

LECTURE: Ethnography - Observation / data analyses

Feedback on OBSERVATION 1

- Drawings of the site
- Setting the stage, where are we, weather, time of day, location
- Explain in what way the setting is interesting for observation.
- Same time / same place but different observations – how can that be? How come? What does that mean?
- What do your observations tell?
- What patterns do you see, what deviations?
- Would it have been helpful to document the time when you began and ended observing various people? What would such take reveal / positioning your observations?

See e.g. Silverman p. 175 for questions for field note analysis

proceeding on feedback in relation to readings

- Learning to do ethnography involves learning to see social situations in a way that problematizes certain phenomena (Forsythe 1999:129)
- The resultant "insider ethnography" takes local meanings at face value overlooking tacit assumptions rather than questioning them" (Ibid.:138)
- Anthropologists are trained to be reflexive; that is, to attempt to identify and evaluate their own research assumptions as well as those of their respondents" (Ibid.:141)
- Behavioral and organizational patterns exist "out there" in the world [...] [NO] Patterns of human thought and action are no more visible than the diagnosis of an individual's illness (Ibid.:132)

Blomberg et al. 1993

Note taking:

- Describe what you observe / encounter
- Remember: date, time, place, persons present (roles, occupation, affiliation)
- Video, photos, tape recordings serve as good memorable-tones, but remember to 'log' them.

Participant-observation:

- Focus of observation: event, person, place, objects
- What people say they do and what they do are not the same (ideal and manifest behavior).

Silverman (chap. 5, 11, 12)

DATA ANALYSIS::

Analyze data already in the public sphere

- Newspapers
- Libraries
- Local / state archives
- TV, radio, internet (Oct 19th, Gisle talks about internet)

Borrow other people's data

- Some might already have gathered material, BUT
- Data might not be resent
- Personal accounts
- How were the data collected / generated?
- (See Forsythe 1999 for a critique on sharing data (intellectual property))
- Situation when data is shared (workgroups etc.)

Ask for advice

- Somebody who can get you started by asking into your work after having seen you material

Analyzing interviews

- Is your aim to describe reality of people's lives (realism) or to access the stories or narratives through which people describe their worlds (constructionism)?

Analyzing field notes

- It's not simply recording data, it's analysis. Take into account:
- What can you see and hear
- How are you behaving / being treated

Analyzing text and visual material (photos, videos, street signs, advertisements, etc.)

- Is your goal precise content analysis (establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category)? Or is it to understand the participants categories and to see how these are used in concrete activities like telling stories, assembling files or taking photographs?

Analyzing transcripts

- The analysis of tapes and transcripts depends upon the generation of some research problem out of a particular theoretical orientation. When there is more than one researcher, debate about what you're seeing and hearing is never about collecting data - it is data *analysis*.

DEVELOPING DATA ANALYSIS (important tables from chap 12):

Functions of detailed field notes

- To identify and follow *processes* in witnessed events.
- To understand how members themselves *characterize* and *describe* particular activities, events, groups.
- To convey members' *explanations* for when, why or how particular things happen and, hereby, to elicit members' theories of the *causes* of particular happenings.
- To identify the *practical concerns, conditions* and constraints that people confront and deal with in their everyday lives and actions.

Six groups of questions for field note analysis

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

Developing analysis of field data (p. 178)

- *Data reduction* involves making decisions about which data chunks will provide your initial focus.
- *Data display* involves assembling your data into displays such as matrices, graphs, networks, charts, which clarify the main direction (and missing links) of your analysis.
- *Conclusion drawing* 'beginning to decide what things mean, noting regularities, patterns, explanations,' etc.
- Verification means testing the provisional conclusions for 'their plausibility, sturdiness'.....

Another example on engagement with field material (Finken, 2005)

Most of my encounters with and/or visits to Dweb have been documented in my personal fieldnotes. I say *most*, since I, as a consequence of the issues of access I experienced in the beginning of my field study, stopped writing notes at a certain point in time. Beside this break from writing, my fieldnotes were a space in which my ideas marinated; where puzzling thoughts got straightened up, and where events, which I did not have the time and/or capacity to record at the time of their occurrence, were revisited and written about. In the stage of analyzing and writing my dissertation, my fieldnotes have served a mnemonic function in that they have supported my memory in recalling certain events from the field. This has provided richer illustrations of 'what went on' in specific situations and/or more rich explanations of certain encounters. Also, the fieldnotes have added substantial texture to my headnotes, which simultaneously have added to my understandings of my fieldnotes. This process has altogether given my knowledges of my field research more content.

My headnotes have as well been valuable when analyzing my field material. I have not kept a separate folder in which themes, ideas and fieldnotes have been categorized and

chronologically ordered. Instead I have been devoted to indexing my field material in thematic events relating to my question of inquiry. Sanjek (1990b) describes different types of indexing ranging from (the abovementioned) chronologically orderly file to: “an outline written form, for, and sometimes inscribed directly on fieldnotes.” (ibid:386). I submit my work to the last mentioned way of organizing field material. With a color pen I marked out (circled or boxed in) events of interest. These color-marks are attended by comments, explanations and references to similar and other events of interests. All of this is written in the margin or on blank back pages of my field material. Sometime I made notes on the cover of a piece of field material to indicate thematic events in the text. My headnotes have supported my navigation through the field material; they have been valuable when making links between themes of interest and when engaging analytically with my material. My thematic indexing has developed and changed during my engagement with the material. Such moves have been (and still are) set in motion by interactions between field material, conversations with colleagues, and reading and thinking theory. Whenever such shifts have occurred new marks and comments have been added in my field material, and my essay(s) have changed.

NEXT WEEK

Movie: “Kitchen Stories” by Bent Hamer.

Readings for Wednesday September 26th:

Optional reading

Harper, R. (2000): The Organization in Ethnography. A discussion of Ethnographic Fieldwork Programs in CSCW. *Journal of Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, Vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 239-264. (How to do it in practice?) – Available online.

Third exercise: Observation without notes – group assignment (September 26th)

Observation without taking notes (write up notes afterwards!)

Carry out a second round of observations either:

- 1) “passive” observations as in the first assignment
- 2) “participant observation” in a setting in which you are familiar (as long as you are not compromising confidentiality and privacy of others), or
- 3) “shadowing” someone in their routine practices for 45 min. to 1 hour (this requires permission from the person you want to follow—this is a way of “seeing the world through someone’s eyes”; by quietly following someone as he/she carries out the work as normally done).

You may choose to return to the site for your observations last week or choose a new site. This time, observe without taking notes for at least 45 minutes (for an hour if you can; for absolute minimum of 30 minutes). In other words, you will write field notes from memory rather than from detailed notes taken while observing as in the first assignment. Think about how observing without taking notes affects what you see. If you return to the same site, think about continuities and changes in what you see when re-visiting the place and interactions there.

Include reflections on your experience as an observer and researcher. What difficulties did you encounter? What do you see as advantages and limits of such observations? How, when and where might you make use of passive or participant observations? How would you carry out such observations differently?

As for your first observations, write up your field notes, aiming for 2-4 pages, and post them by email **by September 26th to both:**

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