Participant - observation

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Participant observation is a *minimal* methodology in geography. Its credo is to keep as close to the spatial phenomenon as is possible and it is thereby quite distinct from methodologies that emphasize distance and objectivity. Participant observation involves observing *and* participating.

Contents

'I have no great quickness of apprehension or wit . . . my power to follow a long and purely abstract train of thought is very limited . . . (but) I am superior to the common run of men in noticing things which easily escape attention, and in observing them carefully' Charles Darwin, Preface to 'The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals'.

What is it?

Participant observation is perhaps the easiest method in the world to use since it is ubiquitous and we can all already do it. From the moment we are born we are in various ways observing the world around us and trying to participate in it. Children acquiring language for the first time listen and watch what, when and how their parents are doing what they are doing. They observe greetings, and have greetings directed at them and attempt to participate by, at first, looking and, later, waving and making sounds that approximate, and eventually are, hellos and goodbyes. It is, of course, not just children that use this method to acquire skills; surgical students spend a great deal of time observing surgery and are gradually entered into the practical demands of actually doing surgery as fully participating surgeons. International migrants finding themselves in foreign countries have a massive task of observing the multitude of activities and exactly how they are done in order to fit-in as participants. Amongst other background knowledge they have to acquire the locals' ways of getting everyday things done such as greetings, ordering coffee, queuing for buses, making small talk, paying their taxes and so on.

So far so good: participant observation is easy it does not require the mastering of arcane skills or technical lexicons. And yet there is a catch (well there had to be one right?) You may have guessed already from the mention of surgeons and migrants that participant-observation as a way of engaging with life worlds will unfortunately face their particular challenges. Also for better and for worse, because it is not an *external* method administered on research subjects such as a questionnaire or a focus group or a lab test participant observation has *no pre-set formal steps* to doing it. Or rather the stages that anyone doing participant observation must go through are the stages *which arise out of the phenomenon and settings* that you are investigating.

If you do not know how to do, or be something, then learning how to do, or be that thing will be as hard for you as for anyone attempting to participate in it. Think of the effort and time required to do informative participant observation studies of air traffic control (Harper & Hughes, 1993), mathematical problem solving, or playing jazz music (and these expert cultures have been studied though participant-observation.) And yet participant observation can be turned to such seemingly 'simple' spatial phenomena as shopping in the supermarket or going clubbing (Malbon, 1999) or walking in the city (Watson, 1993). In these latter examples you may already be able to do them and the demands on you will then be to provide a commentary that describes them in revealing and interesting ways. Key to your success in doing participant observation is, as Charles Darwin says of his own

powers, that you notice things that otherwise escape attention and that you observe *carefully*.

Commentators and players.

A common mistake, made as often by well qualified social researchers as by those new to participant-observation, is to take observation as the dominant part of participant-observation. This is to some extent a legacy of scientistic ideas about 'objective observers' who watch their research subjects in a detached, emotionless manner and are thereby able to provide objective descriptions of what was occurring. Even though most researchers no longer pursue this kind of objective observation many still underestimate the importance of participation, proposing that it is sufficient to watch what is going on and then write down their observations.

To give you a sense of why it may not be enough to simply observe let us move on to what your participant-observation should produce: *commentary*. Being able to comment on the culture, society and geography of various of spaces and places is indeed the major requirement of doing geography. In that sense all geographers are commentators and many of them exceptionally good ones. If we think about sports commentators for a moment, as against social and cultural commentators, we can see that they are seldom the ones playing the game, they are sitting to one side observing it. Some sports commentators provide exasperatingly bad and irrelevant commentary because they have never played the game they are commenting on. One ingredient of a decent sports commentator is that they should be, or have been, a player to offer any kind of insight into the game. Knowing *how* to play the game in no way guarantees insightful remarks since many of the outstanding players and competitors have very little to say. Shifting back to social and cultural research it is the case that far too many of its researchers are only commentators and have never played. The point that is being reiterated here is that the best participant-observation is generally done by those who have been involved in and tried to do and/or be a part of the things they are observing.

Doing participant observation / Becoming the phenomenon.

Despite my having suggested that there is no template for doing participant-observation there are features in its course, which while not pre-specifying what is to be done, will give you a sense of whether you are making any progress or not. If you have never been involved in the event, activity, phenomenon, group or whatever that you are investigating then on your arrival you will find yourself cast into some category. You will be called, if not a 'greenhorn', 'beginner', 'new girl', then something worse such as an ‘incompetent’, ‘tourist’ or ‘outsider’. This is not simply a pejorative term for you but also assigning you a to type which is related to what you are expected to be able to do, the perspective you will have on events and what you will need to be taught. This is also not such a bad place to start since peoples' expectations of you will not be too high and you will be expected to be observing so as to learn how to become one of the group/company/band/players. Recording your

observations at this point is vital since if all goes well they should have changed by the time you are finished. They are also, at this point, the perspective of 'any person' who may well be who you will wish to write your report for at the end of your fieldwork. Without keeping a record of your own struggles to get ‘the knowledge’ you are likely to forget the lay members perspective once you no longer have it. Consequently you will no longer appreciate what is that may seem odd, irrational or otherwise mysterious to those, like yourself, now in the know.

Example*: In a cafe which I was studying as part of a community project the counter staff talked really loudly and greeted customers coming through the door. I noticed this the first time I went in and noted it down. It seemed odd that the staff should allow their conversations to be overheard by everyone. I also noticed that they greeted a lot of customers by their name, calling out : “Hi Betty!”, “Just take a seat Mr Stewart and I’ll be right with you.” As my fieldwork in the neighborhood continued over its 6 month period I gained the status of a 'regular' (one kind of participant status) in the café where I no longer noticed how loudly they talked. I had become used to the place. I had a favorite table. I had a favorite toasted sandwich. Not only that I had become one of the people who the staff greeted by name and would say with a smile: “A toasty today?”. When writing up the research I returned to ponder the loudness of their talk, the things they said, the fact that they remembered names and favourite foods, and began to see its part in creating the ambience of a 'place where everybody knows your name'. Greeting people on their arrival also made known to anyone there who were the 'locals' and who were passing trade. The loud talk tuned you into local gossip about who was marrying who, who had been expelled from school, where the roadworks were, what people ate and drank there. 'Loud talk' was, then, an everyday method used by the staff and enjoyed by the regulars as giving a feeling of community and offering some local knowledge. (For a much longer description see (Laurier et al., 2001))*

Just how long it takes to become competent in what you choose to study, and indeed whether it is possible to reach that state will vary according to what you choose to study using this method. Should you choose to study a supermarket as a shopper or stacking the shelves as a member of the staff then it is not so demanding to become competent in these activities. However other communities of practice such as mathematicians, rural villages or jazz piano players may take considerable time and effort before you will be recognised as an accepted member of their groups. For whatever activity you decide to participate in there will be different ordinary and expert ways in which you are instructed in how to do it, from the more formal (i.e. lessons, workshops, courses, rulebooks etc.) to the informal (tips, jokes, brief chats). For some rural villages you will always be an ‘incomer’ even if you reside in them until your dying day. A successful participant-observation does not turn entirely on becoming *excellent* in the activity (becoming an Olympic athlete or leading cardiac surgeon), or passing as, say homeless, Italian-American or even as a member of the opposite sex. Yet by the end you should possess a degree of the particular know-how, appropriate conduct and common-knowledge of the place and/or people you have chosen to study.

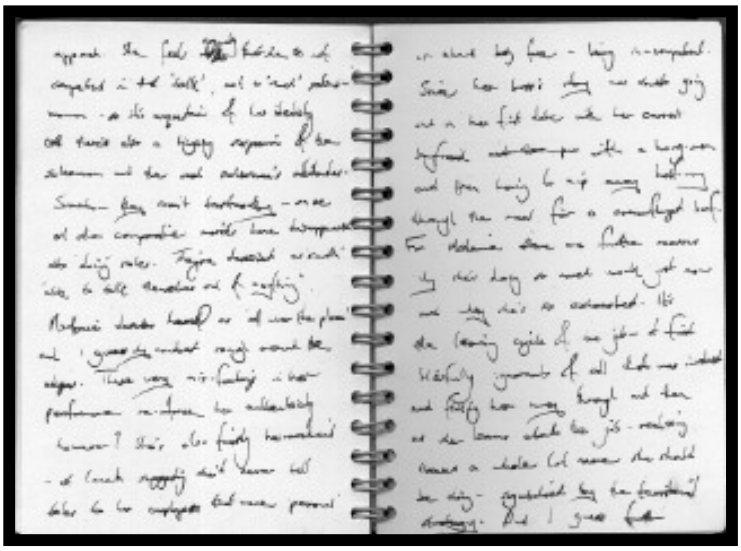
Here is a brief extract where David Sudnow (1978) offers a sense of what he was doing in what he called 'going for the jazz'. He had already acquired a basic competency in piano but was trying to *become* a jazz piano player, so he was, amongst other methods, starting to look very carefully at what the experience players did with their body at the piano:

'At live performances I had watched the very rapid improvisation players whose records had served as my models, but their body idioms in no way seemed connected in details to the nature of their melodies, and my occasional attempts to emulate the former had no appreciable bearing on my success with the latter. This, for example, had a little shoulder tic, but mimicking that (which I found myself doing after a night of watching him) did not make his sorts of melodies happen. Another sat tightly hunched over the piano, playing furiously fast, but assuming that posture seemed to have no intrinsic relationship to getting my jazz to happen as his did.' Sudnow 1978 p82.

Sudnow spent a *decade* learning firstly how play piano, secondly how to play jazz that was recognised by other jazz musicians as jazz, and finally how to instruct students in jazz piano. The above quote gives only a hint of the experiences involved in Sudnow's odyssey. However long you devote to your study, and it's more likely to days or weeks rather than years, what is important is to keep notes, audio-visual records and ideally a journal along the way. Basically record as much as you possibly can and even more importantly try and write straightforward and detailed descriptions of the phenomena you are interested in. Record what you see and can make sense of and what puzzles or upsets you (with a camera or camcorder if possible). Sudnow video-taped himself playing piano so that he could then repeatedly watch what his hands were doing on the piano keyboard in relation to the production of the music. These recordings will form the base materials for your commentary at the end of your time doing fieldwork. It is not impossible to write a delightful report on your participant-observation without having kept a record of it at the time but it is considerably more difficult and the details will inevitably slip away. In my own research practice I try to take photographs and shoot video wherever and whenever possible. Video in particular provides you with some 'stuff' to work with once you are writing up your research. It is a 'retrievable data-set' and re-viewable to find unanticipated details that you could not formulate in words at the time, nor may even have noticed, since you were too busy being engaged in the situation. Photos and video-clips are also very helpful for presenting your results to lay and expert audiences. With video, audio and still photographs you can share your data and I would strongly encourage you to do data review sessions in a group to see what different people are able to find in the visual material you are presenting them with. Note down what you all see in common and try and consider how you do so. Materials that may initially seem quite uninteresting should by the end of their close viewing and description provide you with surprises. Drawing reflective conclusions from the materials you have gathered remains reliant on your insight.

Examples of fieldnotes.

These notes were taken in the passenger seat of a company car after a conversation with a regional manager about her boss and some of her co-workers.



Typed transcript:
'… She feels equally that she is not competent in that 'talk', not as 'real' saleswoman - so it's a question of identity, there's also a lingering suspicion of the salesman and the real salesman's attitudes. Somehow they aren't trustworthy - once all other comparative morals have disappeared into doing sales. They're described as 'smooth', 'able to talk themselves out of anything'. M describes herself as 'all over the place' and I guess by contrast, rough around the edges. These very mis-footings in her performance re-inforce her authenticity however? She's also fairly hierarchical - at lunch suggesting she'd never tell tales to her employers that were personal or about losing face - being incompetent. Since her boss's story about going out on her first date with her current boyfriend --- with a hangover and then having to nip away half-way through for a camouflaged barf. For M there are further reasons why she's doing so much just now and why she's so exhausted. It's the learning cycle of the job - at first blissfully ignorant of all that was involved and fluking her way through and then as she learns about the job realising there's a whole lot more she should be doing - symbolised by the territorial strategy. And I guess further...'

Fieldnotes, or rather certainly *my* fieldnotes are often badly written, dull, cryptic and not the kind of thing I would want to show anyone. However I have included a 'cheat' sample of a not too dire section to give you at least a flavour of how roughly notes tend to be written at the time. What is important to bear in mind is that notes should be taken because you will not be able to recall sufficient details of what happens nor what people say during a lengthy engagement with them. As it happens getting your notebook is also quite useful in showing your researcher status in the field or setting, so that you will be seen to be at work doing your research and (may) be taken seriously as a result. You should be aware that there are sensitive settings where you will want to keep your status as a researcher more low key. In such an event you may end up scribbling notes in the toilet, or in the bus afterwards, or some other hidden place and there are plenty of amusing stories from experienced geographers about doing so. The notes reproduced above were written up while the regional manager was out of the car dropping in to visit one of her clients.

As importantly mote-making can help you concentrate during situations which may otherwise allow your mind to wander. The uses of note-taking to help you pay attention will I am sure be familiar from your use of them to do so during university lectures. To repeat myself the most significant use of your fieldnotes will be *after the event*, in helping you recall the details of the situation which you wish to describe, analyse or reflect on. As you can see from the example of my notes they generally need tidied up, expanded upon and details frequently need to be filled in which allow your jottings to be decrypted.

Example of videonotes

(From Laurier and Philo 2003) The original video footage was taken later during the same research study as the notebook extract above. From repeated watchings the notes below were written.

1 2 3 4 5

1. Marge opens the boot,
Bends forwards so that her line of sight is directly into the boot

2. Looks in and pulls out white cardboard box of glass tumblers (unopened)
Places white box out of the way on parcel shelf
Pushes down protruding lid of large brown cardboard box so that she can reach right to the back of the boot

3. Pulls out 8-pack of miniature bottles sealed in transparent plastic shrink-wrap
As she stands upright, she holds the 8-pack slightly away from her body. As she does this she says…

M : ((staring at 8-pack)) “Oh excellent, I’ve got some”
E ((from behind camcorder)) : “What’s that, is it flavouring?”

M bends down again and reaches toward the same dark nook that she found the 8-pack.

4. Pulls out a single miniature, turns her head slightly in the direction of Eric and the camera.
Waggles the pack, then puts it down on parcel shelf

M : “Yeah, it’s flavours”
E : “So they do flavoured vodkas”

5. Marge places the single bottle onto the parcel shelf “Yup”
Continues to search in boot for a few seconds.

Digital video (DV) records of events during fieldwork also require writing up afterwards so even though they save you making notes at the time you cannot escape making some notes eventually. The clips that you are interest in can be imported from DV tapes to computers that have the appropriate connectivity (usually firewire). Once video is imported then using various software packages (i.e. Quicktime, Media-player, Realproducer, Adobe Premiere, Final Cut Pro) stills can extracted to be arranged in sequence as above. If you are working toward multi-media documents of your research then the sequences can be kept as moving 'real-time' audio-visual data and inserted into html files. There are plenty of technical guides to this available on-line and given the rapid changes in video-technology I will not go into further technical detail on dealing with digital video. Broadly it is worth pointing out that it has been getting easier and easier to use and geographers have barely scratched the surface of what might be done with it for describing social practices or presenting their results.

As with using a notebook, using a camcorder makes your status as a researcher highly visible, only more so. When you switch the camera on people frequently feel obliged to make faces or talk to camera as if they were starring in a docu-soap. For instance Marge talks to the camera to some extent in the extract above when she waggles the vodka flavourings toward me and the camcorder. Serious documentary makers emphasize getting the groups or individuals you wish to video familiar with the presence of the camera to the point of ignoring it and urging them to do what they would normally do were the camera not there. In fact many anthropologists hand over the camcorder and allow their communities to video themselves in an attempt to hand over control of the video-making to those being represented. In my own practice I tend to hold on to the camera since I have a rough idea of what I am after and am anxious to avoid giving busy people any more work to do than they already have. In the above example I had been videoing Marge for more than a week. In the clips and their accompanying description I was trying capture something of her work as it happens 'naturalistically' (in contrast to experimentally or by questionnaire or interview).

Video clips or transcribed sequences of stills, as I have noted already, assist in sharing your original data. In my notes on videoclips I try to put down what is happening without jumping to any particular conclusions. As you can see from the above example they are perhaps starkly descriptive, yet they are what social life looks like 'in the flesh' so to speak. They are also a first stage toward your analysis, much like tabulating the descriptive statistics from a numerical study. Unlike statistics they do not give you 'results' at this stage but are reliant at this point on your further description and analysis of what is occurring. In the example with Marge above, myself and Chris Philo were investigating how a sales region was organized through the mundane and time-consuming work with cardboard boxes and a car boot being packed, unpacked, open and re-packed at different clients' venues.

Adequate commentaries on culture and society

First an oft-quoted remarks from Harvey Sacks on reading his students reports after he had sent them to do participant-observation work on people exchanging glances:

p83 "Let me make a couple of remarks about the problem of 'feigning ignorance.' I found in these papers that people {i.e. the students in his class} will occasionally say things like, 'I didn't really know what was going on, but I made the inference that he was looking at her because she's an attractive girl.' So one claims to not really know. And here's a first thought I have. I can fully well understand how you come to say that. It's part of the way in which what's called your education here gets in the way of your doing what you in fact know how to do. And you begin to call *things* 'concepts' and *acts* 'inferences', when nothing of the sort is involved. And that nothing of the sort is involved, is perfectly clear in that if it were the case that you didn't know what was going on - if you were the usual made up observer, the man from Mars - then the question of what you would see would be a far more obscure matter than that she was an attractive girl, perhaps. How would you go about seeing in the first place that one was looking at the other, seeing what they were looking at, and locating those features which are perhaps relevant?" (Sacks, 1992)

The warning Sacks is making to his students is not to exercise a kind of professional skepticism ('feigning ignorance') which subverts the intelligibility of the things and actions they are able to observe. In this case a guy checking out an attractive girl. Sacks is warning of the dangers of acting like a Martian who has landed in a city and is without the myriad methods and experiences we have for making sense of our local environment. Moreover Sacks is saying that what we see in any setting is tied to the fact that we *are* participants and that there are classifications that we are able to make almost instantly and definitely pre-theoretically as part of our natural attitude to the world. In doing participant-observation of places we are already competent inhabitants of and can take their appearance for granted, the solution to doing adequate descriptions of them is not to import strange labels for the things we see or hear or otherwise sense almost instantly. It is the categories that the locals do and would use to describe their observations that we are interested in.

If you are a 'local' already you have huge advantages in providing adequate descriptions of how and why things get done in the way they get done. Yet you also are at the disadvantage of no longer noticing how such things get done because they are so familiar as to be *seen but un-noticed* and you may never have attempted to make them into any kind of formal description (Garfinkel, 1986). The exercise that Sacks set his students is one that you might also 'try at home without supervision':

In a public place such as a busy street, university library or park set yourself down with a notebook, camera or camcorder. Watch the people there and look for exchanges of glances between people who are not otherwise interacting with one another. Write notes at the time, and afterwards if you have video to re-view and check your observations. The notes are to be on what kind of persons exchange glances with what kinds of second (or third persons). Try and consider what kinds of actions get done during exchanges as well if that is possible. Can exchanged glances be hostile? Friendly? Flirty? Defensive? And if so, how so?

After gathering your observations they can be further described and analysed in order for you to consider the social categories you have used. For instance that a 'well-dressed woman' exchanged 'friendly' glances with a 'mother and baby', or that a 'teenage girl avoided the glance of another teenage boy.' What you will start to show in your analysis is something of what you know and use already to make sense of

your everyday life. Moreover if you carry out this exercise you should start to get a grasp on how it is that you are able to see the same things as someone else sees. That is, you can see what it is that they are looking at, not so much from working out the exact focus of their look but by seeing what it is in the scene that they would glance at (i.e. a beggar lying in a doorway, a librarian dropping a box of journals, a kid on a skateboard). This exercise is done with a minimum level of participation by you as a researcher and a minimum level of disruption to the place that you are investigating. Whilst easy to do, the test is to get a really good description done that makes available how glancing works as a social and cultural activity. Your description will be adequate when you show some parts of how glancing works in the particular observations that you have in hand. This exercise in doing a participant observation is illustrative of a broad type of participant observations, which are those of our common or everyday life world.

Things will be slightly different if you have pursued participant observations of new and uncommon set of skills such as mathematical proving, walking a police officer's beat (Sacks, 1972), learning mountaineering, nursing the dying, living amongst the homeless on the streets (Rose et al., 1965), dropping in at a drop-in center for the mentally ill (Parr, 2000) or using a car as a workplace (Laurier & Philo 2002). From these more practically ambitious projects, as I suggested earlier, your adequacy as a commentator turns on you having learnt things which lay members and indeed geographers cannot be expected to know. This certainly makes delivering ‘news’ easier since unlike ‘exchanging glances’ or ‘answering the telephone’ or ‘buying a newspaper’, not everyone knows how these more obscure, expert, secret or exotic activities are done. Not everyone could tell whether what you were saying about these activities indicated that you really know what you were talking about or whether it was sense or nonsense. For that reason you should consider testing the veracity of your descriptions on the people they were purported to represent.

Competence in the particular field you have selected will be one way in which your comments will attain a reasonable degree of adequacy. You yourself and other competent members like you will be able to see your comments as closely tied to the activities they are describing. Ideally you will be able to show some things that are in many ways known already but have simply never been closely described and analysed before. Doing adequate descriptions is already a challenge but in this second case is certainly no easy matter. It will be additionally hard because you will be trying to write or speak to two different audiences: towards the more abstract concerns of human geographers and other researchers and just as importantly writing for and as a member of the group you are describing.

Results - respecifying the generalities of social science

Human geography, like most other social sciences, has a host of big topics such as power, class, race, sexuality and gender. If like Charles Darwin your ‘*power to follow a long and purely abstract train of thought is very limited’* then these classic topics may not best be pursued as purely theoretical matters. As big picture issues

they sit uncomfortably with the more modest and small picture concerns of actually doing a participant observation. Are you really going to resolve disputes that have dogged the social sciences for a century from your study of a drop-in centre? Perhaps not but you may be able to respecify what appear to be big abstract problems into worldly, ordinary practical problems.

And what might your results look like? Your results should be ones that you could *not* have guessed from the big topics. Nor should you have been able imagine them before doing your study, or else why bother going to have a look if you can work it out without ever consulting anything in the world. Darwin's methods were to pay close attention to animals in all kinds of places, including his pets at home, and observe them in extended detail in ways and to ends that had not been pursued before. Despite their quite ordinary non-technical provenance Darwin's patient observations of animal life over-turned our view of ourselves, our origins and our relation to nature and god. Now *that* is a result. But what has been made of his work should not be confused those with the actual lowly and lengthy observations he documented that ended up being drawn into these larger conflicts. His 'results' were mostly descriptions, alongside sketches and still photographs, interspersed with re-iterations of long standing problems in biology and zoology and occasional bursts of inspiration and insight.

The strengths of participant observation are hopefully quite clear by now in that it is easy to do and it provides a more direct access to phenomena than some of the more complex methodologies of social science. It allows you to build detailed descriptions from the ground up that should be recognizable to the groups whose lives you have entered into. Its limits are that it does not have a handle that you can turn to make results pop out. Nor can it be shoe-horned in as a replacement for statistical methods since it will provide only very weak answers to the kinds of questions that could be hypothesis tested.

The kind of evidence that arises out of a one-off description allows your study to bring into view certain types of phenomena that are too complex for methodologies that seek and detect general features. Good data from a participant observation can be and usually is a particular instance of some practice or event or feature that elicits your interest. Sometimes the instance is an exception to the rule that teaches you the rule such as when someone does a foot fault at Wimbledon. At that moment you discover a little bit more about the game of tennis that you never knew before. It is not a well-known rule nor commonly broken one but it is there in the game. Sometimes an instance is simply one that you find recurring all the time such as in the video notes example from earlier. Marge packed and re-packed her car boot hundreds of times a month, looking at one instance of it revealed methods that she used each and every time she did her packing. If you consider that in each and every place the natives have at hand just what they need, then and there, to locally produce the spatial phenomena and interactional events you are observing, then it becomes apparent that wherever you start there is material for your analysis.

There is no need for you to climb a ladder to get a view that nobody else has. As Wittgenstein remarks:

"I might say : if the place I want to get to could only be reached by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now. Anything I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me." Wittgenstein, manuscript 109,207 ; Culture and Value.

Final Words of advice

It is with a mild hint of self-irony that my finishing words are: avoid reading books which claim to describe 'how to do' participant observation. If you must, then read just the one and then throw it away afterwards. A preparatory way to learn how this kind of fieldwork is done, if you cannot get hold of someone else who has done participant observation already, is to read an actual study which has been based in participant observation (see the list at the end of the chapter). None of these are substitutes for doing a study yourself. Much like learning to play piano or work out a mathematical proof or describe what a strawberry tastes like, you have to take a bite. Being told how playing piano or maths or tasting is done, in a book, does not and cannot provide what you need to know. Participant observation is not difficult, nor obscure, though the topics, places, people, subjects and more to which you apply it may be. Since it acquires the shape and scale of its phenomena, in your first studies choose things you reckon you can handle.

Summary of material covered:

- the way of participant observation
- making sure you have participated and not just observed
- gaining some descriptive access to the identifying detail of particular events and actual instances of spatial phenomena
- the challenges of learning about new places and new practices
- the challenges of making visible familiar places and familiar practices
- writing field notes, writing video notes
- closely describing and analysing empirical material
- re-specification of abstract problems from individual

Suggested Reading:

Crang, P. 1994 'It's showtime: on the workplace geographies of display in a restaurant in South East England', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12: 675-704.

Participant observation used to examine how a waiter's work gets done and how looking closely at this work teaches us about surveillance and display in workplaces.

Goffman, E. 1961 *Asylums*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

A classic from a very readable author, by turns thought provoking, amusing and disturbing. It is not just geographers who have found this book of value it is a key text on many courses in sociology, social psychology, psychiatric nursing and doctoring.

Goode, D. (1994), *A World Without Words: The Social Construction of Children Born Deaf and Blind*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

An out-standing investigation of two children born deaf and blind which is based on Goode's extended interactions and growing intimacy with his subjects. The study utilises fieldnotes and video.

Harper, R., Randall, D. and Rouncefield, M. (2000), *Organisational Change and Retail Finance : An ethnographic perspective*, London: Routledge.

Based on two of the authors spending time working alongside the employees of new telephone banking facilities and traditional banks and building societies. This study shows how participant observation can be carried out in a business environment.

Liberman, K. 1985 *Understanding Interaction in Central Australia : an ethnomethodological study of Australian Aboriginal People*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Participant observation is perhaps best known as a way of studying 'exotic' cultures where the everyday is rendered strange. This study offers us insights into the practical reason that shapes normal life amongst aborigines.

Livingston, E. 1987 *Making Sense of Ethnomethodology*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

A very accessible and practical introduction to what is a somtimes puzzling and certainly distinctive approach in the social sciences which heavily utilizes participant observation.

Lynch, M. 1985 *Art and Artifact in Laboratory Science, A Study of Shop Work and Shop Talk in a Research Laboratory*, London: Routledge.

A study which was revolutionary in its time and became a founding text of the social studies of science and technology field. It is based on the author 'hanging around' amongst scientists working in a laboratory and learning how they get the work of scientific experiments done as a practical matter.

Sudnow, D. 1978 *Ways of the Hand, The Organization of Improvised Conduct*, London: MIT Press.

Mentioned earlier in the main text, this book was both a best seller when released and is read by both academics and musicians. In addition if you can play piano then it can be used as a tutorial in the basics of jazz. For those unfamiliar with playing music some sections will be hard to grasp since it relies on a basic knowledge of notation, chords etc.

Wieder, D.L. (1974), *Language and Social Reality, The Case of Telling the Convict Code*, The Hague, Mouton.

Based on the author's residence as a researcher in a halfway house for ex-convicts this study illuminates how the 'convict's code' is used as a device for making sense of and producing events at the halfway house. It provides a good basis for seeing how a particular place and its inhabitant organize their everyday lives.

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