herbs. And I like every now and then to pray. I go to the library. I do a great deal of reading.

(Paul continued to interview Jessie about his spirituality and his reading habits. He brought this interview around to another preplanned question that he asked of all his AIDS informants.)

P: What advice do you have for the newly diagnosed?

J: Don't panic. You do have a tendency to blow it out of proportion. And find a friend, a real friend, to help you filter out the negative. Ask your doctor questions. Let it out and forgive. Forgive yourself, you're only human. And forgive the person you think gave it to you. Then you will learn that the key to spirituality is to abandon yourself....I don't want a sad funeral. I want music, more music than anything else. I don't want my family to go under because of this disease.

Paul's interviews eventually became a training film for volunteers at the Triad Health Project and area schools that wanted to participate in AIDS support and education. In the film, Paul has the advantage of presenting his data, not just through verbal display but visually as well. As Paul conducts his interviews, we hear his voice and see his informants—their surroundings and artifacts, their gestures and body language, and the tones of voices as they respond to Paul.

Author Mark Singer is a veteran writer for *The New Yorker* magazine, and his specialty is portraits. "People want to tell you their stories," he recently told a university audience of writers, "but you have to learn to stop reporting to be a good listener....Your job is to listen, above all else." He has written about high-profile people like businessman Donald Trump and Citizen K (con-man Brett Kimberlin), but most of his writing is about less well-known but nonetheless fascinating people—a chef, a woman who balances job and child care, a lifelong court buff, a street violinist. Singer likes to look for incongruities in the people he portrays—to "go below the radar," he says. He conducts his research in the

field with lots of observation, amasses vast amounts of background information, and creates portraits that are long and detailed. Most important, he listens. He builds on his own interest, his interviews, and the personal connections he makes with his informants, and then he shares all this with his readers.

Would we call him a journalist? A nonfiction writer? A biographer? A cultural anthropologist? We'd say, like many ethnographic fieldwriters, he fits none of those categories and all of those categories. Some of his projects have taken over two years to complete; others, two weeks. Although *The New Yorker* is a business, it recognizes that each project challenges each writer in different ways and so supports its writers with editorial coaching, idea sessions, and even a fact-checking department. But the careful work of listening, notetaking, observing, writing, and revising belongs to each writer.

Singer has published several collections of his essays, the most recent of which is called *Character Studies: Encounters with the Curiously Obsessed.* He writes in his introduction,

> To compose the portraits in this book, I first imposed upon my subjects by requesting permission to shadow them, often for days at a time, usually over some weeks or months. As a reporter, I always know things are going well when it becomes evident that my presence has been taken for granted and that I've managed to fulfill what is both the anthropologist-observer's goal and the voyeur's process, and the longer I've been at this the more slowly I manage to get the job done. My excuse is that the people I write about, having allowed me to scrutinize their lives as they pursue their passions, are entitled to my own obsessive deliberateness. (2)

When you read a Mark Singer essay, you become part of the informant's world without losing Singer's guidance as his informant's story unfolds. As a researcher, you'll note how his writing incorporates his meticulous (some might say obsessive) fieldwork: hours of interviews and observations and piles of background material. It's fun to read his prose twice: once to understand the story itself (the narrative arc) and then again to identify the many data sources he orchestrates so smoothly.

Here is a short excerpt from the opening of "The Man Who Forgets Nothing," Singer's long portrait of a film director, Martin Scorsese: "Now, where were we? Oh, right, Martin Scorsese's stream of consciousness. OK, so one afternoon late last summer, seven weeks shy of the opening date of his most recent film, *Bringing Out the Dead*, we happened to be in a sound-mixing studio in the Brill Building, on Broadway, in the Forties." As if directing a good movie, Singer drops readers into a busy scene where the characters are operating in their everyday setting—in this case, a sound-mixing studio where Scorsese is cutting and rerecording film dialogue. Singer guides us on the trail of Scorsese's thinking: "I'd brought along a laptop computer," Singer intervenes early in the essay, "and, although I type very quickly, I was laboring to keep up." Scorsese's thoughts take off and run ahead of Singer's just when he wants us to see them. We join Scorsese (via Singer) at this point in the essay:

The Man Who Forgets Nothing

Mark Singer

Across many months, I had many conversations with Scorsese, encounters that tended to engender a mixture of awe and sympathy. Along the way, I would speculate about this agreeably garrulous fellow: What's the weather like inside his brain? Evidently, every movie he'd ever watched—and he'd probably seen more than any other living director, more than most movie critics—was stored there, along with five-plus decades of personal history, sensory memory, family mythology, music heard, books read, all of it seemingly instantly retrievable. Was it painful, I wondered, to remember so much? Scorsese's powers of recall weren't limited to summoning plot turns or notable scenes or acting performances; his gray matter bulged with camera angles, lighting strategies, scores, sound effects, ambient noises, editing rhythms, production credits, data about lenses and film stocks and exposure speeds and aspect ratios. Instinctively, he'd engraved facts and images and feelings that he'd been able to draw upon throughout his creative life. But what about all the sludge? An inability to forget the forgettable—wasn't that a burden, or was it just part of the price one paid to make great art?

Since 1973, the year *Mean Streets* appeared—long before the label "America's greatest living film director" became routinely appended to his name—moviegoers throughout the world have known what a Scorsese movie looks and sounds like, even if only from seeing the work of other auteurs, disciples, and wannabes who've gone to school on his camera moves, narrative innovations, and editing tropes. Scorsese once mentioned to me that the best new movie he'd seen during the previous year was *Rushmore*, an unpredictable and winsome comedy directed by Wes Anderson—who, he learned after sending Anderson a fan letter, was an ardent admirer of Scorsese's exemplar, Michael Powell, the British director of such masterpieces as *The Red Shoes*, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, and *A Matter of Life and Death*. When I asked Anderson how he'd reacted to hearing from Scorsese, he replied, "I wrote back to him probably twenty-five seconds after receiving his letter." Of course, Anderson also proved to be a careful student of Scorsese.

"So many Scorsese ideas have been used so much that they're no longer Scorsese ideas," he told me. "They're just part of the grammar. The most obvious things are the ways he moves the camera and the cuts. And the way he uses music. Also, using documentary-style information in a fiction movie.... Take the counting of the money in *Casino*. The movie just sort of stops for a few minutes, nothing is happening with the characters, because he's telling you how the money works. He does it differently in *Mean Streets*, when he shows you how that world works. He's not the first director to do these things, but the way he does it combines realism and this dreamy and surreal expressionism."

"Marty hates plots," Thelma Schoonmaker often says, echoing remarks that Scorsese has uttered along those same lines. He is, of course, a masterly

storyteller, one who refuses to settle for conventional three-act linear dramas with tidy resolutions, because since when does life work that way? What drives a Scorsese tale is his talent for weaving variegated optical and aural and emotional textures, for devising solutions to the paradox that truth and beauty and depravity must share the same frame. Underlying these dazzling gifts is Scorsese's compulsion to provoke discomfort in himself and his audience. For instance, there's the slaughter at the Norbulinga Palace in *Kundun*, or the torment and torture of Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, or the tattooed torso of the jailed Max Cady (Robert De Niro) in *Cape Fear*. Or there's that sidewalk confrontation between Travis (De Niro) and Sport (Harvey Keitel, playing Jodie Foster's pimp) in *Taxi Driver*, during which De Niro expresses his revulsion—and our revulsion—by stiffening his spine and looking away, into the uncertain distance. Our sympathy lies squarely with Travis at that moment, as opposed to the chill we feel in the famous "You talkin' to me?" sequence. (For my money, and this is, I concede, a minority viewpoint, the most unnerving scene in the Scorsese canon is the passage in *The King of Comedy* where Rupert Pupkin, in a successful effort by De Niro to establish a gold standard for putzlike behavior, shows up uninvited, luggage in hand, along with a girl he's trying to impress—Diahnne Abbott—at the weekend home of Jerry Langford, a Carson-like talk-show host played by Jerry Lewis. Pure skin-crawling terror, and nobody ever comes close to getting hurt.)

Barbara Hershey, who played Mary Magdalene in *Last Temptation*, spoke to Mary Pat Kelly, one of Scorsese's many biographers, about the disturbing scene in which she copulates with a series of strangers while Jesus watches silently: "There was one shot, just a simple shot, where an Indian man is watching me make love. Christ is sitting out of focus in the background....The camera slowly starts to move in, and you think it's going to move onto Christ, but it swoops slightly and moves into the close-up of the eye of the Indian man, and then it locks focus and Christ is in focus as well, in the background. When I saw it I said to Marty, 'How did you think of that?' and he said, 'I thought of that four years ago. I woke up in the middle of the night with that one.' I realized that he had been preparing for this film his whole life....Who knows what talent is?...I don't think talent is as rare as the need to express it or the strength to handle the rejection. I don't think Marty can help it; there's nothing else he can do with his life."

That combination of sensibility and urgency—the encyclopedic brain brimming with references to old movies and real-life experiences, waiting for just the right opportunity to download—is the dominant trait that distinguishes Scorsese from other filmmakers of his generation. In *Wiseguy*, the nonfiction bestseller by Nicholas Pileggi that *GoodFellas* was based upon, the wife of the main character, a Mafia soldier named Henry Hill, described how during their courtship he would escort her to the Copacabana nightclub: "On crowded nights, when people were lined up outside and couldn't get in, the doormen used to let Henry and our party in through the kitchen, which was filled with Chinese cooks, and we'd go upstairs and sit down immediately." Somehow,

(Metronome/Getty Images)

American jazz and pop singer Billy Eckstine performs at the Copacabana, 1950.

Scorsese translated those forty words into a seamless three-minute Steadicam shot, an exhilarating and revelatory blend of cinéma vérité and ballet—choreographed to the perfect music, "Then He Kissed Me," by the Crystals. When the camera at last delivers us to the big room at the Copa, Henry Hill (Ray Liotta), whom we've seen crossing palms with twenty-dollar bills, and his future wife (Lorraine Bracco) momentarily disappear, and a pair of briskly efficient waiters hoisting a line-draped table enter the frame to give the couple the VIP treatment. Offscreen, some poor schmucks waiting to be seated whine futilely to the maitre d'.

How was it that Scorsese knew to build that scene that way? Or, rather, how was it that Pileggi's book found its way into the hands of the only film director alive who just happened to know by heart, along with a zillion other potentially but not necessarily useless facts, the protocols of the Copacabana in the fifties? "I'd been there a lot when I was fifteen or sixteen," Scorsese told me. "And I saw this go on all the time. I had to explain it all to the crew. 'Make sure we see the money. Money, money, money, money. Slipping money here and there, slipping money here and there, slipping money. Even if you don't see the cash, you see the hand movements.' Henry's greasing his way all the way in. This guy's like a king. This is his reward. The Copacabana was like, I

don't know, like Buckingham Palace, especially if somebody like Sinatra was performing. It was as sanctified in my world, where I came from, before making movies, as you could get. Especially when you're younger, you get down there and you think you've got a great table and suddenly three more tables come flying into the room and these wiseguys, all these gangsters, come in and you can't say anything. You're finished."

"Marty never talks about his art," Pileggi has said. "All he ever wants to know from me is 'What really happened? What was he really talking about? How was he dressed? Where were they standing? What did his wife say?'"

Marty hates plots? It's a reductive, not-to-be-taken-too-literally way of saying that Scorsese is, among other things, a cultural anthropologist (with an unscientific devotion to the notion that character is destiny). Reviewing *Mean Streets*, Pauline Kael, in an unalloyed rave, described it as "a true original of our period, a triumph of personal filmmaking" and observed that "every character, every sound is rooted in those streets." In contexts as diverse as Las Vegas (*Casino*), Tibet (*Kundun*), Edith Wharton's New York (*The Age of Innocence*), and the Mob's outer boroughs (*GoodFellas*), Scorsese anatomizes the codes and rituals of whatever subculture he fixes his lens upon. He's an articulate, generous explainer, and his elucidations of what he was thinking when he first imagined that shot or made that cut reveal a rigorous self-awareness and a mind that's at once phenomenally cluttered and coherent. All that shelf space inside his cranium, it seems, is jammed with subtext—the footnotes, in effect, of his inspirations, footnotes that, as often as not, prove no less edifying or entertaining than the main text.

At first, Singer wasn't sure about the focus of his project. Scorsese is a famous film director who has been interviewed many times, and much has been published and produced about him. But his self-proclaimed obsessive personality intrigued Singer:

> When I first sat down with Scorsese, stacks of books and reams of articles had already been published about his style of filmmaking and its autobiographical underpinnings. I had no idea, at that juncture, what my purpose was or what the result might be. What emerged many months later was not a mini-biography but a travelogue of a journey along Scorsese's rapidly flowing stream of consciousness, an attempt to illustrate how such an extraordinary volume and variety of data could jockey for space inside his capacious brain and eventually get transformed into images on film. (3)

We hope you're read Singer's complete essay in *Character Studies*, where you will find more portraits of passionate people. As you do, notice the array of data that Singer spins into his compelling portraits of the people he has found intriguing.

BOX 20

Establishing Rapport

Purpose

Both the professional writer Mark Singer and the passionate amateur Paul Russ worked hard to establish rapport with their informants. Rapport doesn't happen in one short interview. Both writers turned their interviews into a collaborative and interactive process in which the researchers make themselves knowledgeable about their informants' positions, interests, feelings, and worldviews.

Action

In this activity, you will reflect on your relationship with an informant and gain greater understanding of yourself as a researcher. Write a short paper about your subjective attitude toward an informant. Think about whether you've felt tentative or hesitant toward your informant, feelings that you may not want to write about in your final paper but that you acknowledge and understand as part of your researcher self. Use the following list to guide you:

1. Describe your first meeting with your informant. What did you notice about yourself as you began the interview process?
2. Describe any gender, class, race, or age differences that may have affected the way you approached your informant.
3. Discuss ways you tried either to acknowledge or to erase these differences and the extent to which you were successful.
4. Discuss how your rapport changed over time in talking with and understanding your informant and her worldview.

Response

Paul Russ faced many race and class differences when he interviewed his informants about how they lived with AIDS. The most obvious was health, since his informants were facing disease and he was not. Paul's response describes the many conflicting feelings he had when he interviewed Jessie:

> I picked up Jessie to drive him to the Health Project office for the interview. At first, we didn't conduct the interviews at his house. I'm not sure if he was uncomfortable about me seeing the inside of his house, if he didn't want the neighbors seeing a tall white guy carrying a bunch of camera equipment into this house. Anyway, as Jessie rode in my car, I was incredibly aware of the two different worlds we came from. I had a bad case of white man's guilt. As he sat in my car, I apologized for the dog hair left from taking my two dogs to the vet. He said that it was fine, that he was used to it. Then he mentioned his dog, Princess. It was the first thing we had to talk about. Jessie admitted that he had little family support to cope with AIDS and that Princess was his family. I shared that my dog had had a difficult pregnancy and that I almost lost her. That's when he first opened up to me about his fear of living without Princess or Princess living without him. When it later came up in our interview, it was an obvious opportunity to encourage Jessie to speak personally.
>
> It was essential to establish common ground with him because I felt I had nothing in common with Jessie. Perhaps this was because he did not come from where I came from and, perhaps, because he did not look like me. And while I've never considered myself prejudiced, I realize that we all have prejudices deeply buried inside no matter how intelligent or informed we are. In order to know him with some degree of intimacy, I had to be vulnerable and share myself. I had to address the baggage of race, class, education. I did this with all the informants in my project, and it scared me because being friends with someone who is facing mortality requires an emotional investment. I knew I had to establish a friendship.
>
> While I was making a personal connection with Jessie, I also had professional distance. With everything that came out of Jessie's mouth, I was thinking about how it could be used in the final project. For me, interviewing is very active. It's not passive at all. You have to listen for meaning and listen for what's not being said. I had trouble getting Jessie to speak from the heart. His responses to early questions were pressed. I knew that if I were writing his story for a reader, I could project a much clearer sense of his identity than he gave me on camera. I knew that. But I wasn't writing his story. My mission was to record him telling his story in his own words. So I looked for opportunities to help him reveal himself to me. Princess was one of these opportunities.

TAPING AND TRANSCRIBING

Interviews provide the bones of any fieldwork project. You need your informants' actual words to support your findings. Without informants' voices, you have no perspective to share except your own. You bring to life the language of the people whose culture you study as you record them.

The process of taping and transcribing interviews has been advanced by computers and audio recorders that are small, relatively inexpensive, and easily available. It's no coincidence that interviewing and collecting oral histories has become more popular in recent years with these accessible technologies. With a counting feature to keep track of slices of conversation and a pause button to slow down the transcription process, even the most basic recorder becomes a

valuable tool for the interviewer. Computer software and recording devices—from simple word processors to the specialized programs that create and recombine information—cut down the tedium of sorting, classifying, and organizing huge piles of written data.

But transcribing is tedious business nonetheless. Most researchers estimate three or more hours of transcribing for each hour of recording. You don't want to record everything you hear, nor do you want to transcribe it all. That's why it's important to prepare ahead—with research, guiding questions, adequate equipment, and knowledge about using it. We'd like to share some advice to make your taping and transcribing go smoothly.

1. *Obtain your equipment.* Borrow or purchase quality equipment. What's good for recording a concert or burning a friend's CD may not be the best equipment for recording an interview. You'll need a counting feature to track and locate sections of the interview and also a microphone that is sensitive enough to pick up the human voice. Some recording devices have built-in microphones, but a separate directional mike can maximize the voice and minimize peripheral noise. Check to see if you can borrow interview equipment.

2. *Prepare your equipment.* Batteries can die when you least want them to, so you'll need to have extra batteries on hand and perhaps an AC adapter as an additional power source. In general, it is safer to use electrical outlets as your power source than to depend on batteries, though you might not always be near an outlet. Test your equipment before entering your fieldsite by recording the date, your name, and your informant's name. When you arrive at your interview, play back your preliminary information. Most fieldworkers have stories about losing interviews because of bad tapes or malfunctioning equipment. Elizabeth, for example, took one 60-minute tape to a two-hour interview session. After the first hour, her informant kept talking, but Elizabeth pretended to record while she took notes furiously by hand. If you're using a simple recorder, check both the length and quality of each tape you purchase. Medium-quality tape is adequate (high-quality tape is made for recording music; low-quality tape can stretch or break). When you arrive on site, be sure to have extra tape or cartridges, tape labels, a notepad, and pencil. A camera is a great way to gather contextual information, too. It can capture details you may not have time—or may be too nervous—to write down. Remember to wear a wristwatch so that you can quietly keep track of interview time.

3. *Organize your interview time.* Ask the informant to suggest a convenient place and time for the interview. Arrive a few minutes early to set up and test your equipment. Try to minimize interruptions once you are at the fieldsite. Arrange your materials and notepads close by so that you won't bang or shuffle, distracting your informant or cluttering your recording with extraneous noise.

4. *Organize and listen to your audio.* Nothing is more frustrating to the energetic researcher than a box full of unlabeled audio. Before you start recording, label your materials with the date, day, time, place, and person whom you

are interviewing. After recording, listen as soon as possible to get an idea of what may be valuable to transcribe. (We sometimes do this in our spare time on our car players and on our headsets.) You may want to outline the topics covered, take notes to highlight the major themes, and think about the questions you want to ask in the next interview. Don't let your recordings gather dust until you have time to transcribe them fully. This initial listening process enhances your memory of the interview and the overall sense of purpose for your project.

5. *Log your recordings.* Set the counter feature to identify relevant chunks of data. List the topics and note the corresponding numbers on a piece of paper—for example, "015–138: CV: talks about her late mother's flower shop and her history of gardening" or "249–282: good quote on nature and spirituality." Summarizing your material and noting where it appears will allow you to easily retrieve it later. The more time you spend logging and describing, the less time you'll need for actual transcription. Over time, you will develop your own system. Don't hesitate to use your device's built-in features for logging and transcribing as well.

6. *Transcribe.* As soon as possible after the interview, transcribe your audio. Use the pause button on the recorder to freeze the tape. Use the rewind and play buttons to reverse and review any material you need to hear again. If you are fortunate enough to have a foot switch (often used by professional transcribers), you can start and stop with your foot and continue keyboarding as you listen. Transcribe word for word, using parentheses or brackets to indicate pauses, laughing, interruptions, sections you want to leave out, or words that seem unintelligible: "[CV talks about having a cold]" or "[unintelligible: maybe "hunch," "bunch," or "lunch"; check with CV]."

7. *Use your computer.* Word processors have features that enhance transcribing. You can make a separate file for each informant or separate interviews according to themes. The computer allows you to format a pattern of organization as you transcribe (date, person, topic). Be sure to back up your material once you have a lot of data transcribed.

8. *Bring language to paper.* As a transcriber, you must bring your informant's speech to life as accurately and as appropriately as you can. When you transcribe oral language, you will find it difficult to capture intonations, speech rhythms, and regional accents on the page. Most researchers agree that a person's grammar should remain as spoken. If an informant says "I done," for example, it's not appropriate to alter it to "I did." If, when you share a transcript later with your informant and she chooses to change it, respect that change.

All speakers "code-shift" between what linguists call "speech registers," which depend on topic, audience, and background (such as regional or ethnic identity). For example, Bonnie's grandmother code-shifted with Yiddish expressions among her Mah-Jongg partners, but she used mainstream-accented Philadelphia English in a department store. Many characteristics of oral language have no equivalents in print. It is too difficult for either transcriber or reader to attempt to capture or understand oral **dialect** in written form. "Pahk

the cah in Hahvahd Yahd" is a respelling of a Boston accent, meant to show how it sounds. But to a reader who's never heard it—even to an insider Bostonian who isn't conscious of her accent—the written version of her oral dialect looks artificial and complicates the reading process. Anthropologists and folklorists have long debated how to record oral language and currently discourage the use of spelling as a way to approximate oral language.

9. *Share your transcript.* Offer the transcripts to your informant to read for accuracy, but realize that you won't get many takers. Most informants would rather not plow through a whole transcript but would rather wait for your finished, edited version of the interview. In any case, the informant needs the opportunity to read what you've written. In some instances, the informant may make corrections or ask for deletions. But most of the time, the written interview becomes a kind of gift in exchange for the time spent interviewing.

Fieldworkers must turn interview transcripts into writing, making a kind of verbal film. As interesting as interview transcripts are to the researcher, they are only partial representations of the actual interview process. Folklorist Elliott Oring observes, "Lives are not transcriptions of events. They are artful and enduring symbolic constitutions which demand our engagement and identification. They are to be perceived and understood as wholes" (258). To bring an informant's life to the page, you must use a transcript within your own text, sometimes describing the setting, the informant's physical appearances, particular mannerisms, and language patterns and intonations. The transcript by itself has little meaning until you bring it to life.

Cindie Marshall conducted a semester-long field project at Ralph's Sports Bar, frequented by men and women who ride motorcycles and describe themselves as bikers. Cindie had returned to school while she continued to work at a law firm, and she completed this study in a second-semester freshman writing course. In "Ralph's Sports Bar," she combines her skills as a listener, an interviewer, and most of all a writer. In her study, her informants speak in their own voices, but Cindie contextualizes them, offering readers a look into the biker subculture as it exists at Ralph's. In her data analysis, she identifies three categories of biker patrons as they interact side by side at Ralph's: the "rednecks," the "regular bikers," and the "white-collar weekend professionals." Cindie uses her interviews with two key informants, Alice and Teardrop, to verify her data, along with her own extensive fieldnotes. As you read Cindie's research study, notice the fieldworking skills she brings together.

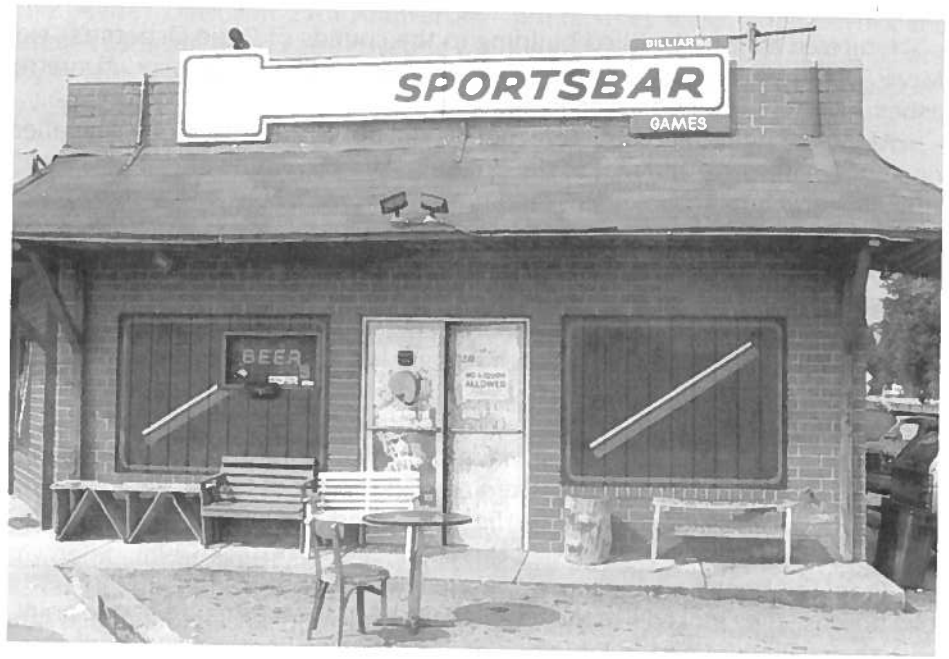
Ralph's Sports Bar

Cindie Marshall

The Arrival

Ralph's Sports Bar isn't a sports bar at all really. When someone says "sports bar," I think of a bar that is neatly kept, full of white-collar professionals, a big-screen TV, billiard tables, and more than likely a dartboard or two. Oh, and let's not forget the line of high-dollar sports cars parked outside. Well, that does not come close to describing Ralph's Sports Bar.

As I pulled into the half-paved, half-graveled parking lot, the first thing I saw on the side of the small red-brick building was a large sign that said, "Urinate inside, not out here." I suppose had I been anywhere else I would have been shocked by the sign. However, I had come here to seek out bikers, and this small sign depicted just what I had expected of them. I am not quite sure how I came by such a negative image of bikers. Like anything else in life, I suppose I was conditioned to think this way. My white-collar family raised me to believe that there were different classes in the world and that my class was just better than theirs. The truth is that the sign struck another chord as well. The



(Photo: Minshall Strater)

Ralph's Sports Bar.