CHAPTER

Stepping In and Stepping Out: Understanding Cultures

Long before I ever heard of anthropology, I was being conditioned for the role of stepping in and out of society. It was part of my growing up process to question the traditional values and norms of the family and to experiment with behavior patterns and ideologies. This is not an uncommon process of finding oneself. Why should a contented and satisfied person think of standing outside his or any other society and studying it?

—Hortense Powdermaker

Ordinary living involves all the skills of fieldworking—looking, listening, collecting, questioning, and interpreting—even though we are not always conscious of these skills. Many of us enjoy people-watching from the corners of our eyes, checking out how others talk, dress, behave, and interact. We question the significance of someone’s wearing pig earrings or displaying a dragon tattoo on the left shoulder. We wonder how a certain couple sitting in a restaurant booth can communicate when they don’t look at each other in the eye or wonder who made the rules for children we see playing stickball in the middle of a busy street. Fieldworkers question such behaviors in a systematic way.

What is a “field”? And how does a person “work” in it? The word field carries a wide range of meanings. It can mean open cleared land, such as a field of corn, and it can also mean the ground devoted to playing sports, such as a soccer field. In military operations, the word suggests a battleground, whereas at the university, a field relates to an area of professional study, such as the field of rhetoric and composition or the field of Latin American studies. In photography and in art, a field can mean a visible surface on which an image is displayed, like a field of color or a field of view. In science, it relates to a region of space under the influence of some agent, such as an electrical field or a magnetic field. Business people, naturalists, and anthropologists all talk about “being in the field” as part of their jobs. Working “in the field” for an anthropologist means talking, listening, recording, observing, participating, and sometimes even living in a particular place. The field is the site for doing research, and fieldworking is the process of doing it. Close looking and listening skills mark trained fieldworkers who study groups of people in contexts—others’ and their own. The job of this book is to help you become more conscious as you observe, participate in, read, and write about your own world and the worlds of others. Although we don’t claim to turn
you into a professional ethnographer, we borrow ethnographic strategies to help you become a fieldworker, and we focus on showing you effective ways to write about your project. We'll guide you as you conduct and write up your own fieldwork and as you read about the fieldwork of others. Fieldwork will make you consider your everyday experiences in new ways and help you interpret other people's behaviors, language, and thoughts. But most of all, the fieldwork itself will help you understand why you react and respond in the ways you do. Sometimes, without much consciousness, we watch others. This book will encourage you not only to watch others but also to watch yourself as you watch them—consciously.

You've probably spent many hours noticing behavior patterns and questioning routines among the people you've lived with and learned from. In the quotation that introduces this chapter, anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker suggests that as we grow up, we "step out" a bit; we adopt the outsider stance as we watch the people inside our own group. We also "step in" to unfamiliar groups and examine them closely, which is the fieldworker's insider stance. As outsiders, we wonder if there might be a better technique for mining garlic or cooling pies that is less laborious than our family's method. Or we wonder if it is always necessary to dry dishes with a towel since, after all, they do dry by themselves. As outsiders moving to a new school, we might question the ritual cheers aimed against the rival or different rules for submitting papers. When we visit another country, we need to learn new rules for introductions and farewells in order to behave appropriately. Fieldworkers study the customs of groups of people in the spaces they inhabit.

Inquiry into the behavior patterns of others prepares us for doing fieldwork. Powdermaker also asks why any "satisfied and contented person" would want to research everyday ways of behaving, talking, and interacting. One answer is that fieldwork sharpens our abilities to look closely at surroundings. People, places, languages, and behaviors can be familiar because we've lived with them, but when we move or travel and find ourselves strangers, the very same things can be unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Another answer is that knowing our assumptions and recognizing our stereotypes helps develop tolerance and respect for customs and groups different from ours. For example, head coverings— turbans, veils, yarmulkes, ceremonial headdresses, and even baseball caps worn backward—may seem strange to us until we understand their history and significance. Studying and writing about diverse people and cultures does not necessarily make us accept difference, but it can make us aware of our assumptions and sometimes even our prejudices.

DEFINING CULTURE: FIELDWORK AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Culture is a slippery term. To some people, it implies "high culture"—classical music, etiquette, museum art, "Great Books," or extensive knowledge of Western history. For those people, culture is gained through exposure and socioeconomic status. But fieldworkers who have studied cultures around the world and in their own backyards know that individuals acquire culture from others in their group. Every group has a culture, so there is no useful distinction between "high" and "low" cultures. Anthropologists have tried to define what culture is for as long as they've been thinking about it, and they have developed contrasting definitions.

We define culture as an invisible web of behaviors, patterns, rules, and rituals of a group of people who have contact with one another and share common language. Our definition draws from the work of many anthropologists:

- "Culture is local and manmade and subtly variable. It tends also to be integrated. A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action" (Benedict 46).
- "A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members... (It) does not consist of things, people, behavior, or emotions. It is rather an organization of those things" (Goodenough 169).
- "Cultures are, after all, collective, unitary assemblages, authenticated by belief and agreement" (Myerhoff 10).
- "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance which he himself has created. I take culture to be those webs" (Geertz 14).

Cultural theorist Raymond Williams writes that culture is one of the most difficult words to define, and these anthropologists' definitions illustrate this. While Ruth Benedict and Ward Goodenough emphasize patterns in their definitions, Barbara Myerhoff highlights messiness. Clifford Geertz uses the metaphor of a web to describe how a culture hangs together invisibly. And still another anthropologist, James Peacock, draws a metaphor from photography. Using the lens of a camera, he describes its "hard light" and "soft focus" to show how ethnographers try to capture the background and the foreground of a group. As you can see, definitions of culture can be both metaphorical ("webs" and "lenses") and structured (patterns of belief and behavior as well as unitary deviations from those patterns).

In your fieldworking experiences, you will be constantly asking yourself, "Where is the culture?" of the group you are investigating. The goal of fieldworking is to find it. You will find evidence in the language of the group you study, in its cultural artifacts, or in its habits and behaviors. Fieldworkers investigate the cultural landscape, the larger picture of how a culture functions: its rituals, its rules, its traditions, and its behaviors. And they poke around the edges at the stories people tell, the items people collect and value, and the materials people use to go about their daily living. By learning from people in a culture what it is like to be part of their world, fieldworkers discover a culture's way of being, knowing, and understanding.

Fieldworkers who live, observe, and describe the daily life, behaviors, and language of a group of people for long periods of time are called ethnographers.
mother who denied her Jewish heritage. Elizabeth is a midwestern WASP whose grandfather was a farmer and whose father became a businessman who spoke Spanish and traveled to Cuba before Fidel Castro came to power. We both grew up as American baby boomers, with conformity and optimism in the post–World War II ‘50s, which by the 60s turned to protest of the Vietnam War. Bonnie played the guitar, wrote folk songs for a friend's coffeehouse, and joined the civil rights march on Selma. Elizabeth belonged to the Anti-Compliance War Movement, hung out in Greenwich Village wearing black clothes, and grew organic vegetables on a cooperative farm. But we were not only followers of these “countercultures”; we also belonged to more mainstream American ones. Bonnie, who was vice president of her high school student council, skipped school occasionally to take the train downtown to peek into a broadcast of American Bandstand but also wrote features for her college newspaper and joined a sorority. Elizabeth was a member of the National Honor Society, drag raced a souped-up red and cream-colored Chevy, and was sent off to finishing school, where she wore white gloves, stockings, and little hats.

In each of these subcultures, we communicated through special languages with insiders. We knew the ways of behaving and interacting, and we shared belief systems with the others in each group. Yet we held membership in many subcultures at the same time, and we could move among them. As members over the years, we were aware of those groups as actual cultures, but looking back as fieldworkers, we now understand that we, like you, have always been in a position to research the people around us. And we probably did do some informal inquiry but not the disciplined fieldwork of the ethnographer that this book describes.

As researchers, we've both studied the literacies of American subcultures. Because we are interested in language, both written and oral, we research everyday interactions: people read, write, speak, and listen, college students' conversation patterns, collaborative journal writing, middle school writing workshops, and kindergarteners' book talk. Bonnie has studied talk in a high school teachers' lounge, interactions in a college writing center, a recording session for a Hollywood movie, the writing and reading of handicapped teenagers, and a school superintendent's writing portfolio.

Neither of us has “stepped out” of our North American culture to find our research sites, but the more research we do, the more immersed we are in researching familiar places. We are a bit like tourists who need only to travel a little way from home to find something very different and very fascinating to research. Less than an hour away from Elizabeth’s home, for example, is a small town called Seagrove that has over 100 working potters. They form a community that shares similar technical language, crafting skills, and aesthetic values. Each spring the potters of Seagrove stage a ritual opening of the kilns to the public. Pottery is thrown and glazed and applied as potters share their insider knowledge with outsiders. This group of artisans, whose craft goes back eight or nine generations, represents a subculture unknown to Elizabeth and many others who live just outside Seagrove. We don’t always need to go very far from home to find...
Looking at Subcultures

Purpose
We consider any self-identified group of people who share language, stories, rituals, behaviors, and values a subculture. Some subcultures define themselves by geography (southerners, Texans, New Yorkers). Others define themselves by ethnicity or language (Mexicanos, Irish, Belgian, Filippino, Ghanaian). And others define their interests by shared rituals and behaviors (fraternities, Girl Scouts, Masons, Daughters of the American Revolution, computer hackers). Whether it's your bowling league, your neighborhood pickup basketball team or group of bicycle freestylers, your church, your community government, or your school's ecology club, you simultaneously belong to many different subcultures. With this box, we'd like you to recall your subculture affiliations and share them with others in your class.

Action
List some of the subcultures to which you belong. For each subculture you mention, jot down a few key details that distinguish the group—behaviors, insider phrases, rules, rituals, and the specific locations where these behaviors usually occur. You might want to divide your list into a few categories or columns, such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Rituals</th>
<th>Insider Phrases</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
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Write a paragraph or short essay describing one of these subcultures, either seriously or satirically.

Response
Some of our students belonged to these subcultures: computer interest groups, online discussion groups, listers, deer hunters, gospel singers, specialty book clubs, volleyball teams, science fiction conventioners, auctioneers, fly fishermen, billiard players, bull riders, lap swimmers, bluegrass musicians, stock car racers.

Chinatsu Sasaia, a native of Japan, where as a teenager she experienced karaoke quite differently from the way Americans do. Here is what she writes about the subculture of Japanese karaoke participants:

Investigating Perspectives: Insider and Outsider

Fieldworkers realize that ordinary events in one culture might seem extraordinary in another. When people say “that’s really weird” or “strengh bastards” a fieldworker hears these comments as signals for investigation. When you first ate dinner at someone’s home other than yours, you may have felt like an
Stepping Out: Making the Familiar Strange and the Strange Familiar

Rosaldo's parody of the family breakfast and his understanding of the Ilongots' headhunting practices display the coupled skills of detachment and involvement a fieldworker needs. To understand the Ilongots' perspective on headhunting—a crucial part of what anthropologists would call their worldview—Rosaldo had to suffer the intensity of rage and grief that the bereaved Ilongots did. Though
not intentionally, he achieved this empathy by making what seemed to him a strange event (cutting off people's heads for revenge) totally familiar as a researcher.

What is often more difficult to achieve than making the unknown become familiar is making the familiar seem strange. Rosaldo was able to accomplish the outsider view of his family's breakfast-making practices mainly through satire, a technique that distances the reader from the event or practice under consideration. In the following reading written in 1956, "Body Ritual among the Nacirema," anthropologist Horace Miner also depends on satire to depict an ordinary set of daily practices as strange and unfamiliar. As you read this essay, try to figure out what everyday rituals Miner is satirizing.

Body Ritual among the Nacirema

Horace Miner

The anthropologist has become so familiar with the diversity of ways in which different peoples behave in similar situations that he is not apt to be surprised by even the most exotic customs. In fact, if all of the logically possible combinations of behavior have not been found somewhere in the world, he is apt to suspect that they must be present in some yet undescribed tribe. This point has, in fact, been expressed with respect to clan organization by Murdock (1949, 71). In this light, the magical beliefs and practices of the Nacirema present such unusual aspects that it seems desirable to describe them as an example of the extremes to which human behavior can go.

Professor Linton first brought the ritual of the Nacirema to the attention of anthropologists twenty years ago (1936, 326), but the culture of this people is still very poorly understood. They are a North American group living in the territory between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui and Tarahumara of Mexico, and the Carib and Arawak of the Antilles. Little is known of their origin, although tradition states that they came from the east. According to Nacirema mythology, their nation was originated by a culture hero, Natghinhaw, who is otherwise known for his two great feats of strength—the throwing of a piece of wampum across the river Pa-To-Mac and the chopping down of a cherry tree in which the Spirit of Truth resided.

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. While much of the people's time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. While such concerns are certainly not unusual, its ceremonial aspect and associated philosophy are unique.

The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of the powerful influences of ritual and ceremony. Every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose. The more powerful individuals in the society have several shrines in their houses and, in fact, the opulence of a house is often referred to in terms of the number of such shrines it possesses. Most houses are of wattle and daub construction, but the shrine rooms of the more wealthy are walled with stone. Poorer families imitate the rich by applying pottery plaques to their shrine walls.

While each family has at least one such shrine, the rituals associated with it are not family ceremonies but are private and secret. The rites are normally only discussed with children, and then only during the period when they are being initiated into these mysteries. I was able to establish sufficient rapport with the natives to examine these shrines and to have the rituals described to me.

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept the many charms and magical potions without which no native believes he could live. These preparations are secured from a variety of specialized practitioners. The most powerful of these are the medicine men, whose assistance must be rewarded with substantial gifts. However, the medicine men do not provide the curative potions for their clients, but decide what the ingredients should be and then write them down in an ancient and secret language. This writing is understood only by the medicine men and by the herbalists who, for another gift, provide the required charm.

The charm is not disposed of after it has served its purpose, but is placed in the charm-box of the household shrine. As these magical materials are specific for certain ills, and the real or imagined maladies of the people are many, the charm-box is usually full to overflowing. The magical packets are so numerous that people forget what their purposes were and fear to use them again. While the natives are very vague on this point, we can only assume that the idea in retaining all the old magical materials is that their presence in the charm-box, before which the body rituals are conducted, will in some way protect the worshipper.

Beneath the charm-box is a small font. Each day every member of the family, in succession, enters the shrine room, bows his head before the charm-box, sprinkles different sorts of holy water in the font, and proceeds with a brief rite of ablution. The holy waters are secured from the Water Temple of the community, where the priests conduct elaborate ceremonies to make the liquid ritually pure.

In the hierarchy of magical practitioners, and below the medicine men in prestige, are specialists whose designation is best translated "holy-mouthmen." The Nacirema have an almost pathological horror of and fascination with the mouth, the condition of which is believed to have a supernatural
influence on all social relationships. Were it not for the rituals of the mouth, they believe that their hearts would fall out, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them. They also believe that a strong relationship exists between oral and moral characteristics. For example, there is a ritual ablation of the mouth for children which is supposed to improve their moral fiber.

The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.

In addition to the private mouth-rite, the people seek out a holy-mouth-man once or twice a year. These practitioners have an impressive set of paraphernalia, consisting of a variety of augers, awls, probes, and prods. The use of these objects in the exorcism of the evils of the mouth involves almost unbelievable ritual torture of the client. The holy-mouth-man opens the client's mouth and, using the above mentioned tools, enlarges any holes which decay may have created in the teeth. Magical materials are put into these holes. If there are no naturally occurring holes in the teeth, large sections of one or more teeth are gouged out so that the supernatural substance can be applied. In the client's view, the purpose of these mini-insinations is to arrest decay and to draw friends. The extremely sacred and traditional character of the rite is evident in the fact that the natives return to the holy-mouth-men year after year, despite the fact that their teeth continue to decay.

It is to be hoped that, when a thorough study of the Nacrie is made, there will be careful inquiry into the personality structure of these people. One has but to watch the gleam in the eye of a holy-mouth-man, as he jabs an awl into an exposed nerve, to suspect that a certain amount of sadism is involved. If this can be established, a very interesting pattern emerges. For most of the population shows definite sadistic tendencies. It was to these that Professor Linton referred in discussing a distinctive part of the daily body ritual which is performed only by men. This part of the rite involves scraping and lacerating the surface of the face with a sharp instrument. Special women's rites are performed only four times during each lunar month, but what they lack in frequency is made up in barbarity. As part of this ceremony, women bathe their heads in small ovens for about an hour. The theoretically interesting point is that what seems to be a preponderantly masochistic people have developed sadistic tendencies.

The medicine men have an imposing temple, or latipa, in every community of any size. The more elaborate ceremonies required to treat very sick patients can only be performed at this temple. These ceremonies involve not only the thumaturge but a permanent group of vestal maidens who move sedately about the temple chambers in distinctive costume and headdresses.

The latipa ceremonies are so harsh that it is phenomenal that a fair proportion of the really sick natives who enter the temple ever recover. Small children, whose indoctrination is still incomplete, have been known to resist attempts to take them to the temple because "that is where you go to die." Despite this fact, sick adults are not only willing but eager to undergo the protected ritual purifications, if they can afford to do so. No matter how ill the supplicant or how grave the emergency, the guardians of many temples will not admit a client if he cannot give a rich gift to the custodian. Even after one has gained admission and survived the ceremonies, the guardians will not permit the neophyte to leave until he makes still another gift.

The supplicant entering the temple is first stripped of all his or her clothes. In everyday life the Nacrie avoids exposure of his body and its natural functions. Bathing and excretory acts are performed only in the secrecy of the household shrine, where they are ritualized as part of the body-rites. Psychological shock results from the fact that body secrecy is suddenly lost upon entry into the latipa. A man whose own wife has never seen him in an excretory act suddenly finds himself naked and assisted by a vestal maiden while he performs his natural functions into a sacred vessel. This sort of ceremonial treatment is necessitated by the fact that the excreta are used by a diviner to ascertain the course and nature of the client's sickness. Female clients, on the other hand, find their naked bodies are subjected to the scrutiny, manipulation, and prodding of the medicine men.

Few supplicants in the temple are well enough to do anything but lie on their hard beds. The daily ceremonies, like the rites of the holy-mouth-men, involve discomfort and torture. With ritual precision, the vestals awaken their miserable charges each dawn and roll them about on their beds of pain while performing ablations, in the formal movements of which the maidens are highly trained. At other times they insert magic wands in the supplicant's mouth or force him to eat substances which are supposed to be healing. From time to time the medicine men come to their clients and jab magically treated needles into their flesh. The fact that these temple ceremonies may not cure, and may even kill the neophyte, in no way decreases the people's faith in the medicine men.

There remains one other kind of practitioner, known as a "listener." This witch-doctor has the power to exorcise the devils that lodge in the heads of people who have been bewitched. The Nacrie believe that parents bewitch their own children. Mothers are particularly suspected of putting a curse on children while teaching them the secret body rituals. The counter-magic of the witch-doctor is unusual in its lack of ritual. The patient simply tells the "listener" all his troubles and fears, beginning with the earliest difficulties he can remember. The memory displayed by the Nacrie in these exorcism sessions is truly remarkable. It is not uncommon for the patient to bemoan the rejection he felt upon being weaned as a babe, and a few individuals even see their troubles going back to the traumatic effects of their own birth.
In conclusion, mention must be made of certain practices which have their base in native aesthetics but which depend upon the pervasive aversion to the natural body and its functions. There are ritual fasts to make fat people thin and ceremonial feasts to make thin people fat. Still other rites are used to make women's breasts larger if they are small, and smaller if they are large. General dissatisfaction with breast shape is symbolized in the fact that the ideal form is virtually outside the range of human variation. A few women afflicted with almost inhuman hypermammary development are so idolized that they make a handsome living by simply going from village to village and permitting the natives to stare at them for a fee.

Reference has already been made to the fact that extraneous functions are ritualized, routinized, and relegated to secrecy. Natural reproductive functions are similarly distorted. Intercourse is taboo as a topic and scheduled as an act. Efforts are made to avoid pregnancy by the use of magical materials or by limiting intercourse to certain phases of the moon. Conception is actually very infrequent. When pregnant, women dress so as to hide their condition. Parturition takes place in secret, without friends or relatives to assist, and the majority of women do not nurse their infants.

Our review of the ritual life of the Nacirema has certainly shown them to be a magic-ridden people. It is hard to understand how they have managed to exist so long under the burdens which they have imposed upon themselves. But even such exotic customs as these take on real meaning when they are viewed with the insight provided by Malinowski when he wrote (1948:70):

Looking from far and above, from our high places of safety in the developed civilization, it is easy to see all the crudity and irrelevance of magic. But without its power and guidance early man could not have mastered his practical difficulties as he has done, nor could mankind have advanced to the higher stages of civilization.

Works Cited

As you read this parody of American (Nacirema spelled backward) personal hygiene, you probably noticed how Miner's descriptions of everyday bathroom objects and grooming practices seemed like something you never before engaged in. He describes the medicine chest as a "shrine" that holds magic potions and "charms." The toothbrush is "a small bundle of hog hairs" for the application of "magical powders."

We laugh at Miner's parody because we see ourselves and our American obsession with cleanliness. This reading makes fun of our own cultural attitudes about bathing and cleansing habits, our American belief in dentists, doctors, and therapists, and our reliance on hospitals and diets. Miner defamiliarizes our everyday behaviors so that we can see ourselves as outsiders might describe us: a highly ritualized people who believe in magical customs and potions.

### Making the Ordinary Extraordinary

**Purpose**
As the preceding excerpts from Renato Rosaldo (p. 8) and Horace Miner (p. 10) show, shifting oneself from insider to outsider and trying to describe language and behavior from those perspectives are not only the essence of parody but also activities of enormous value when we try to "make the familiar strange and the strange familiar" as fieldworkers must do. This box offers you an opportunity to recognize the value of seeing ourselves as outsiders might describe us.

**Action**
Take something that's familiar to you—an ordinary routine or ritual in your everyday life that would seem extraordinary to someone else in another culture or subculture—and reexamine it as if you were seeing it for the first time. Try something simple—like the way you fix your hair, listen to music, change a tire, take the mail, or get ready for a sporting event. List the specific behaviors of your routine, and identify what might seem strange or extraordinary to others. Prepare your list to share with others, or write a short paragraph that describes the process.

**Response**
Our student Angela Harger wrote this response:

I pay thousands of dollars a year—dollars I resent giving up but give up anyway. For all this money, I get the privilege of awakening early, long before my body wants to. I groggily get ready and then drive east for half an hour, through rain, snow, or blinding sun. I shell out another extraordinary amount of dollars each day for the privilege of leaving
Posing Questions: Ethnographic and Journalistic

An ethnographer and a journalist may both gather information about the same event but write up their accounts very differently. Miners' satire on American body rituals is a parody of the kind of traditional research that anthropologists have often published about foreign or exotic cultures. Nonfiction exposes, reports of personal experiences, and historical and documentary writings may read like fieldwork projects, but the difference lies in the research processes that led up to them. A standard daily newspaper reporter, for example, conducts research in an attempt to be objective: to give the who, what, when, where, and why of an event for a readership that expects facts without too much interpretation. As a fieldworker, your purpose is to collect and consider multiple sources of information, not facts alone, to convey the perspective of the people in the culture you study.

The fieldworker asks big, open-ended questions such as “What’s going on here?” and “Where is the culture?” as he or she observes, listens, records, interprets, and analyzes. The journalist often writes from the outsider perspective, quoting from insiders. The fieldworker must combine an outsider’s point of view with an insider’s perspective. Anthropologists use the term emic to mean the insider perspective and etic to refer to that of the outsider.

The following piece, “Church Opens Doors to Vietnamese,” from the front page of a small city’s newspaper, provides an example of reportage. But if we examine the article with an ethnographer’s eye, we’ll ask different questions that help us examine information that a news writer usually doesn’t consider. To read for the complexity that this article implies, we need to uncover many layers of cultural meanings.

Church Opens Doors to Vietnamese
St. Louis de Gonzague Holds First Mass in Vietnamese and Welcomes the Community to Its Parish
Byron Brown, Telegraph Staff

NASHUA—The one o’clock Mass at St. Louis de Gonzague Church was a little different Sunday. The choir and congregation sang “Meet Me in St. Louis” to greet its new minister, the Rev. Louis Nhien.

Nhien greeted his new parishioners by conducting Mass in Vietnamese. Nhien’s sermon was the first of what will be a weekly Vietnamese Mass at the church on West Hollis Street.

Before the 90-minute Mass, Nhien led about 200 Vietnamese worshipers into the church as hundreds of St. Louis’ current parishioners stood and applauded. Nhien took a seat behind the altar alongside Pastor Roland Cote and Bishop Leo O’Neill of the Manchester diocese.

Older Vietnamese women wearing flowing silk blouses and pants, and younger Vietnamese families toting small children all filled into the pews in the middle of the church.

There, they listened as O’Neill praised, with the help of an interpreter, the union of the Vietnamese community and the Roman Catholic Church.

“No matter what language we speak, no matter what country we come from, we’re all brothers,” he said. “We are one church as we profess one faith.”

O’Neill spoke of St. Louis’ history as a French-speaking church and how that had prepared its older parishioners for the new Vietnamese Mass.

“The French people of Nashua decided to build their own church where they could feel at home and speak their own language,” he said. “The people of St. Louis want to welcome you here today, so you can feel at home.”

Nhien then led the entire church in prayer and song.

Nhien, 38, was ordained last year and came to New Hampshire three weeks ago from Carthage, Mo. The New Hampshire Catholic Charities, led by Monsignor John Quinn, specifically brought him to the state to conduct Mass for the Vietnamese refugee community, which is centered in Greater Nashua and Manchester.

Older parishioners welcomed the Vietnamese worshipers and said their arrival makes St. Louis a stronger and more diversified church.

Veronica Barr, an Englishwoman who now lives in Nashua, said, “I’m excited. I think enthusiasm is an extension of us all being Catholic.”

Ethnography and journalism differ not only with respect to the writing process but also with respect to the depth of research, the time allotted to it, and, most significantly, the perspective that the researcher adopts. Many ethnographers
write journalistically, and many journalists write ethnographically. In the example
above, journalist Byron Brown's responsibility was to report on the special
church service—that event as it happened at that church on that day—against a
deadline and for a specific audience of newspaper readers. This journalist's goal
was to gather the church's news, and his responsibility was to get it out quickly.
But as a fieldworker, your responsibility would be to conduct extensive research,
to discover knowledge that might take months or even years to complete. The
fieldworker's commitment is an entire one—to capture the perspective of the
insiders in the culture.

The newspaper account is the story of a Vietnamese priest from Carthage,
Missouri, who has been invited to conduct a weekly Catholic Mass for Vietnamese
refugees. The Mass takes place in a New Hampshire church whose pastor and
parishioners are primarily French Canadian and whose bishop is Irish.
The article states that the choir sings a song from an American musical, "Meet
Me in St. Louis," playing off the name of the church (St. Louis de Gonzague),
its newest minister (Louis Nhu), and the state from where he has recently
come (Missouri).

The article describes how Vietnamese women wear "wearing flowing silk
blouses and pants" and an Englishwoman saying "I'm excited. I think enthusiasm
is a quality of all being Catholic." In the newspaper account, the bishop
announces, "The people of St. Louis want to welcome you here today, so you can
feel at home." The accompanying photograph shows an American flag, a bilingual
banner that says "Welcome/Bienvenue," and a large stained-glass crucifix. Under
these artifacts stand the three Catholic clergymen, seated before the congregation
in their religious vestments. The caption reminds readers that the clergy recited the
welcoming Mass in three languages: English, French, and Vietnamese.

As a fieldworker, you would ask focused questions about this cultural
moment. You would emphasize issues that differ from the journalist's focus on
the who, what, where, when, and why. You would ask questions like these: Who
belongs to the Vietnamese church community? How do they see themselves
here at this church? What languages do they speak? Do they define themselves
they associated with this church? What is the history of French-speaking in New Hampshire? What is the history of the French influence in Vietnam? Whether you choose the perspective of the Vietnamese priests,
the non-Catholic Vietnamese refugees, the Irish bishop, or the mayor of Nashua,
you will offer the insiders' perspective along with your own as you translate your
cultural data into ethnographic text for your readers.

When Bishop O'Neil states in the article that he wants the Vietnamese
worshippers to feel "at home," what does he mean by "at home"? Home to the
people already in the church? To the Vietnamese refugee community of parishioners?
or to the greater Nashua community? The older Vietnamese women are reported to be wearing silk blouses and pants, but what were
the younger women wearing? The men? The non-Vietnamese parishioners?
Who was included in the "hundreds" who stood and applauded? Why did they
applaud? Why was Veronica Barr specifically described as "an Englishwoman"?
And how do we read her perspective that "enthusiasm is an extension of our all
being Catholic"? What, for example, would one of the Vietnamese parishioners
say about the multicultural service?

As a fieldworker, investigating all these questions and trying to understand
this cultural moment, you would collect more information (data) and do more
fieldwork. You might, for example, gather artifacts (material objects that belong to
and represent a culture)—the painted service, prayer books, and hymnals, docu-
ments or pamphlets describing the church and its programs—in any or all of the
three languages. You might do some research at the library on the French occu-
patation of Vietnam and on the history of the Catholic Church in the United
States, Canada, France, and Asia. Or you might go to the Nashua Historical Society
to learn about the French Canadian settlers in Nashua. But you would not be able
to write your account until you had begun to decipher where the culture is.

One way you could begin would be to locate key informants to interview—
a few people to help guide you and explain their culture. Such guides represent
the "others," those who are different from the researcher. To describe their
profiles, fieldworkers use the terms informants, consultants, subjects, natives, the
other, or outsiders. Which term we use is our own decision, but since such de-
scriptions reveal our attitudes toward the people we study, it is a crucial decision
to make. Throughout this book, we use anthropology's term informant to refer to insiders in a culture. We realize that some readers may associate this term inform-
ment with police work (a "snitch," for instance), but we like this term because it
emphasizes the knowledge—the information—that insiders have. For similar
reasons, some fieldworkers like the term consultant.

So you would choose key informants in Nashua to interview, using a transla-
tor if necessary, holding conversations in homes and in other community set-
tings as well as in the church. Your informants might help you understand:
their perspective on the extent to which the church has welcomed the Vietnamese into its community. You might, for example, interview the clergy, the Englishwoman
Veronica Barr, one of the clergy, the Englishwoman, or even Byron Brown, the
newspaper writer who wrote the account of the Sunday afternoon Mass. Other in-
formants could include the church's choir director, Monsignor John Quinn, who
brought Reverend Nhu to New Hampshire. You would tape your interviews
and then transcribe them.

Throughout the process, you would keep careful fieldnotes describing the
details in the places you go and the people you observe as they go about living in
those places. You would also record your own subjective responses and feelings
and how they affect your data: things that bother you, ideas you don't under-
stand, events or comments that interest you. Looking over all this data, you
would begin to formulate hypotheses about what is important in the culture of
the St. Louis de Gonzague Church, Nashua's Vietnamese community, the larger
refugee community, or the French Catholic community. As you thought about your data, you would then make choices about which part of it
you would use to represent the people in the culture.
Engaging the Ethnographic Perspective

Purpose
Knowing the difference between the insider ("emic") perspective and the outsider ("etic") perspective is an important skill for a fieldworker, as it is for a journalist. But for a fieldworker, being sure to represent many perspectives—those of the researcher as well as those of the various people important to the "moment" in a given cultural event—is deeply important to the principles of ethnographic research.

Action
Find a news article in your local paper that shows a cultural moment and might challenge a fieldworker to do more research. A cultural moment need not be a major political or social event such as the disbanding of the Berlin Wall or a march on Washington. Local headlines often mark insider culture in smaller places: the opening of an ethnic restaurant, a local hero’s action, a community conflict, a group or institution that’s made a major shift. Share the article and your answers to the following questions with your colleagues:

- What cultural information does the article include?
- What kinds of questions might the fieldworker ask to further uncover the culture the article describes?
- How would the fieldworker’s questions differ from those of a journalist?
- What information would the fieldworker want to gather to answer the question “What’s going on here?”
- What other sources of information might the fieldworker use to penetrate the insider perspective?
- Where would she need to go to find those sources?

Response
Here are some sample headlines of newspaper articles our students chose:
“Amish Community Copes with Rare Murder,” “Korean University Professor Develops Education Program in Finland,” “Art Teacher Saves Drowning Child in Treacherous River Dam,” “Small Business Grant Slashed in Favor of Community Fireworks Display,” “Kiwanis Club Donates Funds toward Little Juanita’s New Kidney.” Note that the headlines are specific, full of cultural details. Our students’ analyses were twice as long as the news articles they chose. They asked more questions than they were able to answer as they peeled back layers of information to find out “Where is (or are) the cultural?” An example, consisting of a news story accompanied by a student’s analysis, follows.

Black Astronaut Carries Navajo Flag
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP)—Before Bernard Harris Jr. was allowed to take a Navajo flag aboard Discovery, tribal medicine men had to bless it with corn pollen and make sure the space shuttle’s path fit with their beliefs: It had to orbit clockwise.

When the Navajo decided that from their viewpoint, Discovery’s orbit met the requirement, all signals were go for Harris to carry the first Navajo item to fly in space. NASA allows astronauts to carry up a few small belongings.

“I’m flying this flag for them because being there I could see their plight as the original Americans,” said Harris, a 38-year-old black physician who lived on a Navajo reservation from ages 7 to 15. His mother taught at boarding schools run by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Harris, who today will become the first black to spacewalk, approached the Navajo in December about taking some tribal item with him on the mission.

Navajo Nation President Albert Hale decided on a flag after consulting with medicine men to make sure no spiritual traditions would be violated. The flag was blessed last month by Navajo medicine man Ross Nez.

Through a ceremony, Nez “was told by the Creator and the Holy People that it would strengthen the Navajo Nation for this flag to go around Mother Earth,” Navajo spokeswoman Valerie Tallman said Wednesday.

Bernard Harris Jr., an astronaut aboard the space shuttle Discovery.
"The flag is a symbol of our nation and reminds us of how we must live in balance with our Mother Earth to survive," Hale said.

Nestled in the desert, the flag is draped with corn pollen, which has an important role in the Navajo culture. The flag is often used in ceremonial activities, such as the Navajo Sunrise Ceremony. Hale sent the flag to NASA a few days later, but it was not until the flag was displayed in the Oval Office that it became an important symbol for the Navajo Nation.

The flag is made from a traditional Navajo design and is made of wool, which is a symbol of the Navajo people's connection to the land. The flag is flown in public places, such as schools and community centers, as a way to promote cultural pride and respect for the Navajo people.

Using the Ethnographic Perspective

Steve Gates

"Black Astronaut Carries Navajo Flag," Cedar Rapids Gazette, February 10, 1995

The article discusses Bernard Harris Jr.'s choice to carry a Navajo flag on his shuttle flight. Harris is an African American who spent eight years of his youth on a Navajo reservation. The article reveals general details about the circumstances and the way in which the decision was approved by Navajo tribal leaders.

Regarding the cultural issues, there are several things the article doesn't include. Why does Harris consider the Navajo the "first Americans" as he is quoted as saying? What daily interaction did Harris have with the Navajo during his youth, and what specific influence did they have on him? Why did he leave when he was 15? Did he maintain contact with the Navajo after he left the reservation? How much does he know about his African American heritage compared to the Navajo culture? Did he also take an artifact from his African American heritage? Why or why not? If so, what was it, and is there any connection to the Navajo flag?

Other questions worth pursuing might be how Navajo officials and tribal leaders felt about Harris's choice for an artifact. Perhaps one could interview childhood friends of Harris's from the reservation to hear their reflections and opinions. Do they have the same opinion of him now that they did then? Why or why not? Did Harris actively participate in the Navajo culture and rituals as a young person? To what extent does his choice to carry their flag represent a sincere and genuine belief in their culture?

I would think tribal elders and the medicine man referred to in the article would be good sources for more insight into the cultural implications and details of this event. Another curiosity is the writer's choice to compare the use of corn pollen to Navajo rituals to the use of holy water in the Catholic Church. This could be an example of a "mixed" metaphor since the frame of reference for the writer is Christianity, and although there are some obvious general similarities (i.e., creation stories and the hereafter), there are many contradictions between the two, especially if one starts to pursue the concept of land ownership and its relationship to Christianity.

Obviously, an ethnographer could find numerous trails and sources to pursue.

FIELDWORKING WITH THIS BOOK

In the preceding section, as our imaginary fieldworker, you used one cultural moment at a church service to begin your field research. Researching involves making sense of cultural events. As one of the main goals of your research will be to share what you learn with others, you'll need to organize your research process as you work toward your final written project.

To help you organize, we've arranged this book around four learning strategies: reading, writing, fieldworking, and reflecting. Using these strategies will help you build two projects of your own: a research portfolio and a fieldwork essay. The aim of a fieldwork portfolio is to develop personal insights and reflections on the research process as you go along, not just at the end of your project. We recommend that you share your work in progress several times during your research process. You may want to choose a portfolio partner among your colleagues to read your work regularly or form a research group to do the same.

With this book, you'll read published texts, but you'll also learn to "read" objects as cultural artifacts: baskets, buildings, quilts, clothing. And you'll learn to "read" places, events, and people: truck stops, restaurants and bars, mall stores, and town meetings. In the process of "reading" places and people, events and artifacts, you will dig into layers of meaning that lie inside language in words, expressions, stories, jokes, proverbs, and legends.
This book will initiate you into the gritty part of fieldwork. You will learn to keep researcher's notes, tape-record interviews with informants, collect material culture, gather multiple types of information (research data), develop questions and hypotheses, analyze patterns, and offer interpretations. A pencil and a notebook are your bare necessities, although you might consider other technologies (a camera, a laptop computer, a tape recorder). More important than the skills you develop or the equipment you use for controlling your data, however, is the understanding that you are the matrix that frames your research. As a researcher, you'll need to develop a kind of bi-directional lens as you research, allowing you to look at others and be seen by you.

For example, as our imaginary fieldworker on page 18, if you were French Canadian and Catholic yourself, you might not recognize the interesting collision of Asian, French, Catholic, and Catholic cultures in a French Canadian Catholic church in Nashville. Or you might have a biased view of history because your own father was killed in the Vietnam War. Or you might not notice the significance of the song "Meet Me in St. Louis" and its connection to the name of the church, St. Louis de Gonzague. Through the process of writing and reflecting on your fieldwork, you'll become aware of the cultural lenses through which you look and how they affect what you understand, what you don't understand, and what you may never understand.

In this book, we'll review some of the basic writing strategies that fieldworkers use. Short writing exercises will help you hone your skills of description, specificity, mapping, organization, and analysis. You'll learn about constructing a researcher's voice in your ethnographic study and developing yourself as a narrator who guides your reader through your research. Particularly, audience, purpose, and focus will help you shape your data for your reader. You will also study and try out some of the aesthetic features of ethnographic writing: metaphors, sensory images, dialogue patterns, thematic structures. Finally, it's also apparent from his study that Rick has read other articles and books about the trucking culture. He has knowledge about what he expects to see there. In some ways, this background information could put blinders on Rick as he sets out to confirm or disconfirm the ideas of other writers who claim that truckers form a community with shared interests, values, and language. Because, like Rick, you will be researching a place you are already interested in and want to know more about, you'll need to admit your possible biases about your topic and look at how other researchers have written about it.

As you read Rick's study, make a list of questions about his research process so that you'll be prepared to discuss the piece from that point of view. We realize that Rick's research may be the first ethnographic study you've read, so we'd like you to recognize its form and content. For example, Rick provides headings to guide you through his study and help you organize the questions you may have.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY: "FRIDAY NIGHT AT IOWA 80"

We present here a fieldworking project completed by one of our students to give you a sample of the kind of research and writing we hope you'll ultimately do. We want to show you how a fieldworker "steps in" to a culture to investigate it, at the same time "stepping out" as he maintains the outsider's perspective while he observes. Rick Zollo wrote this study about a truck stop in Iowa as his major paper for a course centered on researching and writing about fieldwork. Though your study will probably be shorter than Rick's, it will share many features of his approach, particularly the emphasis on the self as part of the research process.

Rick is an older student with a background in journalism who is new to ethnographic research and has long been interested in truck drivers - so much so that he attended trucking school the summer after finishing his study. You'll notice immediately that Rick's study of the truck stop is written as a narrative and reads like a fiction article from a magazine, a genre often called literary journalism or creative nonfiction. As a reader new to ethnographic writing, you may not immediately distinguish the features of this study that make it ethnographic research and not journalism or reportage. You'll need to slip underneath Rick's smooth narrative like to see what goes into the fieldworking process. Look for places where Rick interweaves his own feelings, beliefs, and reflections. While reading, ask yourself the questions like those asked as we read the newspaper article "Church Opens Doors to Vietnamese": What were Rick's sources of data? How does he confirm or disconfirm his ideas? What interpretations does he offer? What is the culture he describes? What makes it a culture? Does his writing convince you? Can you see the place and people he describes? Do you understand what it would be like to be an insider in this culture?

You'll need to keep in mind some background knowledge as you read Rick's interesting story about a culture of truckers that he has captured by describing a typical truck stop, Iowa 80, on a Friday night. First, it's clear that although Rick writes about a single Friday evening, he's spent many Fridays and other days gathering data and working his way into this field. He writes with the authority of having been there, and he makes us feel that we've been there too. It's also obvious that Rick has permission from the owner of the truck stop, Del's Truck Stop, to hang out and interview truckers and staff members. Finally, it's also apparent from his study that Rick has read other articles and books about the trucking culture. He has knowledge about what he expects to see there. In some ways, this background information could put blinders on Rick as he sets out to confirm or disconfirm the ideas of other writers who claim that truckers form a community with shared interests, values, and language. Because, like Rick, you will be researching a place you are already interested in and want to know more about, you'll need to admit your possible biases about your topic and look at how other researchers have written about it.
Friday Night at Iowa 80
The Truck Stop as Community and Culture
Rick Zollo

Truck stops are the center of trucking culture. "Trucker Villages..." offer the driver an equivalent to the cowboys' town at trail's end or the friendly port to sailors.

—James Thomas, The Long Haul

A Modern Trucking Village

Friday nights are a special time all across America, for big and small towns alike, and it's no different at a "trucker town." Iowa 80 is advertised as "the largest Amoco truck stop in the world" and is located off Interstate 80 at exit 294, outside the small town of Walcott, about 10 miles from downtown Davenport and 40 miles from the Iowa City home.

I arrived at suppertime on a full Friday evening, with the intention of enjoying a meal in the full-service restaurant. But before I could even consider eating, I had to walk the grounds. In my experience, the best way to observe a community is with a walkabout, observing climate and current social interactions.

A huge hole occupied what had most recently been the south-side front parking lot. The hole was filled with a bright blue fuel tank roughly 40 by 60 feet in size and topped by five large green plastic spirals. The operation was a result of another government mandate, concerning the fuels that storage containers, like those of De la Mona, company vice president, told me this operation would cost Iowa 80 $180,000 ($40,000 to take out the old tanks and $140,000 for replacement), another example of "government interference." According to De la Mona, the tanks dug up so far were in good condition.

The truck stop is laid out in the form of a huge rectangle, taking up over 50 acres on the north side of the interstate exit. The first building facing incoming traffic is the main headquarters, which includes a restaurant at the front, video and game room next, a sunken shopping mall, and a stairway leading to second-floor corporate offices, hair salon, laundry room, movie theater (seats 40), and TV room, dental offices, exercise room, and private shower stalls. The last renovations were completed in 1984, about the time I first began noticing the village, but De la Mona stated that a large building project was planned for 1994.

The evening had yet to begin, and the yard was only a quarter full, without that convoy pattern of trucks coming and going in single file, an orderly parade that in several hours would take on Fellini-like dimensions. I maneuvered through the yard (in my usual loping stride), notebook in hand, making eye contact with truckers when they passed, not trying to act like one of them so much as feeling comfortable in their company.

Will Jennings, a former trucker and personal friend, talked about the insularity of the trucker community in Frederick Will's Big Rig Souls. "You go in truck stops and they have their own section... Most of them (truckers) could tell from the minute you walk in the door you're not a driver. They hold most people who aren't drivers... with a good deal of disdain."

I had already been spotted by employees of Iowa 80 as "not a driver," and in my many youthful years of hitchhiking around the country, I had been made to feel the outsider whenever I'd stumble into one of these trucking lairs. I had trouble understanding this resentment of outsiders, especially when I was on the road in need of a ride. But familiarity with the culture was bringing what scholar Sherman Paul calls "the sympathetic imagination," and I now felt I was beginning to understand.

On this late afternoon, the lot was rather calm, even though trucks waited in line to diesel up at the fifty fuel station, all four bays at the Truckomat truck wash were filled, and service was being rendered at the mechanics' and tire shop. The three buildings stood in a row on the north side of the lot, each about a third the size of the main complex and separated by several truck lanes for traffic.

The truckyard occupied the southern half of the property, with the interstate in its full glory to the south of that. Every time I stood in the middle of
I sat opposite the veteran and watched him. He ate with gusto, enjoyed a smoke (truck stop restaurants are not smoke-free), and wrote in his logbook. Should I approach him? Why not?

"Excuse me, I'm doing research on truckers and truck stops. Can I talk to you?"

He looked up from his logbook and smiled. "Yeah, sure. I've got time."

I grabbed my gear and joined him. His name was Gordy,* and he drove out of Oklahoma City for Jim Brewer, a company that hauls racks of automobiles to dealerships. Gordy spoke with easy affability, and underneath his three-day growth of beard, I detected once boyish looks reminiscent of the actor Lee Majors.

Gordy drove all over the country, hauling General Motors vehicles. He stopped at this truck stop often, but only because of the food. He made it a point to let me know that he generally didn't frequent truck stops.

"Your truck have a sleeper?"

"No. Wouldn't drive a truck that had one."

That was a surprise, since I thought that just about all long haulers used sleepers.

Gordy was a veteran, with 22 years of service on the road. "How does driving compare now with twenty years ago?"

"Worse. Things are worse now. So are the truck stops, he said, which are bigger, with more features, but run by national chains with no feeling for the trucker.

He blamed deregulation for today's problems. Before deregulation, freight rates were controlled, and a trucker knew what he could make from each delivery. Then came deregulation, and "all these fly-by-night companies" flooded

* The names of all truckers and employees, except those in management, have been changed.
The driver's name was Morris, and he wasn't sure he wanted to talk to me. Like Gordy, he was middle-aged and grizzled, but where Gordy's three-day growth covered handsome features, Morris was a buzzard, with a hawk nose, a pointy chin, and a leather motorcycle cap pulled low over his forehead.

I assured him that my questions were for research purposes only, but he looked at me suspiciously, as if I were an authority sent to check on him.

Had he ever been at this truck stop before?

"First time, but I'm coming back. It's got everything."

How long had he been on this particular run? (Gordy was careful to emphasize that he made only four-day hauls.)

"Been home three and a half hours in the past four months."

Did he drive his own truck?

He was a lessee operator (leasing his own rig to a company that moved furniture, presently hauling a load from Lafayette, Louisiana, to Cedar Rapids, Iowa).

How long did it take him to drive from Lafayette? (Knowing geography, I tried to calculate the time.) The question of time raised Morris's suspicions again, and instead of answering, he fixed me with a hard gaze. Sussing I had crossed some invisible boundary, I thanked him for his time. Obviously, my question related to logbook procedures, and I made a mental note to avoid that type of inquiry.

Also, I noticed that Morris and the woman for whom he had so gallantly won a prize were not together. Seeking a couple who actually drove in tandem, I walked into the mall area, past the cowboy boot display and chrome section ("the world's largest selection of truck chrome"), and spotted a couple with a baby moseying down the food aisles.

"Excuse me. I'm doing a research paper on truckers and truck stops. Are you a trucker?" I asked, directing my question to the presumed dad in the group.

"No, I'm not," he said emphatically.

Iowa 80 Employees

Truckers, four-wheelers (about 20 percent of the business at Iowa 80), and employees make up the truck stop community. The employees keep the community functioning, like municipal employees without whom towns and cities could not operate.

Two such employees stood at the end of one of the food aisles, stocking shelves. Sally and Maureen knew about me, thanks to a letter that General Manager Noel Neu had sent out a month ago, asking Iowa 80 workers to cooperate with my study. Sally was the shift manager of the merchandise area, and Maureen was one of her staff. I directed most of my questions to Sally.

How long had she been working at Iowa 80?

Eight years. Maureen had been with the company for only a year.

Which was the busiest shift?

"I think it's four to midnight, but if you ask someone on the day shift, they'd probably say their shift."

The Arcade

Fortified by a meal and a successful encounter, I ventured into the arcade area separating restaurant from shopping mall. The area was packed. During my hour with catfish and Gordy, many truckers had pulled off the road, and a handful of them were engaged in pinball games, laser-gun videos, a simulated NBA game, and in front of one large glass case with a miniature pickup shovel, a man and a woman were trying to win a pastel-colored stuffed animal. I stopped to watch. After several tries the man succeeded, and the couple rejoiced. I waited for their enthusiasm to wane and then introduced myself.
What did she most like about working four to midnight?

"The people. We get all kinds here. Down-to-earth people... crazy people."

And she told me about a woman who several weeks ago came into the store

ranting and raving, apparently in the throes of paranoid delusions. Authorities

were called, and it was determined that "she was on some kind of bad trip—
cocaine or something."

Sally mentioned that the police were out in the yard at this moment, mak-
ing a drug bust. "How did they know somebody was selling drugs?" I asked.

"A trucker reported it at the fuel center. Heard someone over the CB. We
called the cops."

Apparently truckers police themselves. Sally also said that drivers will
even turn in shoplifters. "They know if we get too much shoplifting, prices will
go up."

I asked Sally about those prices, which I considered reasonable. She
replied that they were cheap enough for most truckers, but these were always
those who wanted to haggle.

"You're allowed to barter over costs?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah. Not as much as the day manager."

Sally came from a small town north of Walcott, and Maureen was from one
of the Quad Cities. Iowa 80 employed over 225 workers and was one of the
largest employers outside of the Quad Cities municipal area.

"One of the things that most impresses me is how friendly the workers are
here," I said.

"We try to be the trucker's second home," said Sally.

Talking to Truckers

Business continued to pick up. As with previous Friday night visits, I found
much conversation in the aisles, as if the truckers could afford to be expansive,
find community with colleagues, socialize at the end of a workweek. Many of
these drivers, though, still had loads to deliver; others were settling in for the
weekend, waiting for a Monday morning pickup.

I had hoped to talk to women and minorities. The popular image of the
truckers is that of a Caucasian blue-collar male, and for the most part, that
group represents the majority of the industry. But more women are entering
the field, and from my observations, black men make up 10 to 20 percent of
the population. Two black truckers stood near the display of music tapes, engaged
in spirited conversation. I didn't want to interrupt them. Near the cash register
I spotted another black trucker, a chubby 40-something fellow with a moustache
and a mustache parting. He was reluctant and wary, but he agreed to answer questions.

Ronald was a long hauler from Detroit, making his third stop at Iowa 80.
He had been driving for five years, after serving a 12-year hitch in the armed
services. He drove all over the country, going out for three to five weeks at a
time. He didn't mind sleeping in his rig. For every week on the road, he got a
day off. He was presently hauling a load from Omaha to New Jersey, with plenty of
time to get there. (I consciously slowed my questions away from time lines.)

He wore a forced smile, which served as a shield, and any question that
might seem personal made the smile stiffen. He didn't give off the scent of
danger I detected from Morris, but he definitely eyed me more as an adversary
than as a friendly interlocutor.

Our session was interrupted by a mid-sized white fellow, probably in his
mid-thirties, sporting an orange pony tail, two diamond studs in his left ear
lobe, and several menacing facial scars.

"What you up to, man? Who you workin' for?" His voice had a manic edge
that reminded me of Gary Busey in one of those action adventures they
watched in the movie theater upstairs.

"I'm a researcher from the University of Iowa," I described my project.

"Oh, yeah?" he said, as if he didn't believe me. Then he turned his high-voltage attention on Ronald. They started talking about the rigs they drove.

Cal spoke so fast it was hard to keep up with him. He was telling Ronald
that he had bought his own truck and would soon be independent, a status he
encouraged Ronald to seek. Ronald's smile by this time had softened like a
band of steel. He was cornered by white guys, one with a notebook, the other a
speed raper with a pony tail. Ronald was clearly on guard.

Cal was from a nearby town, and he mentioned a motorcycle-driving buddy who was writing a book with help from someone in the Iowa Writer's
Workshop. I dropped a few names Cal recognized, and he suddenly decided I
was OK. When he couldn't convince Ronald to use his method to buy a truck,
he ducked away to collar someone else. Ronald kept smiling and muttering,
"Man, I don't want my own truck."

Before I could finish questioning Ronald, a well-built 30-something
trucker with finely brushed hair and trimmed moustache jumped before me,
ings folded, ready to unload his truck.

The atmosphere was getting uncomfortable. Who did these people think I
was? I recalled a previous visit, when I was down at the truck wash. A woman
named Connie, a road veteran who bragged of living on the highway for years
as a hitchiker, told me. "We though you were a spotter."

Not knowing what that meant but reckoning that it couldn't be in my favor,
I assured her I was only a writer. "What's a spotter?" I asked.

"They go around checking on company drivers, to see if they're not
swearing up, taking riders, that kind of stuff."

My new friend's name was Dan, and he was at the truck stop because a
trailer he was supposed to pick up at a nearby meat products plant was late
being loaded. "Never come down here normally. Know why?" I sure didn't. "No
counter in the restaurant. They took out the counter. And the food's greasy."

Dan presented me with a challenge. "Want to know what makes me mad?Want to know what pisses me off?"
A Truckers Lament

Dan started in on his own speed trap. His eyes weren't glazed like Cal's but instead fixed on me, as if he were an authority he wanted to confront, an ear that would be judged by its sympathy or lack thereof.

I wanted Dan to know I was sympathetic. I am a good buddy.

As Dan began ticking off his grievances, I asked him the same questions I had asked others. He didn't stop at Iowa 80 often. His schedule included him on 9,000-mile hauls (however long they took—it varied, he said). He drove for a company that was not unionized (that was the Teamsters) but walked to organize truckers into a national force, and had been driving for 12 years.

With that said, most of our conversation dealt with Dan's copious grievances, a litany other truckers voiced to various degrees.

Grievance number one: "I'm pissed about multiple speed limits. Iowa, the speed limit is the same, sixty-five for cars and trucks. In Illinois, it's sixty-five for cars but only fifty-five for trucks. How does that set up like that? Supposed to be for safety, have the trucks go slower, but it creates two flows of traffic, and that's a hazard. No, the real reason is revenue. Easier to give us a ticket."

Dan was angry, and I had trouble writing down all his words in a standing position. I suggested we go upstairs, where we found a spot by the shoe shine area just outside the movie theater, giving me a better position to get everything down. The Illinois complaint was not new; other truckers had sounded off about that state's split speed limit, as well as their war against radar detectors. The opinion in the trucker community was that the authorities in Illinois were against them.

Once we were seated in comfortable chairs, Dan went on another tangent: "They take three million basically honest people and force us to break the law to make a living."

I assumed he was talking about the infamous logbook. I just so happened to have one with me. Dan grabbed it. "Know what we call this? A comic book. It's a joke!"

He proceeded to show me why. The logbook was symbolic of the industrial, a monitoring device that was set up so it couldn't be followed except by lying. Once lawbreaking becomes institutionalized, other more serious laws become easier to break until the small man is truly the outlaw of romantic legend. And the trucker, in Dan's mind, at least, was a small man caught in the snare of the bosses (Clifford Geertz's "webs of suspension") constructed by government and big business, a conspiracy of sorts designed to keep the proverbial small man down.

Dan opened the logbook and ran through a typical workweek. The trucker had two forms: 60 hours in seven days or 70 hours in eight. Time frames are broken into four categories: off duty, sleeper berth, driving, and on duty. The last slot was what most agonized Dan. He simulated a California run, he showed that loading and unloading is held against the trucker, since it is considered on-duty time. (Note that the trucker does have the option of leaving the site where his trailer is located, which is what Dan was doing when he met me, but that involves risk, especially in terms of truck hijacking and other forms of larceny.) "Sometimes we gotta wait eight hours before they load or unload our truck. That time is held against us. That's sixty- or seventy-hour week. We get paid by the mile. I don't make a cent unless my truck is moving."

Dan was convinced that big business and government were in a conspiracy: "Suppose I've got to deliver a load from Monticello [Illinois] to San Francisco. That's two thousand miles. Then they want me to turn around and bring a load back. How can I do it if I honestly report my hours?" He tapped the logbook nervously.

"You have to cheat," I said.

"Cheat or starve. Because if I follow the laws, I get no work. Company won't say anything. They'll just stop giving me orders.

"And if you get caught cheating, does the company back you?"

"Dan's eyes lit up, and he gave me a manic half grin, half grimace, as if to say, Now you're catching on.

"We get caught cheating, breaking the speed limit, you name it, the trucker pays all fines. Our fault, so we get paid.

"Gripes number three: who is supposed to load and unload the truck? Dan waited for me to record this complaint. The company sells his services, which are to deliver most products to supermarket warehouses. He's not paid to load and unload the truck. But the supermarket chains will not provide the service:

"I have a choice," he said. "Unload the truck myself, which is not supposed to do. Or hire a lump.

Mere mention of the term lump sent Dan into another paroxysm of indignation. Lumpers are scab laborers who hang around warehouses and get paid under the table ("out of my money"). Dan was convinced that most of them were on welfare and made as much as $300 a day that they don't declare. They pay taxes on my wages. Lumpers get government welfare plus this other money. Another symbol and symptom of what was wrong with America. And who was to blame? The Department of Transportation."

"All the DOT does is drive up and down the highway busting truckers. They never go to the grocers and say we're not forced to unload our trucks. The reason for the conspiracy? Simple. The supermarkets get all the free labor.

The combination fuel tax and low-sulfur diesel oil requirement was another gripe. A government-mandated low-sulfur fuel plus an additional 4 cents fuel tax had been imposed as of October 1.

"Truckers are supposed to pay to clean up the air, but not airlines or bus companies or farmers. They all get exemptions. Farmers are exempt because of off-road use. Yet how many tractors are we getting running in this state?"

I asked if he thought conditions would improve. One trucker told me the split speed limits in Illinois were supposed to be abolished.

"Rumors. To keep truckers in line. They know if we organize a work stoppage, this nation'll stop running."
Dan believed in truckers organizing but felt that the trucker's independent nature prevented that from happening. He dismissed the Teamsters. "We need an organization run by and for truckers. Teamsters are not the answer, and this organization, the American Truckers Association, has sold us out, backing every law that's ever hurt us."

On and on. Dan's monologue was complicated by his nervously darting eyes, which kept staring up for sympathy. He talked about disparities in fines ($70 for a logbook violation in Nebraska; the same violation in California can cost you $1,500), unfriendly state police and DOT officials ("California, Ohio, and Virginia are the worst"), and big business and government collusion to keep the small man down.

This country depends on truckers for survival. Trains and airplanes can't deliver like the truckers. Yet if this country is so dependent on us, why are we treated like scum?

I could not adequately answer Dan's complaints, nor could I ascertain their complete veracity, except to say that similar complaints had been made by other informants. Yet even in the midst of these difficult working conditions, there was the sense that a living wage was being made. One particular trucker, who was vehement about the split speed limits and logbook absurdities (the drive from Omaha to Chicago and back twice a week), bragged that he made $500 to $1,000 a week.

Even Dan admitted to making more money driving a truck than he could ever earn in the small town where he lived when he wasn't on the road. His complaints were less about pay than about being forced to break the law to earn his living and about the lack of sympathy shown by greater society to this blue-collar occupation so responsible for America's land of plenty.

My sympathy was aroused. I've always felt sympathy for blue-collar concerns. My European forebears had fled to America for better jobs, freedom from persecution, no chance to pursue an individual lifestyle. And I was nothing! not an advocate of individuality.

Dan and I traded addresses—he promised to send me a flyer for his own fledgling organization—and I thanked him for his time.

**Town Meeting around the Cash Register**

I wandered back downstairs and moved about the merchandise aisles, tired from my talk with Dan. Who did I meet in one of the back aisles but Carl, in the company of a tall, slender woman with a well-used look. He still had that manic glint in his eye. "Man, you're all right. You really are a writer. I thought you were government, but you're not."

My wandering brought me to the cash register, a good place to meet truckers. Drivers were either coming in or going and were most receptive to exchange. I found a middle-aged driver paying for a purchase, and we passed over the neat and well-kept appearance. No heavy conversations or even polite questions—Dan had exhausted me of that.

The woman working the register and the driver were comparing horror stories about truck-stop robberies. I had noticed the woman before. She was one of the friendly employees who liked to talk to drivers. Many of the workers at Iowa 80 had this friendly conversational manner about them, and it always contributed to the atmosphere in the building.

The trucker knew a driver who had been robbed recently at a truck stop in Atlanta, where he was now heading. The woman told of another robbery at a truck stop outside Tampa. Both robberies occurred in the parking lot, and in both cases, the drivers were getting out of their rigs when someone stepped out of the shadows and robbed them at gunpoint.

The trucker left, and I lingered to talk to the woman. Her name was Bea. Her husband had been a trucker until last week, when he was involved in an accident outside Atlanta, caused by a drunk driver three cars ahead of his rig. Nobody was hurt, but there was $8,000 in damage. "Fifteen years without an accident, and they fire him. I sent the guy who fired him a thank-you letter. We got two teenagers at home."

How was her husband taking his dismissal?

"He's broken up about it, but I'm glad."

"What's he doing now?"

"He's farming with relatives."

I pulled out my notebook and introduced myself. Bea knew about me, again thanks to Noel Neu's letter. She was convinced I had picked a great subject for research. She had been working for Iowa 80 part time, then left for a full-time job in Davenport. "But I came back because I missed it. Took a pay cut, but it's worth it to work here."

I mentioned my interview with Della Moon and how many Iowa 80 employees seem to love the work atmosphere.

"Isn't Della wonderful? I love this family," Bea told me a story about Bill Moon, one of the founders of Iowa 80 and an empire builder in the truck stop industry. Years ago, Bea's son had a paper route in downtown Walcott. One morning, her son was stymied by a blizzard. Bill Moon saw the boy struggling to cover his route. The businessman got his car and helped her son finish the job. "That's the kind of guy he was."

Bill Moon died of cancer over a year ago. "You should have seen this place," said Bea. "Everyone was so sad."

**Truck Yard at Night**

Back outside, three hours after my arrival. I moved through the huge truck yard, filling my lungs with air and trying to catch a second wind. Trucks pulled into and out of the lot in promenade. Diesel fumes filled the air, and the lot was noisy with the sounds of transmissions shifting.

The yard was teeming. Large spotlights mounted on 50-foot, poles outlined the scene. Puddles in the middle of the parking lot reflected blue and pink neon from the Jiffy Shop fuel center. A computerized sign facing the
interstate spilled a cascade of shifting letters, advertising the night's menu, chrome supplies, free showers with tank of fuel, guaranteed scales to weigh freight.

I loped across the yard, tired but feeling fine, realizing that the more I learned about the trucking community, the more I would never know. I was a four-wheeler, a writer temporarily tangled in these "webs of significance," an outsider whose sympathies could never connect all the lives spent in forced but voluntary isolation. Long haulers were sentenced to a solitary voyage, and the truck stop was the oasis where they found temporary community.

**Old-Timer at the Fuel Center**

Inside the Ily Shop quiet, Iowa 80's fuel center is built like your average convenience store, with fuel and sundries sold at a discount, except that here the fuel is diesel instead of gasoline and the sundries are marketed for truckers' needs.

A young black trucker was buying a sandwich at a back counter. Several of his white comrades were paying for their fuel up front. In one of the two-person booths that line the windows along the west wall sat an older gray-haired gentleman, resplendent in a green polo shirt and reading a trucker magazine.

I sat across from the old-timer in an adjoining booth and, after a few minutes of stringing up the situation, made my introduction. "May I ask you a few questions?"

He looked up from his magazine and admitted to being a trucker but added, "I don't like to get involved."

Fair enough. Still, we talked. Gradually he warmed up, and eventually I opened my notebook and began recording his remarks.

He had been driving trucks for some time but wouldn't say how long. He was at the truck stop getting an oil change for his tractor. He was primarily a short hauler, though he had done long hauls in his time.

He placed his age in the mid-50s. Books I'd read on over-the-road trucking mention how the long haul prematurely ages the driver. I could understand that this old-timer would change to shorter routes. As he warmed up to me, he revealed more information. He was articulate and had the face of a learned man. Perhaps he had retired from another profession. (More and more truckers were coming from other professions; many were veterans from the armed services.)

He asked me questions as well. His early pose of disinterest belied an avid curiosity. I soon had the impression that he would rather interview me.

He lived in the Quad Cities and had been a trucker all his life, starting at age 17 when he drove for construction outfits in the Fort Dodge area. He let slip that he was 60, an owner-operator of his own rig. Allusions to problems from bygone years by dint of previous financial difficulties.

Don's populist appeal was still ringing in my ear, so I mentioned the rigors placed on truckers by big business and government. But the old-timer was not buying. True, big business and government put obstacles in the way, but there was a good living out there for anyone willing to put in the time. He told me a story similar to the fable of the tortoise and the hare. He always obeyed speed limits. He was in no hurry. Younger drivers would pass him, impatient with his caution. But the old-timer always got the job done on time. He clearly identified with the tortoise.

I found myself taking a shine to this man. There was something smart-witted and flinty about him, even in his refusal to give me his name. We talked about trucks, and he became a font of information. He pointed to his rig in the yard, a Ford. He would have preferred a Freightliner but couldn't get financing. He made disparaging remarks about Kenworths, called the Rolls-Royces of the profession, and about another highly rated competitor—"Why, I wouldn't even drive a Peterbilt. Cabs too narrow."

He was presently leasing his truck and services to a company that hauls general merchandise to stores like Pamida, Kmart, and Sam's Warehouse. Earlier in the day, he had hauled 45,000 pounds of popcorn, but at present he had a trailer full of supplies for a Sam's Warehouse in Cedar Rapids. As for his earlier mention of being a short-hauler, well, that wasn't quite the truth. He tried to limit his runs to the Midwest—within the radius of Kansas City, Omaha, Fargo, and Youngstown—but sometimes he ventured as far as Atlanta or Dallas.

What about the complaint, first voiced by Gordy, that times were worse now than 20 years ago?

Yes, in some instances, no in others. True, the logbook was a joke, especially concerning off-duty time: "Why, when I hauled steel out of Gary, sometimes they made you wait 12 hours to get your load. That's all your driving time.

Yet the trucks these days were better, and the money was still good. I can drive from Kansas City to Des Moines without hardly changing gears. Couldn't do that 20 years ago."

And, "I'm not saying I'm not making money. Making more money now than I was three years ago."

I didn't have to get back to his work, make his Cedar Rapids drop by 11. Otherwise he'd continue the conversation. I could tell he enjoyed our talk, and I had the urge to ask him if I could go out on the road with him. I was sure several weeks of riding with this old-timer would have given me an education.

But we parted as comrades, although when I asked again for his name, he declined to give it.

I'll just refer to you as 'an esteemed older gentleman in a green shirt,'" I said. He enjoyed that description immensely and left me with a loud, ringing laugh.

**Conclusion**

My night at Iowa 80 was going to a close. I had only left the truck lot and get into my little Japanese-made sedan. I was a four-wheeler, but there that didn't stop me from making eye contact with the truckers in the yard, waving a hearty hello before I made my Hi-No Silver.

What was I to make of this experience? I was exercising what Clifford Geertz calls "an intellectual poaching license" (Local Knowledge 12), engaging in
what John Van Maanen terms "the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of my own experience in the world of these others." (ix)

But had I truly experienced the community and culture? Had I penetrated the veil of unfamiliarity to become a reliable scribe of trucker life? I had no doubts on that Friday night, as I returned to my car and drove home. I felt flush. My informants, reluctant at first, had been forthcoming. Employees were friendly, and the truckers, although initially suspicious of my motives, spoke from both head and heart.

My experiences with the culture reflected what I had read by James Thomas and Michael Agar. I sensed a community that felt both proud and put upon, holding to perceived freedoms yet reined in by new regulations and restrictions. Some company drivers, like Gordy and Ronald, felt insulated from variables over which they had no control (fluctuating fuel prices), but others, like Dan, were angry about issues brought on the road (DOT and highway personnel) and other (time and money constraints involving the unloading of deliveries). The owner-operator, a green-shirted older gentleman, did not feel like an endangered species, and the fact that Cal, however reliable his testimony might have been, was becoming an owner-operator attuned to some of the values of that status.

The metaphor of the road cowboy certainly has significance. I surveyed the boot and shoe shop and found three varieties of cowboy boots (but not a loafer or sneaker in sight), ranging from the economical $40 model with non-leather uppers to $150 snakeskin cowboy boots. Not far from the boot section were belts and buckles with a decided Western cast and enough cowboy hats to populate a Garth Brooks concert.

But connections to cowboys run deeper than clothes. Thomas writes that the "outstanding characteristics of both the trucker and the cowboys are independence, mobility, power, courage, and masculinity." (7) With all due apologies to the many women now trucking, what definition seems to apply? But it might be more mental than physical since, as my old-timer professed, driving a truck these days is not the physically rigorous activity it once was, and Dan's complaints about loading and unloading aside, truckers are not supposed to touch the product they deliver.

The cowboy element of the culture might seem like romantic accouterment rather than realistic assessment. Yet as Agar has pointed out, even the romantic notions of the cowboy were more nonsense than truth, since that species in actuality "were utilitarian clothes, engaged in long days of hard work, and ate boring and nutritionally deficient food" (Independent Declared 10), a description that sounds like trucker life.

I also found some agreement with Agar's assessment of present versus past times. The old-timer had a healthy attitude: "Some things are better, some things are worse." But for the most part, the veteran truckers I talked with see the past as "a better time... because regulations were simpler, enforcement was more lax, and fines were lower. Although the technology of trucks and

roads has improved, the culturally spun webs of regulation have thickened into a maze." (44).

As for trucker grievances, one thing I found for certain, which Frederick Will documents in Big Rig Sod, is that "the trucker is condemned to rapid turn-arounds after each load, to physical discomfort, to little or no boredom, to being forever harried." (29).

I believe I found a community at Iowa 80. Delta Moon described the company's goal as turning the truck stop into a "destination." The dictionary defines destination as "the place to which a person or thing travels or is sent," which for all its scope and size, is still a truck stop. But a good many of my trucker informants were regulars, and the ones who were there for the first time were impressed by what they found.

Thomas states that "providing personal services for drivers is not where a truck stop gains most of its profits. The extras...are to lure truckers in from the road to the fuel pump and service area." (17) Delta Moon supported this view.

Yet in the process of giving truckers these amenities, as varied as a part-time dentist or a portable chapel for those needing to be born again, Iowa 80 is creating a context, setting up a multiplicity of complex structures that are both conceptual and real. A Friday night at this village is truly an adventure and, for those willing to engage experience as a form of education, an introduction into a dynamic community and culture.

Works Consulted


Paul, Sherman. University of Iowa, English Dept., personal communication.


Rick Zutol's research study has many features of a full-blown ethnography, which is a book-length study that often takes years to complete. Over the course of one semester, or even a year, neither Rick nor you could expect to write a
complete ethnography of a subculture. Rick's study, however, includes most of the parts of a fuller piece of research: library and archival research, cultural artifacts, fieldnotes, photographs, interviews and transcripts, reflective memos, and multiple drafts of his writing. (We will explore these aspects of research in later sections of this book.) In his portfolio, Rick mentions having read Michael Agar's *Independents Declared*, an ethnography about truckers. In his reading at libraries and in private collections, he also read Walt Whitman's poem 'Song of the Open Road', Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, and Woody Guthrie's road songs. He studied trucker magazines, truck school brochures from a community college, trucker trade journals, truck stop menus, and government regulations about the trucking industry. He also attended a two-day 'truckers' jambores', where he took more notes.

In "Friday Night at Iowa 80", Rick begins with descriptions of both the inside and the outside of the truck stop, to establish a full sweep of the landscape. He starts by guiding his reader on a walk around the outside of the truck stop, moving from the huge unoccupied building that marks the trucker's fuel container to the parking lot that holds 1000 trucks. Once inside the mall-like complex, Rick shows us around the restaurant, where we see a meal of catfish and hush puppies. We next accompany him into the arcade of pinball machines and laser-gun games and then into the aisles of the convenience store, where employees are straightening shelves.

In addition to the sense of authority he gains through his thick and rich physical descriptions of Iowa 80, Rick also collects an interesting range of interviews from both truckers and employees at the truck stop. Rick is able to get his informants to talk by hanging out and chatting with them. Sometimes informants don't talk to him because they're suspicious of him and think he is a 'spitter' or some kind of spy from the Department of Transportation. Sometimes they don't trust him because he is a student-researcher. Other times that prompts a stream of valuable information. But because he persists and gathers a range of informants—a mix of male and female, black and white, trucker and non-trucker—wearing his interviews into the overall narrative, he advances his study toward an analysis of the information he's collected.

The data he relies on come mainly from informant interviews, but within these he sorts through a range of responses to his questions: insider terms, insider knowledge, and inside stories. Some informants supply terminology about the jobs, such as the words *jamper* and *spotter*. Others offer insider knowledge about how truckers do their jobs, answering questions about mileage, speeds, logbooks, and truck preferences. From still others, he gathers occupational stories by inviting informants both to brag and to complain about their jobs.

After Rick has spent considerable time collecting this data about trucker beliefs and gripes, he introduces an unnamed informant who disconfirms and complicates much of what other drivers have said. Unlike the others, this lifetime driver felt trucking was a solid job and a good way to make a living and had little to complain about. Fieldworkers always try to disconfirm and complicate the theories that they are trying out. Rather than tossing out this interview data as something that doesn't fit, Rick includes it. An ethnography is compiling only when the author persuades us of his credibility. Rick does this by allowing the voices of his informants to speak. The fieldworker's obligation is both to inform and to persuade.

Rick's data analysis leads him to his final themes that the truck stop is a kind of community and a subculture for many of the truckers who spend time there. One of the Iowa 80 employees claims that the place is like the truckers' second home—a home away from home—which provides the central metaphor for Rick's paper. By the end of the study, Rick is able to link his own findings with other research that draws on the imagery of the trucker as cowboy. What makes Rick's study ethnographic, then, is the wide range and depth of description and interview data, the amount of time he spent gathering it, and his commitment to show the insider's perspective on the trucking culture. As a writer, Rick creates a 'slice-of-time' device. He uses one Friday night at Iowa 80 to represent all the years and nights he collected data there. In actuality, though, he spent weeks and months there. As a researcher, Rick writes himself into the study to show what he's in a position to see and understand, but he also points out what eludes him, who won't talk to him, and who walks away. All along, Rick reads and uses outside sources from other writers to test his own hunches about what trucking life and trucking culture are like. As a writer, Rick makes choices about how he will present his data from a wide range of writing strategies that are open to all contemporary ethnographers. But as a researcher, Rick continues to the process of gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and validating his data, which is what doing fieldwork is all about.

The Research Portfolio: Definitions and Purpose

During the course of his study, Rick kept a research portfolio, which housed both the process and the product of his fieldwork. We recommend developing working files for tracking your learning and documenting your work throughout the research process, and we will discuss further aspects of portfolio keeping in each of the subsequent chapters in this book.

You might keep your files organized on your computer with backup disks or written out and stored in file folders or boxes. Once you have plentiful, accurate, organized working files, you can create a portfolio from them—not merely for final course evaluation or assessment but for your own self-reflection and evaluation. The working files will help you select documents to present in your portfolio so that you can lay out an array of your research in progress.

As you assemble and revise your portfolio, you'll develop a behind-the-scenes account of the story of your research, which you'll want to share with others. Naturally, the research portfolio will include your final ethnographic essays, but your selections will also show the thinking process that led to this project. You'll want to represent selections from the reading, writing, and materials.