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Participant Observation

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How Participant Observation Changes our View on Social Movements

Participant observation and ethnography are not the most common methods in social movement studies.[1] But quite curiously, it is probably because early social movement scholars observed and especially because they took part in social movements that this field of research has seen its main paradigm changes. Consider, for instance, Doug McAdam's (2002) reflections on his early career as a social movement scholar: "My first exposure to the academic study of social movements came in 1971 when, much to my surprise, the professor in my Abnormal Psychology class devoted several weeks to a discussion of the topic. I say 'surprise' because, as an active participant in the anti-war movement, it certainly came as news to me that my involvement in the struggle owed to a mix of personal pathology and social disorganization. But, reflecting the dominant theories of the day, those were the twin factors emphasized in the course."

Because Doug McAdam was himself an activist, the gap between the theories he was taught in college and the practices he had experienced and observed as a participant in social movements was so huge that he would turn his back on the "collective behavior" theories and work on the organizational and strategic dimensions of protest. And McAdam was not alone. By experiencing mobilizations, researchers have taken some of the most important steps in our comprehension of what social movements are. Gamson (1975, 134) pointed out that at this time, many of the future movement scholars were active participants in the student uprisings of the sixties: "They marched on picket lines to boycott chain stores that discriminated or went to the South to work on voter registration; they organized teach-ins and marched against the war in Vietnam; they organized rent strikes or sit-ins for open enrolment, elimination of ROTC, or many other specific issues. And if they didn't actively participate, they talked to many who did."

Properly speaking, Doug McAdam did not do "participant observation." We cannot speak of participant observation in his or other similar cases because participation preceded studying the movement and was not the method they used for their analysis. But their insights built on three core aspects that together can define what participant observation is:

1) *Collecting "firsthand" data*: by comparison with older researchers who did not take part in any mobilizations, McAdam and the others went to the field. And this is what defines, at best, what doing participant observation means. Indeed, in cultural anthropology, the first discipline to use participant observation as a method of research, it is this idea of "firsthand activity" that moved the discipline from an activity done in libraries to the scientific and modern form of anthropology based on field research.[2] Moving the use of participant observation from anthropology to sociology (and the whole of the social sciences), Park (1915) and Whyte (1943) were also convinced that a better knowledge and understanding of societies and cultural scenes required scholars "to get out of their armchairs [or in today's technological world, turn off their computer and statistical programs] and get the seat of their pants dirty." This revolution has affected the entire domain of research in social movements: for instance, in our understanding of what a crowd is, systematic and empiric observation, as in McPhail's studies (1991), has allowed research to produce new theories based on empirical data that go beyond the normative and prescriptive theories on democracy that informed the theories of collective behavior.[3] Historically or epistemologically, participant observation is a *prerequisite of any theorization*, as Levi-Strauss (1963) put it. Thus, collecting firsthand data entails the idea that progress in social movement theory needs to originate in a deep interaction between firsthand data and existing theory.

2) *Moving the observation scale*: McAdam, getting out of his armchair and experiencing protest also moved the observation scale from the meso- and macro-level of collective behavior theories towards a focus on the actions and interactions of individuals. Doing fieldwork and participant observation is useful when one is interested in what people do and in understanding the meaning they give to their actions, as in Geertz's thick description (1973) of social reality. If you want to be able to distinguish between boys who are blinking or winking—as in Geertz's famous example—you need very fine-grained information. Therefore, doing participant observation aims at acquiring a deep knowledge of the social community and the individuals one studies (Bray 2008, 305); it entails adapting to a local area and culture, and it requires evolving within the community of people one is studying over an extended period of time in order to gain a close and intimate familiarity with them and their practices. It wants to get an indigenous view of the alliances, conflicts, and the different goals and strategies of actors in a movement.

3) *Experiencing*: if "inquiring" could be the label for interviewing and "examining" the label for archival research, "experiencing" seems an especially appropriate label for drawing attention to what is gained through

participant observation (Wolcott 1999, 46). Indeed, the purpose (or essence) of participant observation, from Malinowski (1922) to today, is to view and to understand events through the perspective of the people one studies. Participant observation is thus a technique of research where the incorporation of the researcher into the group he or she wants to study is a fundamental element. Researchers take part in the same situation in order to understand the contradictions, the stakes, and the social expectations that people being studied experience. The idea is that the best way to understand what people do, mean, think, or believe in is to be as close as possible to them. As Eliasoph (2011, 262) notes, we only grasp people's multiple binds when we try to do their activities ourselves, as best as we can. Participant observation is thus not just a "technique," but an encompassing and intellectually consistent program and research strategy.

These three elements are at the heart of what participant observation is: ethnographers (that is, researchers doing participant observations) are convinced that a deeper understanding of social life can be produced by *methodologically controlled participation and observation.* Participation and observation conducted with reflexivity, combined with other methods for triangulation, produce data that are confident enough for extrapolation. Reflexivity on the location of the self in the research is, in this process, an essential requirement of ethnographic practice (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Reflexivity means not only being explicit about the political, social, and personal characteristics of the researcher, but also recognizing the constructed nature of the research itself. During the research process, an awareness of the place one occupies in the field helps the researcher to better understand how the group he or she is studying works. A reflexive appreciation and description of our own location in the research process and our impact on it therefore adds critical appreciation of validity of the results that is required in ethnographic research.

Having proposed a first description and definition of participant observation, this chapter aims at presenting this method and offering a practical guide to doing participant observation in social movements. Many researchers use participant observation without making it the central piece of their methodology: attending some meetings to get in touch with activists, making observations before and after interviews, or using it in the preliminary phases of their research. Others give more importance to ethnographic methods or rely mostly on them. The presentation here will be useful for any kind of recourse to ethnography; those researchers who only use participant observation very sporadically in their research design can also benefit from a discussion of the method's core concepts and debates in order to use it more consciously in their research and enhance the heuristic value of data gathered through observation.

Using examples from our own research (Lambelet 2011, 2013, 2014; Balsiger 2014a, 2014b) and from other studies, we will guide the reader through the different stages of a typical research using participant observation, focusing on the discussion of the numerous methodological choices and problems researchers typically encounter when doing participant research on social movements. As we will see, there is not one type of participant observation, but many different kinds. But before we turn to the practical aspects, we want to briefly point to some of the main insights participant observation has contributed to social movement studies.

Contributions of Participant Observation to Social Movement Research

OBSERVING ELEMENTARY FORMS OF COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR

Using different degrees of participation, movement scholars using ethnographic methods have revealed aspects of collective action that are difficult to grasp with other methods.

First, observation has proved very useful for a systematic enquiry of the elementary forms of collective behavior. Studies in this vein use observation to systematically describe forms of collective behavior such as demonstrations (McPhail 1991; Schweingruber and McPhail 1999) or sit-ins (Lofland and Fink 1982), but are not interested in comprehending the points of view of the people who protest. McPhail (1991, 164–74) observed dozens of demonstrations, classifying and counting the behaviors to answer questions such as "Of all the actions in which two persons in temporary gatherings could engage, in which ones do they engage, with what frequency, and to what extent? How do collective actions vary by space and time within demonstrations?" The method used by McPhail and other similar studies is limited to observation and does not include participation; the goal is not to learn anything from participation, but to develop systematic tools that could also be adaptable, for example, for coding demonstrations on television news reports.

OBSERVING THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS OF PROTEST

If McPhail and some other researchers are observing elementary forms of collective behavior, participant observation can also help grasp the meanings and symbolic dimensions of protest or protest-related events. Studies using participant observation have shown that protest is always also a *mise-en-scène*, an often carefully crafted presentation of public images. When observing meetings of seniors' organizations, Lambelet (2014), was thus attentive to the symbolic dimension of events, asking questions like: "Who is on the stage and who isn't? Who do the leaders thank and who not? What kind of leisure activities are coupled with political activities?" Tactics and protest events aim at performing one's collective identity; an apparently similar action will be performed in very different ways depending on what organizations are behind it. The "Women and Cancer Walk" organized by the feminist strand of cancer activists looks very different from the "Race for the Cure" organized by early detection activists belonging to a different "culture of action" (Klawiter 2008, chaps 5 and 6). In a similar perspective, Marin (2001) pointed at the importance of order in demonstration marches as a mechanism for apprehending the various "messages" that the organizers of the event are seeking to transmit: "These often complex messages are conveyed not by the groups or individuals participating in the cortege, but by reciprocal relations among those groups or individuals in the moving volume that constitutes the cortege. Thus there are key places and rows: the beginning, the middle, the end; there are also significant positions: before . . . after . . . in the same row as . . . surrounded by. . . ." (Marin 2001, 45).

BREAKING DOWN THE ILLUSION OF HOMOGENEITY

One of the main insights of participant observation of social movements is certainly their revealing of the great heterogeneity of all movements and movement groups. By moving the observation scale, ethnographic studies have constituted a bulwark against the tendencies of more meso- or macro-oriented methods to homogenize and reify social movements. Such apparently self-evident categories as what movement a group belongs to become fragile when one follows groups closely. In Blee's ethnographic study on small and emerging activist groups in Pittsburgh, for instance, she shows how the fluidity of emerging groups "makes it difficult to label them, to know what any one is 'a case of' " (Blee 2012, 6). Opening up the black box of organizations and taking seriously all its aspects thus leads us to see the diversity within a social movement organization (Vitale 2011). The observation of senior organizations showed that people with different characteristics occupied different roles, revealing that there are many ways to be a member of this kind of organization and that what one retiree does when attending meetings can be completely different from what others do (Lambelet 2014). Participant observation also showed that these organizations are less a place to defend pensioners' interests than places where the various people find different good reasons to get involved in various activities. Within and between particular groups, careful observation can reveal subtle distinctions of socioeconomic status. Observing choices of clothing, hairstyle, type and amount of jewelry, leisure time activities, speech and language patterns, television program preferences and so on, are ways to apprehend indicators of socioeconomic situation and differences within and across groups. Perhaps "the particular contribution of ethnographers is an understanding of how power is embedded and contested in relationships, how subjectivities are constructed and resisted, and how collective meanings are imposed and reinvented" (Thayer, 2005).

HIGHLIGHTING NON-PUBLIC ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES

Great parts of social movement research concern the public actions—in particular the protest events—of movements. One of the contributions of participant observation is to show all the aspects that take place offstage, behind the scenes, before and after protest actions. This attention to the "off" is particularly helpful for studying the strategic decision-making processes of groups, as it allows researchers to see not only the tactics actually used, but also the debates around the adoption of tactics, the options that are pursued but eventually dismissed, and so on. Ethnographers have the possibility to follow these processes as they are taking place, showing that they are not simple reactions to external conditions. In the case of an animal rights group taking up a campaign against foie gras, Blee's (2012) observation of meetings reveals that groups "formulate and reformulate their reactions—along with their strategies, tactics, and senses of themselves as political actors—over time. Even when (the group in case) took actions it had done before, it didn't do so in a robotic fashion" (Blee 2012, 50). Studying anti-sweatshop activism, Balsiger (2014a) describes how a tactical innovation was first introduced into the repertoire of a campaign. Participant observation allowed this process-in-the-making to be grasped, and to understand from within the group what created the appeal of this tactic and what provoked its subsequent dismissal. More generally, there are aspects of movements that are never publicly uttered because they are fluid, informal, or perhaps unconscious for the people studied. As Plows (2008, 1524), working on environmental activism in the UK, says: "It could be argued that ethnography has particular relevance for the study of social movements and social mobilization, being on the ground to accurately capture fluid, shifting conditions. Such methods enable the researcher to trace developing mobilization patterns in embedded social contexts; identifying key issues, such as the way social actors are framing the stakes of engagement, in circumstances where visible protest activity is often the tip of an iceberg."

LOOKING FOR "MEANINGS" THROUGH THE COLLECTION OF "SPEECH-IN-ACTION"

Ethnographic researchers working on politicization or on activism have also revealed the importance of implicit meanings (or "practices," "cultures of commitment," or "perspectives") that enable and constrain what activists can do together. These implicit meanings constitute the boundaries of what groups can do and speak about; they are the basis of different group styles that characterize their culture of interaction (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). By paying attention to implicit meanings, one can see how movement groups constitute "forums" to the extent that they allow interactional space for critically reflexive discussions apart from strategic concerns. Such meanings are hard to discern with methods other than participant observation, because activists may not discuss them readily in an interview. Participation gives access to such interactions and words that the researchers have not inquired about: to "speech-in-action" (Sanjek 1990, 212).

REVEALING GAPS BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICES

Looking at the public statements and frames used by SMOs shows their claims and ideologies. Participation can allow us to go behind these public stances to look at how movements operate day-to-day and can give insights into the possible gaps between what they say and what they do. For instance, researchers often ignore gender or age lines of division within movements, presenting them as "gender and age neutral." However, these dimensions are a crucial factor of collective action at the macro level of political opportunities and contexts, but also at the micro level of the logics of individual commitment and the division of activist labor (Fillieule 2008; Lambelet 2013). Participant observation can, for instance, reveal gender dynamics in movement groups fighting for gender equality. Another example of possible gaps are the participatory ideologies shared by many of the movements of the 1960s or the global justice movement, and the practices of decision making they employ (della Porta 2013). Ethnographic research can closely observe the power dynamics at play in such contexts and, for instance, show that structureless organizations contain their own forms of inequality (Freeman 1970).

SOCIALIZATION AND ROLE TAKING

Socialization and role taking are processes by which people learn to be activists and members of social movements. In a "successful" socialization process, people are supposed to "become" their roles, but this process is never easy. People may never quite become their roles (Broqua 2005), but instead exit or transform the organization. Looking at the process of role taking informs us on the capacity and skills people have to learn, practically and in terms of state of mind. And if the role shapes and patterns both action and actor, if new activists have to learn their new roles, then at the same time people can resist and reshape their roles and transform the organizations in which they are involved. The process of role taking reveals in a new light how groups evolve: sometimes "what begins as a peace group can morph into an environmental group with the change of a few members" (Blee 2012, 6).

LEARNING THROUGH PARTICIPATING

Finally, participant observation gives the researcher the possibility of reflecting on the personal and behavioral transformations one makes through one's experience. It "challenges, even if it does not entirely overcome the (researching) subject (researched)–object binary" (Juris and Kasnabish 2013, 5). Few researchers are really doing *participation* in their fieldwork, and even fewer explicitly speak about what they have specifically learned from this participation. Eliasoph (2011, 262) says that she only grasped the organizers' multiple binds when she tried to do their jobs herself, as best as she could. When interacting with the people we study on the field, we do many things: we discuss, we make jokes, we play, we look around, we eat, we love, and we hate, as Olivier de Sardan (1995) put it. And we are not only *looking at* something, but also *seeing* a lot of things: all these observations are "recorded" somewhere (in our subconscious, our "self"). These are all elements that help us to be able to function unobtrusively (or in a culturally competent manner). Chatting, gossiping, having drinks with informants are not "outside" the study. It is on such occasions that we learn how to act in the correct way, that we learn what is the ordinary life of the people studied. All these observations, as informal or unconscious as they are, are very important and useful for ethnographic research: "Your body remembers when your brain does not" (Eliasoph 2011, 261). For some authors, like Melucci (1996), it is impossible to really understand a social situation if you only observe it: you have to act and be part of it.

Doing Fieldwork

There is not one single type of participant observation, but a continuum from participation to observation. Indeed, as Wolcott wrote (1999, 45), the ambiguity of what participant observation is can make the problem of defining it an inviting topic in the never-ending discourse on method. He therefore advises neophyte researchers to describe, with far more detail than is prompted by the phrase itself, precisely what they intend to do, giving specific examples of the kind of data they believe they will need and the procedures by which they intend to obtain them. In this spirit, the remainder of this chapter discusses the main issues and questions one has to address when using participant observation in social movement analysis.

What Is a "Field"?

An ethnographer's field is "the natural, nonlaboratory setting or location where activities in which a researcher is interested take place" (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, 70). The notion of field contains the idea that the researcher has to move to a specific, geographically and socially located space. In classic ethnographic studies, researchers leave their habitual social environment behind and enter a different social world. Here, the field is seen as a totality that embraces all aspects of social life and has a certain closure. As ethnographers, we are expected to spend as much time as possible in the field over an extended period in order to gain familiarity with the group we study. We learn their language, the rules guiding relationships, cultural patterns, shared meanings and values, and so on.

But often, this unity of space and social bounds is not a given (O'Reilly 2009). In social movement research, a field may be a specific, locally situated event such as protest camps for a G-20 summit, but it may also be an activist group that only meets once every month, several groups belonging to the same movement, or an online forum where activists post comments and discuss. What a field is therefore depends on one's research question, and in many cases the field does not resemble the classic idea of a local setting. Most participant observation in social movements thus implies forms of "multi-sited ethnography" (Marcus 1995). Here, the field is mobile: the researcher follows an object across different settings. For instance, Brooks' (2007) research on the global anti-sweatshop movement implied participant observation in Indian factories where textiles are produced, and of unionists and movement activists in North America conducting campaigns on behalf of those textile workers.

The multi-locality of participant observation often poses a challenge in terms of time resources. It is difficult to conduct participant research on several sites at the same time, especially if the sites are located far apart. Because of professional constraints, one does not have an unlimited amount of time, and researchers are (unfortunately) often in a hurry, which makes immersion problematic. For some authors, spending extended time in the field is necessary even in multi-sited research; Klawiter's (2008) participant observation, for instance, went on for four years. Others—like Ulf Hannerz, who has theorized multi-sited ethnography—take a more pragmatic stance and argue for an "art of the possible" to fit fieldwork into lives (2003, 212). The use of interviews can be a way to "make up" for the lack of time for participant observation, especially when one has already done observation on other sites.

Movements are usually not active 24/7; rather, one observes meetings and public actions that take place every once in a while. Although to understand activism, we may want to observe activists in all their life-spheres and could, for instance, opt to move in with some of them, we often focus on their role as activists. Fields are thus not only multi-sited, they are also non-continuous. We see the activists at a meeting, maybe have a drink with them afterwards, but then everyone goes home and we do not see them until the next event. Some periods are more eventful than others, such as when a big protest is staged; others may be very calm. Contrary to other research objects, such as the workplace, the time spent in the field may thus be much shorter, simply because the activity of the group one studies is quite limited. This can certainly make it easier to do participant observation, provided one is willing to work after 5 p.m. or on weekends from time to time: participant observation does not usually fit neatly into office hours. But the irregularity of activities and the difficulty of foreseeing them and therefore of planning fieldwork can also be a challenge. When studying social movements through participant observation, it is important to have the freedom to jump on the occasions that the quirks of the field create.

Hannerz points at another factor that often makes interviews necessary to complement participant observation. "Settings of modernity" often involve activities that are "monotonous, isolated, and difficult to access" (Hannerz 2003, 211). Is it possible to use participant observation when in one's field, people designing movement campaigns work individually at a computer? It is not a coincidence that much of the ethnographic research on movements focuses on public actions or on meetings. But activists may use other tactics that are more difficult to observe. When Balsiger (2014b) studied the anti-sweatshop movement, it turned out that its campaigns were mainly conducted by a NGO employee working at his desk. Unless being hired as an intern, it was very difficult to do participant observation in this setting. And also one of the main activities of the group of local volunteers was difficult to study through participant observation: they did research to compile information for an "ethical shopping map," usually individually and from their homes. For this reason, the research on the process of tactical innovation (Balsiger 2014a) used interviews to complement observations from meetings. In "individualist" settings, ethnography thus encounters particular challenges. In the case of the recently developed "online ethnography" (see Coleman 2013), those challenges are often particularly present. But online settings also contain many forms of interaction for the study of which participant observation may be very useful.

Finally, multi-site ethnography also poses questions of sampling. What sites do we select, and according to what criteria? Why this group rather than that one? Even if we aim to cover all emerging activism at a certain time and place (Blee 2012), or on a given cause (Klawiter 2008), we still have to choose. Where do we spend more time, where less? These are important questions, as they have consequences for potential claims of generalizability, in particular. They usually imply difficult choices. The emulation of strategies from quantitative research seeking statistical inference, such as random sampling or the search for an average and "representative" site, is not adapted to the specific logic of qualitative research (Small 2009). Instead, it is better to choose sites according to theoretical criteria, not aiming at representativeness but at diversity. When studying a movement campaign, for instance, we might be interested in the different scales in which it takes place, and pick a local group, do observation in the headquarters of the national campaign, and look at the campaign's transnational coordination. The first site we study often gives us a better idea of what aspects matter, and we can then sample for range. When comparing different sites, we can also use criteria of comparative research and choose cases that differ on a few theoretically interesting factors, for instance the gender composition of activist groups. We may want to vary cities, age of groups, composition, the causes being fought for, and so on, in order to find more robust causal explanations.

How to Get in Contact with the Field

The first thing we have to do is to gain access to our field, a step that needs to be negotiated. This can be a tricky task, and it is important to take the first steps carefully: a good first impression can help create good relations on the field. When we try to gain access to our field, we need to think about three questions. Whom do we contact and thus associate with? In what kind of relation of exchange do we find ourselves with the field? And how do we present ourselves? Whom to contact, and with whom to be associated when we first do our participant observation, can have important consequences for research. It can determine what we will and will not be able to see, where we will be taken, and which sites we will not penetrate. Within any group, there are power struggles of which we are often unaware when entering the field; members of the group who have marginal positions will often be the first ones to be attracted to the observer, hoping to promote their interests through this association (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, 72). If one is interested in power dynamics and struggles in movements, being associated with a particular side in an internal dispute is a problem. In an ethnographic study on the response of resident surgeons to reforms of working hours in hospitals, Kellogg (2011) figured out early on that residents were choosing sides in a fight. She therefore "tried to be careful not to affiliate predominantly with either reformers or defenders" (Kellogg 2011, 15). Moreover, the status of the subjects with whom we associate within the hierarchy of the group is crucial. Generally speaking, it can be quite easy to move up the social ladder, but the opposite is often impossible: one is then suspected of betraying confidences. You have to control your associations and be strategic about it, as Goffman (2002) put it: "If you get seen in any formal or informal conversation with members of a superordinate group, you're dead as far as the subordinate group is concerned" (Goffmann 2002, 152) Following similar advice, Kellogg started following first-year residents and dressed like them, thus blending in by also adapting to their clothing style (see also Ollion 2010 on this point).

The question of whom to contact and who to associate with is further complicated by the political dimension that characterizes social movements. Studying social movements means working on organizations that position themselves on specific political issues (see Malthaner 2014 on fieldwork in zones of conflict). If the researcher himself has some kind of (publicly known) political stance or commitment on the issue she studies or a related one, the access to the field can be more difficult. For example, when one takes a clear stance on a particular strategic issue of the movement one studies, it can be difficult to work again on this same movement later on or in another country, because the people you want to observe might be aware of your political preferences. At a time where information is very easily available, we as researchers have to assume that the members of the groups we want to study might look us up online. For very politicized movements, non-conformity with their ideology and strategic choices can be a huge problem.

The second question we need to think about is the kind of relation of exchange we have with our field. For an activist group, welcoming a participant observer can be a logistical and even political inconvenience—they seldom have a lot of time and may also be worried about surveillance (Lichterman 2001). Why should groups agree to this? We need to develop trust with the group we want to study. Luckily, in spite of inconveniences, activist groups are also most of the time very open to research. But even in such a trustful relationship, we often feel the need to give the group something back. This can take many forms. Sometimes, having one more person to stand in the cold rain and distribute pamphlets is much appreciated by small groups who have a hard time mobilizing. We can also volunteer to write minutes in meetings—a task that also has advantages when it comes to taking field notes discreetly. Péchu (2006), doing participant observation with squatters in Paris, offered to write a short history of the movement for the activists. Often, activists appreciate the presence of researchers among them because it makes them think reflexively about their own practices, and because it can be an opportunity for them to make their voices heard in a different arena.

Finally, we also need to think about how to present ourselves. Most authors would say that there are very few reasons that can justify covert research in social movement studies. Indeed, failing to disclose our identity as researchers raises serious ethical issues and can be problematic at the moment of the publication of our results. As a piece of general advice, it should always be possible to explain the research to the group one studies in a language that can be understood by participants (O'Reilly 2009) and to obtain formal permission. However, the question of covert vs overt research is usually not as clear-cut. There is a continuum between those two poles. After all, the goal of participant research is that the research subjects forget about being studied and "act naturally" (O'Reilly 2009). Newcomers in activist groups may not be aware of our research—do we have to explain it each time, or can we simply assume that the other members of the group will tell them? And if we start studying a group of which we are already part, is there a right moment to "come out"? Finally, we may be open about doing research, but not disclose exactly what our research is about in order to avoid interfering with the setting. For instance, when studying gender dynamics in anarchist or queer groups, one might think it better to be strategic and not to reveal this goal, because activists might otherwise become self-conscious about their behavior. But doesn't this mean that one is betraying the activists' trust? And couldn't it be that they are open about someone studying precisely this aspect? Such questions cannot be easily solved, especially in very politicized contexts. The conditions of access to the field are thus not something that is achieved once and for all, but need to be negotiated over and over in the course of fieldwork (O'Reilly 2009, 6). This also plays out within a broader institutional context: in recent years, professional associations such as the American Anthropological Association or the British Sociological Association have developed ethics codes regulating the transparency of ethnographic research, requiring researchers to follow strict procedures regarding their communication with research subjects, the kind of data they collect, and the use they can make of this data (see also, on this subject, Milan 2014 on ethical issues).

How to Prepare Observations

"Going to the field" for the first time can provoke stage fright. What should one observe? What is important and worthwhile to note down? Is it possible to prepare observations? Often, scholars distinguish between theory-driven and field-driven participant observation. The latter intends to shed light on a given empirical object, while the former is designed to address a theoretical problem (Lichterman 2001). Field-driven researchers are empiricists who would go to the field without any theoretical ideas, while theory-driven ethnographers want to see if a specific theory "works." Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory is an example of the empiricist approach, while Burawoy's extended case method (1998) starts from a theoretical questioning. Arguably, most participant observation probably takes place somewhere in between. A defining feature of participant observation is its iterative character (Beaud and Weber 2003). The analysis emerges in the back-and-forth between theoretical reflection and observations: "it begins with a set of connected ideas that undergoes continuous redefinition throughout the life of the study until the ideas are finalized and interpreted at the end" (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, 2). Every researcher, when first entering a new field, has some rudimentary theoretical ideas about what she expects to find or wants to know more about. This can be generated from previous knowledge and experience, from popular wisdom, or from scientific theories.

Sometimes participant observers use an observation *template* that helps in guiding observations. Early field manuals, such as the "Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the use of travelers and residents in uncivilized land" published by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874, featured observation lists to make sure one did not forget anything for a systematic description of unknown cultures. It was aimed at amateur observers who would provide information on demand to scholars at a distance. Such pre-established and universal observation templates no longer exist, but one still can only see what one knows or what others have thought about before. Reading the work of other researchers, regardless of what their empirical object is, remains a crucial element of learning how to do observation.

Specific observation templates are still essential, however, when one does multi-sited ethnographic research or, even more so, team ethnography, where researchers collaborate on a common project (Snow et al. 2010). Blee (2012) observed, with the help of students that she trained, 378 events (mostly meetings) by 69 activist groups in Pittsburgh over four years. She wanted her observations to speak to the same general questions of the emergence of activist groups, and therefore conducted "semi-structured" observations based on an observation template that prompted observers, among others, to pay attention to conflicts, emotions invoked or displayed, or talk of problems in the group. The template is reproduced in the methodological annex of the book (Blee 2012, 150–1) and consists of a very broad list of things to write down and stay alert to. Importantly, it was "continually refined over time to include new issues and address emerging hypotheses" (Blee 2012, 146), thus reflecting the iterative character of participant observation.

When in the Field: Blending in and Observing

When in the field, the participant observer usually wants to blend in and avoid influencing the interactions that are taking place. But is this really possible—won't a participant observer always, to some extent, alter the relations she is supposed to observe? This is a problem every participant observer faces. But to make things even more complicated, participant observers do not only want to blend in and participate: at the same time, they also want to keep a critical distance and observe. Participating and observing are thus oxymoronic (O'Reilly 2009): while participating means getting absorbed in the field, being part of it, and having empathy with the people studied, observing means stepping back, acting as an outsider, being critical. How do researchers deal with this contradiction that is built into the method?

A participant observer who enters a field as an outsider first faces the challenge of being accepted by the group as one of them. We need to "go native," and we want our groups to accept us. In his famous thick description of a Balinese cockfight, Geertz (2005, 58) recounts how he and his wife had a hard time getting accepted; they felt like intruders at first and were ignored. Only after a police descent to disperse a cockfight, when Geertz and his wife ran away from the police like everyone else and finally found refuge at the compound of one of the participants of the fight, were they accepted in the village. "Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and, most especially, amusement." They had become part of the community. Episodes of a similar kind often happen when we study activist groups: particular and unforeseeable events help us to be accepted in a group.

The more time one spends in a field, the more likely it is that we are no longer perceived as outsiders. However, there are often things a researcher cannot change and that will always mark a distance to the groups studied. The social characteristics that define us—age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation—often distinguish researchers clearly and visibly from their field. One of us (Lambelet 2014) studied organizations of senior citizens: it is difficult to blend in as a 25-year-old in a group whose average age is well above 70. Social characteristics influence the relations and interactions between a participant observer and her subjects of study. The people we study may reinterpret the new and unusual research relation into more common terms and make transfers (Fournier 2006): not seeing the ethnographer as a researcher, but as a potential sexual partner, for instance, or, in the case of the research on senior citizens, as a grandson. It can sometimes be possible to take advantage of these roles—it may help in getting accepted in the group. But the social distance can also be a barrier to knowledge. For a long time, ethnographers have ignored these questions and erected objectivist accounts. But with the reflexive turn, such concerns have come to the center of participant observation research. The analysis of the relationship between the participant observer and the members of the groups she studies is an integral part of research.

Not only social distance and difference need to be addressed: similarities raise questions too. It can sometimes be an advantage to have an insider role, to be already part of the group one studies before starting the research, to share the same social status and worldviews. Condemning the ideology of the group one studies makes it a very demanding task to develop the necessary empathy with research subjects—a core requirement of participant observation. But if we are too close to our field, on the contrary it can be difficult to build up the necessary critical distance. It can provoke personal dilemmas to publish a critical account of a movement to which we are fundamentally sympathetic. Lichterman (2001, 127) offers the sound advice to always keep an analytic lens focused on the group we study, regardless of whether or not we agree with them: "We learn less if we surrender that lens on the notion that we already agree with the group's cause and therefore understand what they are doing, or we already disagree with the group's cause and therefore understand—to our chagrin—what they are doing."

The degree of participation also raises concerns: if we participate too actively in the activist groups we study, are we not exerting too much influence on what we want to observe? In the case of very small groups, this can quickly become a problem. When one of us, Balsiger (2014b), approached a group that had launched a petition against a big sports brand, the group turned out to be composed of only four members; at the second meeting, it became clear that the activists were expecting advice from the researcher on how to improve their campaigning skills. But I felt hardly competent to give advice, and was in addition very reluctant to do so because I did not want to "distort" what I was supposed to observe. On the other hand, I could not simply refuse their demands. I ended up putting them in contact with one of the other groups I was studying, which was more experienced in campaign work. Thus, I served as a broker between two activist groups, and certainly contributed to a development in the field that might otherwise not have happened. As participant observers, we also have responsibilities vis-à-vis the groups we observe, and sometimes this means that we have to do things we would prefer not to do. Questions of how much we should participate animate many ethnographers of social movements. Most of them conclude that actively participating hardly poses problems—the heuristic benefits far outweigh the difficulties. Participating enables emotional and relational experiences that often prove to be invaluable sources of understanding that are impossible to acquire in other ways.

Different Roles

How much participation is possible depends not only on our personal research strategies, but also on our epistemological approach, research question, the field, and sometimes on other factors. Ethnographers have identified different roles of participant observers (Watt and Scott Jones 2010, 111): the complete observer is detached from the research cohort and does not participate; the observer-as-participant observes for brief periods of time to set the context for interviews or other types of research; the participant-as-observer builds up a relationship that is both friend and neutral researcher; and the complete participant becomes wholly absorbed in the researched community. However, in reality, these different roles are often played simultaneously by the same researcher in the course of a research. On some sites, we only act as observers, whereas on others we engage with the group and participate. Participant observation can be more or less central in a given research design—it can be the core of it or just a means to become more familiar with what we study.

In the field, specific roles can be adopted and serve as vantage points for participant observation. In social movement research, it is usually not a problem to find such a role, especially when one studies activist groups. We can simply be an additional volunteer, a helping hand in the organization of protest events, or take up certain tasks that allow us to talk to many of the activists. It can be more problematic in the case of professional NGOs, which resemble settings for workplace or public administration ethnographies (Huby et al. 2011), or in circumstances where other factors make observation problematic. In an ethnography on anti-imperial protests in Japan, Steinhoff (2007) was not allowed to participate because this would have violated her visa status. Her description of her "observation technique" shows the delicate negotiations involved in field research in finding one's position and role: "To make it clear that I was an observer and not a participant in the political movement itself (which would have violated my visa status), during street demonstrations I walked on the sidewalk beside the demonstrators (. . .). *In order to maintain good relations with the demonstrators I did not speak to the security police,* but we recognized each other on sight. Aside from the one occasion on which an angry security policeman scolded me for taking pictures of the security police instead of the demonstrators, I was not bothered" (emphasis added) (Steinhoff 2007, 85). The inability to march with the demonstrators required her to find other ways to signal them that she was "on their side" in order to avoid jeopardizing her good relations with the protestors.

Field Notes

Field notes are the central data collection tool of a participant observer. Because it is impossible to remember everything, it is crucial to take detailed notes every day of fieldwork. Sometimes, it is possible to take notes during observation—for instance, during a meeting it is acceptable to put down some points on a piece of paper. However, one should also be discreet with note taking on the spot because it could be perceived as an intrusion. During fieldwork we therefore need to find a way to (mentally or physically) note the important things we do not want to forget. After fieldwork, it is important to take as much time as we need to write down detailed notes. The sooner the better—while memory is still fresh. The longer we wait, the more we will forget.

But what should we write in our field notes? "Everything that's important" is not a very useful advice, since writing down everything will take us forever, and we will not know what is important right away (O'Reilly 2009). It certainly takes some practice to know what is "an observation:" the longer we are in a field, the better we know what to take notes of. In the first few days of fieldwork, the best advice is to write down as much as possible. Goffman called it a "freshness cycle:" "The first day you'll see more than you'll ever see again. And you'll see things that you won't see again. So, the first day you should take notes all the time" (2002, 152). Goffman also encourages writing field notes in a personal tone: since they are not meant to be published as such but constitute "raw data," they can be written as "fully and lushly" as possible (Goffman 2002). But field notes must also be precise, detailing who said what to whom, and how they said it. Noting *what* happened *when* allows us to be able to reconstruct sequences of action. If one uses an observation template, it is nonetheless important to be alert to other information one finds striking and adding new points to the template.

In addition to written field notes about observations, we can also use recordings, pictures, sketches, or videotapes. In certain circumstances, it can be perfectly acceptable to ask permission to film an event, such as a general assembly of a social movement group or a particular protest event. Such data can allow us more detailed access to what happened during a meeting. In addition, besides taking notes and observing, an ethnographer is also a statistician and an archivist, carefully counting the number of people that attend meetings or protest events, trying to know their composition in terms of gender, race, age, and so on. We may also collect the materials activists produce (Philipps 2012), such as pamphlets, PowerPoint presentations, announcements, minutes, personal notes, or e-mail communications, and so on. Finally, the various online traces people leave behind are a tempting source—Facebook posts and friendships by individuals or groups, tweets, or instagram pictures may contain very relevant information on the people we study. In some ways, this use of "big data" is but an extension of traditional methods of triangulation used by ethnographers. But in other ways, because of the sheer amount of information and the privacy issues this kind of data raises, it poses ethical questions that need to be thought through carefully.

The notes one takes are of different kinds. Some are descriptive and relate closely what happened in the field. They are on the *who, what, when*, and *how* of human activity. But others are more analytical. We do not just write down what we see and hear, but also theoretically interpret and analyze this in a reflexive way. Finally, a third kind of notes are methodological. They are instructions to oneself: what to pay attention to in the future, where to go, whom to contact, and so on. Theoretical notes are the first step to the analysis; they can be thought of as memos or, as one goes up the ladder of abstraction, as codes. Separation of these two levels is important, but we also need to be able to quickly retrieve those observation(s) to which a theoretical note is related. This will be helpful when writing our analysis, as the description will give the necessary thickness to our account.

Leaving the Field

How do we know when we have done enough participant observation and when it is time to leave the field? Duration is a crucial factor of good participant observation. Traditionally, ethnographers estimated that one had to spend at least one year in the field in order to see a full natural cycle and its rites—spring, summer, autumn, winter. But what does that mean when we observe social movements? Duration certainly depends on our research question and the nature of our object. When we are interested in events like world social forums, duration can sometimes be only a few days—although in an ethnographic perspective, one would tend also to look at the preparation of events and at what happens after them—what we have called the non-public side of social movements. If we only observe three days of a public meeting, how can we know whether this was a regular meeting or an exceptional one, due to a specific context? To know when to put an end to fieldwork, ethnographers speak of field saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Olivier de Sardan 1995). For a given research question, the productivity of observations diminishes: for each new day of fieldwork, each additional interview or site, we get less and less new information. When this point has been reached, fieldwork has been completed. Conversely, this also ideally means that we should not stop fieldwork as long as this point has not been reached: only when the field is saturated can we give a valid account of it. Stopping before, our data may be insufficient, superficial. Of course, this may sometimes interfere with external constraints—usually, we do not have unlimited time to do fieldwork, but have to finish a paper, a dissertation, a book.

Analyzing Data

Doing fieldwork is an iterative process. Analyzing and collecting data are therefore not always temporarily separated. The regular taking of field notes implies constant analytical work, often pointing towards new questions that will be explored through observations and interviews. This back-and-forth means that one needs to be open to the surprises and contingencies of fieldwork. Our initial research interests often get diverted towards other issues that appear more relevant in the contact with the people we study. In our analysis, we might therefore not necessarily take up the question we initially thought was driving the research; instead, participant observation can lead us on hidden tracks and puzzles that were impossible to perceive in advance. When conducting fieldwork and analyzing field notes, we have to be open to this possibility.

In spite of the iterative character of fieldwork, however, there comes a time when we stop doing observation and start writing up our analysis. There is no single and ready-made method of analyzing ethnographic data. It is usually a process that is hidden, part of an implicit know-how that is learnt by practice and is not formalized. It encompasses activities such as coding and re-coding of field notes, creating research puzzles to which our observations can give an answer, developing arguments that build on citations and descriptions from field notes and refining them when writing, and so on. How does one organize the "steaming mass" of data accumulated over a long period of participant observation into a "coherent narrative" (Katz 2002, 64)? How does one put diverse observations pointing in numerous directions into a linear account?

The job of the analyst is to find a logical order to sort all the material you have. Beaud and Weber (2003) suggest as a starting point to write down a descriptive account of the fieldwork. Such an account is descriptive, precise, and honest; it lists the things we have observed, as well as the deficiencies of our observations. In parallel, they incite us to write an account of our own itinerary on the field. Where did we start our observations, and what sites did we observe from there on? To whom did we talk, and when? What were the different roles occupied in the course of fieldwork? Being aware of this personal trajectory is necessary when reflexively analyzing our data: it helps to contextualize the different encounters and interpretations of settings and events.

The analytical work then means stepping out of the single observations to compare them and find out how they are connected together (Beaud and Weber 2003). In a more theoretically driven approach, this will have started early on and guided our observations all along; if the approach is more field-driven, it will be done mostly after fieldwork is completed. It is best done with some kind of coding system, by putting observations into different thematic folders (and again, has probably started already while doing fieldwork, but needs to be reassessed once all observations have been made). Computer-assisted qualitative analysis can be of help when organizing data and analyzing it. Codes categorize and create links between observations and put order into what we see. The different topics or codes will help us gain an analytical grasp of the story our research is going to tell. Beyond single observations, we thus look for the encompassing themes that speak to theoretical interrogations, develop hypotheses, and propose explanations. Codes are also helpful to organize observations—quotations, conversations, descriptions of settings or of anecdotes—into bits relevant for the different sections or chapters of our research report, paper, or book. In the methodological appendix to her book *Making Volunteers*, Eliasoph reveals that she began her analysis by putting observations into categories; "chapters began as *nothing but* notes that I stuck together for reasons that initially struck me as intuitively right" (2011, 262).

Surprises, enigmas, misunderstandings, paradoxes, or absurd situations often stand at the beginning of compelling ethnographic narrations. What makes us laugh or what makes us feel revolted, is intriguing. The gap between our expectations and what happens in the field can thus reveal an explanation. In our puzzlement about something the group we study takes for granted lies a key to understanding its style that also shapes the tactics it uses (Lichterman 1996). Our astonishment at the absence of visible signs of social movement organizations at a show for ethical fashion triggers the discovery of the different approaches that constitute this field (Balsiger 2012). The art of an ethnographic analysis often consists of producing plausible accounts that draw on such apparently minor anecdotes and observations. But how can we make sure that our accounts are valid and do not just blow out of proportion an insignificant and erroneously interpreted event? What makes it more than our subjective interpretation?

The reflexive nature of the analysis is an essential ingredient for this. The analysis must specify how much time we spent in the field, what roles we played, how we got access to sites, and what relations we built up with the people we studied. It specifies the difficulties we encountered and the iteration of our research questions in the course of fieldwork. It addresses the different kinds of biases that exist in every research: in particular, our privileged relationship to certain informants, actors, and networks on the field that may have shaped our interpretation and our subjective point of view informed by personal biographies. The reader needs to have these indications in order to understand our relation with the field and to assess the validity of the analysis. We do not want to plead for an excessively self-centered analysis: readers want to learn first and foremost about the social movements we study, not about our own personal experience. Nonetheless, being *methodologically explicit* is indispensable in order to produce valid ethnographic accounts.

A second essential requirement of analysis is the contextualization and triangulation of data (Olivier de Sardan 1995). All observations have to be contextualized. Who speaks, who acts? What is her position within the group, what is his social, economic, cultural capital? Activists do not come from nowhere: they have families, professions, personal biographies. They have also dreams or ideas about who they want to be in ten years' time. This will inform what they do and what they say—for instance, what words they use and how they classify things. Contrary to ethno-methodological approaches in the tradition of Garfinkel (1984), which focus exclusively on the setting of interaction, we think that contexts are crucial and need to be accounted for in the analysis of data produced by participant observation. In addition, this data also has to be cross-checked whenever possible. Here, the analytical work of a participant observer resembles that of a crime investigator or a historian. Like detectives or historians, ethnographers must always seek to do cross-verification of data through different sources. This implies both the points of view of different people we study, and the use of other data than field notes from observation, such as interviews, statistics, or secondary documents. Triangulation is more sophisticated if we deliberately choose our informants because of their position within the group we study and seek out their point of view. Indeed, fieldwork can be explicitly designed to "test" or verify our specific hypotheses and interpretations (Olivier de Sardan 1995). It is the "specific beauty of ethnographic research: you develop your ideas and then go back to the field the next day to challenge them, refine them, make sure they are right, and/or discover variations on themes" (Eliasoph 2011, 262).

These principles of a "fieldwork policy" constitute a safeguard against an analysis entirely submitted to the risk of subjectivity (Olivier de Sardan 1995). A final important requirement, of course, is to let the actors speak. An ethnographic analysis should always be rich in descriptions, in using original material from fieldwork—quotes, bits of conversations, vignettes of scenes and settings. This makes the analysis "varied," "colorful," "vivid," and can be a way to appraise ethnographic research (Katz 2001; 2002). But there is always a tension between too much and not enough analysis. In the former case, the actors of the field are in the background and the researcher monopolizes speech. In the latter case, the researcher can almost be absent and lets the field speak for itself. A piece of ethnographic analysis needs to find a balance between those two, which also means finding a balance between the voice of the author and those of the people studied. From an epistemological perspective, researchers have the possibility of varying points of view and are thus able to present an analysis that is different from one single viewpoint. At the same time, whenever we transform the voices from our research into a "scientific narrative," this forces us "to directly confront the partial, situated, 'non-innocent,' and deeply constructed nature of the stories one crafts and the knowledge claims one makes" (Klawiter 2008, 299). Does our researcher's voice have more authority than the points of view of the activists we study, or is it just one view among others? The researcher has the privilege of having the last word, but this also raises important ethical questions and sometimes puts us in an intellectually and ethically challenging position between empathy, responsibility, and respect towards our research subjects, and our goal of critical sociological analysis.

Be Explicit!

Doing participant observation means embracing the idea that taking part in ordinary social situations and interactions allows us to learn about the complexity of things (words, acts, but also causality, significations, and stakes) that coexist and that make possible or shape these social situations. It means accepting that an interest in what actors do and say, as well as in the meaning they give to what they do and say, is indispensable for the comprehension of social phenomena (even though we may know at the same time that actors do not have full awareness of the entire social phenomenon in which they take part, and that we triangulate our participant observation data with other kinds of sources). Participant observation thus means adopting the view that understanding social phenomena is situated somewhere between what people say and what people do—both meanings and actions/practices are important. With regard to other methodologies, which either only use interviews or, on the contrary, only use observation, participant observation looks at what lies between the two: in the adjustments, disjunctions, silences.

The three core aspects that together define participant observation—"collecting firsthand data," "moving the observation scale," and "experiencing" (that is, the presence of the researcher)—constitute the strength of the method. At the same time, this presence is also what the method is most criticized for: the researcher's presence represents, for some, the scientific impossibility of participant observation. Presenting work using ethnographic methods to researchers who do not do ethnography almost certainly leads to questions on subjectivity, while this issue rarely comes up when discussing other methods. It is perhaps because participant observers are most of the time alone on their field, and reproducibility of the same piece of research seems impossible because "the water never flows twice under the same bridge." Most of the time, a researcher who studies a particular movement group immediately becomes *the* specialist on it, and few people can contradict his findings if no one is willing to spend the same amount of time in the field. But does this invalidate the method? On the contrary. Nobody today questions the theoretical advances of the refutation of models of personal pathology or social disorganization that was achieved thanks to researchers who used their personal experience of protest and realized that movements were constituted of strategic and organized actors. Participant observation, certainly more than other methods, has been subject to methodological debates aimed at avoiding the subjective bias of researchers. The tools to do this are the classic tools of the social sciences: multiplication of points of view, reflexivity, triangulation, comparison, and so on. Therefore, the difficulty in reproducing research does not say anything about the scientific character of the method. It just makes the entrance cost of this method explicit: doing fieldwork is a long and costly process.

But in spite of the obvious contributions of participation and the importance of methodological debate among practitioners, a doubt seems to persist. Because of the impossibility of reproducing participant observation-based research, we want to propose, to conclude, some ways to diminish as much as possible the doubts on the scientific value of data gathered through participant observation. One possibility would be to take part in a community of researchers working simultaneously on objects or groups that are similar, allowing us to increase the cumulativity of knowledge on these objects, to confront research and compare it—something which working on very different objects makes much more difficult. The Chicago School was an interesting project from this point of view: many researchers were working on the same social site within a relatively short period of time—the city of Chicago and its urban transformations at the beginning of the twentieth century. Another way to cumulate points of view on the same phenomenon is working in teams, with different researchers working on the same object. This allows us to break with the personal link between a researcher and his field. Blee's (2012) and Snow et al.'s (2010) studies take this path.

Most of all, it is important to be as explicit as possible in the restitution of one's work on the different moments of the research, the choices one made, the positions one occupied. And as much as possible, one should follow certain standards of writing when communicating scientific findings to the broad community of researchers. There are certain established standards of scientific evaluation that are commonly used to evaluate research based on participant observation. Trying to resume to young scholars what an ethnographic paper should contain, Spradley and McCurdy (1988 [1972], 83) proposed the following general outline of a "participant observation paper," which can serve as a guide to ensuring the respect of scientific standards in ethnographic research:

1) Introduction: What is this paper about? How do you define the fundamental concepts you use? What is the plan of the paper? 2) Field Work Methods: Why did you select this cultural scene? How did you make contact with informants? Can you describe the characteristics of your main informants? What fieldwork methods did you use? What factors influenced the selection of your data? Did you have any special problems? 3) The setting: Can you describe the physical setting and social situation related to the cultural scene? What are the major domains of this cultural scene? 4) The Cultural Description: What domains are you going to describe and why? What categories do informants use? How are these categories organized? How are they defined? What is their meaning? How do informants use this information to construct their own behavior? 5) Conclusion: Can you make any tentative interpretations about this cultural scene? Can you recommend areas for future research?

In sum, speaking with researchers using other methods requires transparency on the way research has been done, on the difficulties encountered, the choices made, and the rationales behind them. As Descola (2005) has argued, the best way to give an account of what you have done on your field is not to adopt a normative discourse that clouds your actual practice, but to say what you actually did. "It's definitely better to expound with full ingenuity the windings, the doubts and the accidents that mark out the course of the inquiries and render them possible" (Descola 2005, 66).

NOTES

1. To avoid repetition, we use the terms "participant observation" and "ethnography" as synonyms in this chapter, although ethnography usually contains other methods in addition to participant observation.
2. The acceptance of sustained, focused field research as a norm of good practice was stimulated by Boas and Malinosky. See on this point Kaberry (1957) and Codere (1966).
3. As McCarthy (1991: xi) put it: "McPhail's elegant critical labors raise an intriguing puzzle: How is it possible that earlier ideas about crowds have been so uncoupled from empirical detail about their nature?" For an overview of studies observing collective gatherings using video and photography, see Lambelet (2010).

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