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INTRODUCTION TO HYBRID ETHNOGRAPHY

It's a chilly October afternoon. I am walking slowly through the streets of Winnipeg, which, at that time, was still known as the most dangerous city in Canada. I am in the city's North End—the neighborhood best known for its diverse population of Indigenous people and immigrant Canadians, concentration of social service organizations, legacy of missing and murdered women, and the hot bannock bread distributed to hungry people by a local organizer from her own truck.

On this particular day, the neighborhood is pulsing with a different kind of energy. Not only am I walking very slowly, but I am also walking to a beat. And I am not alone. A small crowd has gathered, and our rhythm has a purpose.

Idle No More, a Canadian-born grassroots movement for global Indigenous rights and environmental activism, has brought us to a public event where we are walking in solidarity with the *Elsipogtog Mi'kmaq* First Nation. During our medicine walk, a small group begins singing and playing hand drums. We pause, and people take turns speaking into a megaphone. Participants talk about fractured and resilient communities, police violence, and the dwindling natural resources on Canadian reserves. Indeed, First Nations reserves just outside Winnipeg function on a boil-advisory for their tap water.

As in previous public North End gatherings, news cameras are filming. And again this time, official video and audio feeds are not the only forms of media being collected and distributed. From the megaphone, one participant urges us all to “be our own media.” We use our phones to document and to share the images, sounds, and words of the event beyond the street where we have gathered.

People can—and have—expressed much about the reasons participants might prefer to disseminate their own media rather than rely on mainstream news sources. Taking out cell phones and going online during a physical gathering helps to share images and sounds with their own networks, removes the need to rely on outside sources to tell their stories, and allows them to tell the stories that matter most to them. It also allows participants to send

personalized invitations and encouragement for friends to come join the rally in the street, completing the circuit from the physical to the digital and back to the physical again.

In the moment I just shared, I am most struck by the interconnectedness of this circuit. When rally attendees were encouraged to “be our own media,” the only question was whether we *would*, not whether we could. Cell phones and other mobile devices with microphones, cameras, and internet access make the ability to record and share information widely available. While equal access continues to be a real concern, it is no longer just official broadcasters who can record and tell stories. In the world of the academy, it is no longer just the ethnographer who can do so, either.

How can we as ethnographers conduct fieldwork that responds to the very real technological changes that continue to alter the ways in which we communicate? The ethnographer has long had an important role as an observer, analyst, and storyteller. As Clifford Geertz wrote in 1973, “The ethnographer ‘inscribes’ social discourse; *he writes it down*” (Geertz, 1973, p. 19). This is hardly the whole of the ethnographer’s work. The process is relational; texts, understandings, and records already exist through performance, embodied knowledge, and writing. Further, the researcher uses all of these sources to contextualize and analyze, ultimately making the (hopefully) elegant leap from the specific to the general that allows her conclusions to be relevant beyond the specific community in which she lives and works. This is the process by which, ideally, “understanding a people’s culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity” (Geertz, 1973, p. 14). But before any of that is possible, the ethnographer has to “write it down.”

But not anymore. In the 21st century, many participants are documenting themselves. This is true with video, audio, photos, and the commentary that individuals create during live events. It is also true of the plethora of media and text that participants share online. No longer is it a privileged role to be the only one documenting an event, choosing what to record, and sharing details with others. It is true now, as it was in the 19th century and earlier, that ethnographers interpret the meaning of the speaking in writing it down. Added now to this function of inscribing discourse is an additional responsibility linked to this profusion of media: Even as we continue to create our own records, what can be learned from interacting with so many other participants’ recordings of discourse?

When Frances Densmore began researching Native American music in the first decade of the 20th century, she traveled with heavy and expensive equipment to make recordings. She secured funding from the Bureau of American

Ethnology to help shoulder the costs. A now-famous photograph of her research from 1914 depicts Densmore and a Dakota interlocutor, Mountain Chief, both facing a large gramophone, which sits squatly on a sturdy case. Densmore took on the task of inscribing quite literally, etching recordings that have preserved the sound of her collaborators' songs. She was working with sound recording machines and film cameras that were hard to come by; choices made during her research have determined what is preserved—and what is not—of the sound and images she encountered (Densmore, 1918).

Now that a typical cell phone can take photos and record audio, the ethnographer is not the only person capable of documentation. Yet choosing what to record and conducting a high-quality documentation process requires expertise. An ethnographer must also sift through a large quantity of digital and physical information, a skill set that neither Densmore's nor Geertz's contemporaries experienced as it exists today. Now, it also requires a critical skill set to tell an analytical story that makes sense of all of the documents, data, and experiences available to ethnographers. This means having a strong methodology that cuts across both digital and physical field spaces. Because—if you take one thing away from this introduction, let it be this—very rarely will ethnographers today find a space to be purely one or the other. As data collection, management, and sharing continue to change, ethnographers need to nimbly organize and understand multiple streams of data from changing sources. Today's research landscape requires an updated set of analytical skills to tell the story of how and why people are interacting with contemporary culture and to understand how we make meaning from our interactions with expressive culture. This book outlines the process in an explicit manner in order to support hybrid research that is responsive to contemporary realities.

OVERVIEW

In hybrid fieldwork, like physical and online work from which it germinates, the researcher engages in cultural practices as a participant while simultaneously observing the field with critical ears and eyes, all the while making it known to others in the scene that participant-observation is part of an overt research process. Fieldwork is often defined as a highly personal aspect of research in expressive culture. Helen Myers describes fieldwork as the process that reveals the “human face” of the research (Myers, 1992, p. 21); Bruno Nettl calls fieldwork “the most personal part of the job” (1983, p. 136). These ethnographers' humanizing tone here is notable: Ethnography is about

relationships between people. Crucially, even during moments in which technology mediates faces, this kind of research is still about seeing, hearing, and knowing each other. As in physical and online studies, cultural meanings are experienced and expressed through the body.

The emergence of the hybrid field offers a contemporary parallel to a shift away from so-called armchair ethnography that was practiced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. No longer just relying on data collected by another person, anthropology embraced the idea of a researcher going alone or in pairs to other places to learn about foreign cultural practices. As practiced in anthropology, as well as in later-emerging disciplines of ethnomusicology, dance studies, performance studies, and related fields, ethnography expanded to include research in a scholar's home, as well as across multiple sites. This research relies on in-depth, personal knowledge of people and groups (Marcus, 1998, addresses the intimate nature of this engagement). Some scholarship suggests that online ethnography is a kind of shortcut to accessing lots of data (Kozinets, 2006) or that it facilitates *non*-participant observation (Snodgrass, 2014). Hybrid ethnography is emphatically not a return to the armchair approach. Truly integrating one's self into multiple aspects of one's fieldsite does involve online work that we can do at home or remotely via a smartphone in many places. Yet thinking of hybrid fieldwork as any kind of shortcut means you are missing the point: Your research site has many aspects, and it takes dedicated time and attention to become an active, culturally aware participant across all of them. In the hybrid field, "face-to-face" communications may take place across a table or through video chatting. The focus on the personal aspect of this kind of research is maintained from the offline to the online and in-between.

Since the beginning of online ethnography, a distinction has been made between "virtual" and "physical" worlds, which carries into much contemporary work (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012; Markham & Baym, 2009; Miller & Slater, 2000). Online ethnographers frequently take advantage of digital tools (Murthy, 2008). Networked tools do indeed offer strategies for, for example, taking fieldnotes in new mediums. However, there is more to be accounted for than simply jotting traditional fieldnotes in an online format: The hybrid field requires a conceptual shift in ethnography.

As online connectivity has become more integrated into many people's lives, the idea of true connection online has gone from being met with suspicion (Rheingold, 1998) to making a self-conscious argument for itself (Lysloff & Gay, 2003) to being largely accepted as a manner in which people can connect (Nardi, 2010; Pink et al., 2016). Groundbreaking work on how identity

formation has changed in the online sphere (Turkle, 1997) can now be connected back through the hybrid scenes in which we live and work. Online spaces offer possibilities for connection, exchange, and mutual support. And today they are increasingly integrated into daily life.

Conducting research in a manner that accounts for the hybrid field responds to the contemporary reality in which fully online and fully offline methodologies offer useful—but not sufficient—tools. Current strategies for ethnography show their limitations precisely where fields overlap. Picture a pair of ethnographers who enter a media lab in a library or a cyber-café in a place where computer access is far from universal. Participants come to the space as physical bodies, and their individual lives impact the relationships in the room. If the ethnographers stay offline, they can learn about the dynamics of the lab, but they have no insight into participants' interactions with each other through internet-mediated communication or beyond the room at all. Should the ethnographers instead choose an online ethnography, they could participate in what is happening online, but they lack context that comes from seeing the physical space in which participants produce their communication online. While it is rarely pragmatic or even possible to be everywhere that individuals are interacting when they engage with networked communications, seeing only a single part of the space precludes the researchers' abilities to analyze sociality in participants' full, lived environments.

In response to the limitations of other methods, hybrid ethnography accounts for a shift in not just what researchers do but how all participants approach the field. In your scene, you may encounter different degrees of involvement in an online or offline portion of a hybrid fieldsite. Yet in all online research situations, autonomous, unique people have created and continue to update the online platform and participate together. These individuals are already part of physical lives and scenes. This also has implications from the online to the offline. When interacting in a primarily online space, we benefit from considering the different experiences and structures in which people participated before they moved online or between which they move when they are not on the internet; when we look at physical spaces, we should account for the direct and indirect ways that people have formed their creative processes previously. For example, members of a laptop ensemble who improvise together may also be informed by one individual member who also plays with a jazz combo on a different night of the week—for a researcher, not knowing this information leaves a crucial gap in knowledge about how improvisation works in this context.

HYBRID ETHNOGRAPHY: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL SHIFTS

Fieldsites that span digital, physical, and digital-physical spaces require more than an additive methodology; the hybrid field requires *a conceptual shift* in conducting research. In hybrid research, the conception of space and the related positioning in time, the delimitation of the material of research, and the way individuals and groups are implicated all shift in qualitative ways.

The “What” and “Who” of Hybrid Research

The “what” and “who” of the research change in multiple ways. As described in the first part of this chapter, hybrid ethnographers must prepare for a role change in which we are not the only people who record social interaction; this involves a conceptual shift. When interpreting media in the hybrid field, researchers contend with content that was made by participants, including ourselves. The line between producers and consumers, which is relevant particularly for expressive culture research wherein audience/artist divisions are important aspects of performance, can become indistinct. When at a live concert, an individual may make and share a video from the audience, in that moment acting as audience, content maker, and distributor, all at once.¹ We must interpret individual actors in multiple roles—as artists/content makers, audience members, readers—in ways that change based on time, location, and purpose.

This hybrid method accounts for the way the “what” of the research shifts. We still inscribe discourse, in person, and sometimes do so online as well. Yet we also interact with large amounts of discourse that is already pinned down—and we need tools to organize and analyze this discourse. With the proliferation of information available, the researcher’s role expands further into analysis of great quantities of data, including our own observations, recordings, surveys, and interviews; website and social media data; and recordings, photos, posts, and other texts created and distributed by participants. We must make sense of data that comes from many sources and viewpoints that circulate for multiple purposes. As will be detailed in Chapter 6, identifying

¹Take a moment to think about how this manifests in your own scene: perhaps in the way fans make response videos, viewers learn dances from online videos that they then perform for other audiences, or artists create social media posts related to their branding that are not exclusively showcasing their primary artistic content.

who is making the media, why they choose to create and circulate it, and for what gain—financial or otherwise—impacts how the researcher interprets the data in context. Data profusion places pragmatic limits on research: These can inform what the researcher considers. In other words, it might be germane to ask about the performance background of everyone participating in a scene but not germane or possible to attempt to know everything about all aspects of those same participants' lives. Researchers must make choices about what to investigate—which necessarily involves choosing what not to investigate. The structures in which we work, and our place in them, impact what we choose to include, what we do not, and why. These concerns fall under the umbrella of positionality, a key concept in hybrid fieldwork that will be explored in the following chapter.

The hybrid field offers more information and spaces of interaction than a fully online or fully offline field—and more analytical tools as well. The core of ethnography remains the patient observation of and participation in interactions between researcher(s) and fellow scene members. Just as researchers now reach beyond inscribing social discourse, we also now have tools that allow for multiple levels of analysis. Research software allows us to sort through vast amounts of information feasibly, catalog it in a manner that can be searched and displayed easily, and enumerate some types of results very quickly. These possibilities in no way preclude the use of techniques that are central to in-person fieldwork. Rather, they help us to account for the massive amount of data that is available and offer possibilities for doing multiple layers of research simultaneously. We can thus extend the focused work of participant observation by filtering through relevant data—text on websites or social media platforms, tags on photos, words in emails—to get a more detailed contextual picture of our field.

In hybrid ethnography, the “who” of the project becomes complex. As being active online becomes a common characteristic in many places, researchers encounter individuals whose daily life moves between—and may aim to integrate—multiple aspects of ourselves. This internal multiplicity is amplified by the 21st situation phenomenon in which many people live and move across social media spaces, but the idea that the self comprises multiple identities rather than a single coherent one was first productively theorized in a wholly offline context (Stets & Serpe, 2016). Because life and work involve aggregating many aspects of our identities, a fieldwork model needs to stretch to make sense of the many aspects of ourselves and each other. Even if we may know that each individual has multiple aspects of themselves that they show in different times and places, field methods typically encourage us to

identify participants by relevant descriptors and use these categories to form conclusions: What differences in attitude do we hear based on age categories? Are men and women and nonbinary people cast in the same roles in the ritual under study? In the hybrid field, we're asked to hold our community members in their multiplicity. Instead of explaining ruptures away, we let them help us think through the core research questions.

An intersectional approach helps to account for the complexities of the self and fellow participants in the hybrid field. As will be detailed in Chapter 3, the researcher's position in relationship to the field and to fellow participants is mutually informed by multiple aspects of one's identity. Carefully analyzing how you understand yourself, how fellow participants understand themselves, and how you are read by others reveals much about the various perspectives that are at play. This kind of analysis also makes you aware of how power operates across various parts of the scene. Engaging in intersectional analysis often provides insight into how you will approach the praxis of research. Because of the increased interconnection between researcher and participants in hybrid ethnography, the theory/praxis divide erodes, and the researcher needs to thoughtfully and reflexively address the practical concerns of fellow participants.

The “When” and “Where” of Hybrid Research

Hybrid ethnography responds to a reality in which the “where” of the field has changed. This is a shift that started with the advent of online or “virtual” ethnography.² As Rene Lysloff points out in his study of online electronic music making, his experience of the field changed when he chose to study an online community (Lysloff, 2003). Shifting to an online ethnographic approach makes sense because Lysloff examined the ways in which musicians share ideas and create new music through digital channels. Yet when working with this online community, Lysloff's relationship with place changed in character. In physical ethnography, Lysloff conducted research in West Central Java and analyzed the way narrative performances are consciously interrupted for dramatic purposes (Lysloff, 1993). Place in physical ethnography is tied to regional cultural practices. The place-specific conceptions of narrative frame the situated use of chaos in the dramas about which Lysloff learned. The experience of the ethnographer in a physical scene was experienced immediately

²I do not find the term “virtual” entirely productive, as its colloquial use suggests that it is a stand-in-for or a pseudo-ethnography. Online ethnography is real ethnography, but it is ethnography that has a different fieldsite and different rules from physical ethnography. Hence, I use the term “online” ethnography, except when quoting other sources that use the term “virtual.”

through the body; Lysloff writes of his visceral experiences of Java, from “driving my motorcycle on dusty and dangerous two-lane highways filled with chaotic traffic” to “drinking hot, sweet jasmine tea” (Lysloff, 2003, p. 235). In his online work, however, participants in the electronic modular music scene come from across the globe and interact without leaving their home locations. As a result, they bring a variety of regionally distinct attitudes toward composition and sociality to the interaction. In contrast to the physical immediacy of face-to-face ethnography, Lysloff identifies how he is seated in a chair in his home.³ When he mentions “‘traveling’ the far corners of cyberspace” (Lysloff, 2003), “traveling” is in scare quotes: One “travels,” yes, but to different “kinds” of social space (p. 236).

Interrogating the way physical locations are discursively brought into being through research has also been a pursuit of scholars active in physical research since the reflexive turn in ethnography. One clear example of this problematizing comes from feminist anthropology: Troubled by a contrast between an unmarked researcher and marked other, scholars noted that this bifurcation created an assumed geographic distance between researcher and researched, which in turn implied a temporal distance locating those who research in the present and those who are researched in the past (D’Amico-Samuels, 1991). Revealing how assumed marked and unmarked categories are indeed all socially situated, scholars worked to close the distance between researcher and researched. Bringing these ideas forward into contemporary research, we continue to be informed by a conceptual change that questions the distance in space and the assumed distance in time between field and researcher as well as field and the academy. Present studies, then, should take seriously shifts that have already occurred in research and placemaking; the researcher must account for the ongoing negotiations that hybrid online/offline spaces require.

Conceptualizing the “where” of the field requires the researcher to develop an understanding of “when” as well. As will be explored in Chapter 4, for some hybrid scenes, participation gains richness if you and your collaborators are online at the same time. This allows for immediate chat responses, multi-player games, online jam sessions, and other activities that thrive on instant responses. Yet for many kinds of activity on the web, there is a lag time between one participant posting information and others responding to it, whether that information be a video file on a sharing site or

³Sensory details can lead to revelations across all aspects of the hybrid field—see Chapter 4 for more.

a short update to social media. Researchers might enter mid-conversation, reading a series of messages and responses before adding their own. Taking the ethnography in the cybercafé as an illustrative example, the researcher interacts face-to-face and online in encounters with specific start and end times and face-to-face in spaces with known geographies. There are also moments of face-to-face interaction in a particular place that involve interaction with websites or platforms; the participants who make and interact with these forums may or may not be participating at same time as the participants gathered in the physical café. As a result, the hybrid field involves integrated use of synchronous and asynchronous communication styles.

Online ethnography readied the researcher for widespread asynchronous communication, though this was not a completely new phenomenon.⁴ Online aspects of the hybrid field, like a relevant social media site, require the skills and mental framework for understanding and engaging in asynchronous communication. Simultaneously, hybrid field researchers engage in synchronous communication. When you get to rehearsal, how do conversations unfold if some—but not all—participants have already read and responded to a post about your group's last performance? What about when someone reads a post on their phone during an in-person meeting and is suddenly up to speed in both the social media site and physical meeting room at the same time? The circuits that online fieldwork began now expand multidimensionally to include physical interaction, including physical interaction with internet-mediated spaces and devices.

Physically going to and coming back from the field and having an experience bounded by geography and time is common in many kinds of research: An education researcher may go to work at a school for a semester or an anthropologist may spend years studying a culture in a geographic location far from home. Though the idea of a fieldsite that is always “on” came regularly into scholarly literature with the advent of online fieldwork (see, for example, Meizel, Cooley, & Syed, 2008), always being connected to the field was not new to ethnography, just to certain ethnographers. Constant potential access and no predetermined end date for fieldwork was only new to ethnographers who traveled to a physical fieldsite for a specific length of time; researchers working in their home communities have long faced this scenario.

In hybrid fieldwork, a feeling of constant activity extends further, as the researcher must navigate physical, virtual, and blended aspects of the site. Across all aspects of the field, it can feel like there is always something

⁴ Asynchronous communication exists in the offline field in the form of voicemails, letters, photographs, reports, and so forth.

happening. In my own research, I have found that I can almost always interact with new communications if I refresh social media, scroll through the websites in my scene, read user-shared video comments, or connect with users online. Paired with regular activity in concerts, rehearsals, social spaces, and media distributors, the only moments of pause are those that I create. Practically, this means maintaining a schedule for interaction across multiple areas of the fieldsite that are always potentially active, observing potential variance across the field, and dialoguing directly with fellow participants about the way they interact with various parts of the field.

The possibility of constant connectivity requires carefully navigating one's roles. Across locations in the hybrid field, one's position can shift: You may have many markers of insider belonging in an expressive culture group yet be a relative newcomer to the most used social media presence among members. This is an expansion of the fieldwork phenomenon in which all of us navigate degrees of insider and outsider status across our researcher–participant roles. Given the multivalent nature of the hybrid field, this flux in status is compounded. Reflections on degrees of the insider researcher position are helpful here, and though they only speak to a physical field, Durham (2014) and Burnim (1985) are good starting points. Because of the potential for ongoing access, at least to the online portions of the field and potentially to some physical parts of the site as well, “leaving” the hybrid field follows the precedent for “leaving” insider fieldwork. It presents not so much the end of the relationship with fellow participants but another role shift away from active new research toward a less formal manner of interaction.

Sharing Hybrid Research

Because hybrid ethnographers interact in a field that has online and offline aspects, we are well positioned to explore innovative ways of sharing information. Many researchers share more than a printed paper essay to convey our meaning to audiences. Multimedia research projects offer the potential for multivocal products that incorporate and re-present perspectives and voices of multiple researchers and co-participants. Because we already work in hybrid spaces, some options for communicating with multiple publics are logical outputs of the process itself. This is an exciting opportunity for research and its relevant dissemination to many audiences.

In the hybrid field, there is an increasing interrelationship between researcher(s) and participants. This change is due in part to the greater research landscape. After the reflexive turn, academics across disciplines

changed research practices from masking the position of a falsely assumed objective researcher. In the 21st century, we are experiencing increasing attention to power dynamics and decolonizing methodologies. In a related move, the academy is opening to calls for community-based research and social responsibility. As anthropologist Bea Medicine summarizes, “As with any human relationship, reciprocity, responsiveness, and responsibility are essential” (Medicine, 2001, p. 5). This increasing interrelationship is also due to changes in technology. Increased internet access and a proliferation of sharing platforms make it possible for research findings to reach more people in more ways; these possibilities invite researchers to think expansively and collectively about ways of sharing that are both possible and desirable.

WHAT YOU NEED TO BEGIN

This guide is designed to facilitate the planning and implementation of a hybrid research strategy. In order to get the most out of it, it is recommended that you iron out the following details before beginning.

Select Your Area of Study

The area of study may be any aspect of expressive culture, including music, dance, film, theatre, or other types of performance—including performance that is part of daily life. This book is most helpful once you have developed working knowledge of your area, including general topics in research, specific concerns in research related to your sub-specialty, and any specific technical proficiency required for your scene. If you are an experienced researcher adding hybrid ethnographic methodology to your research, this will already be clear. If not, develop your bibliography and working knowledge of the ideas it covers.

The amount of time it takes to acclimate to your scene as an active participant and researcher will vary, based largely on whether your work is at the exploratory stage or you are already an established professional in your area and what kinds of participation you have already pursued. No matter how you are already established in your field, anticipate that beginning a new ethnographic project will require negotiation as you establish a new role in the scene. Established researchers may still have much to learn as performers; cultural workers with years of experience renegotiate their roles when taking on the mantle of researcher. Anticipate sharing information about yourself and your work with fellow participants in a way that lets people know what

roles you would like to take on: student, co-teacher, archivist, media specialist, culture bearer, learner. You will also be interpreted and assigned roles in ways that are beyond your control. The cultural scene existed before your entrance, as did participants' ideas of what it is to do research; you are stepping into a moving stream.

Identify Your Physical Fieldwork Site

This book will help you conduct ethnographic work in a cultural community in which you are a participant. You will build on rapport you have established and work on navigating your role(s) in the scene. Whether you dance with a troupe, sing in a band, intern at a radio station, teach acting, work for a film festival, or learn sitar, your experience as a participant will guide the research process. With an understanding of thresholds informed by queer theory, Fairn herising (2005) finds power in the in-between state of the researcher. As scholars, we can ask productive questions about our role vis-à-vis our research community; questioning how we address gaps between ourselves and other participants and how we navigate space between participants is applicable regardless of the degree to which we are already part of the community.

If you have started exploratory work but have not yet clarified your scene and guiding question, two key points can help you focus this process: interest and logistics. Interest is perhaps the most obvious first source of impact on a scene selection process. The kinds of films, music, dance, theatre, and other performance that you make and of which you are an active fan is often the first place to start. Questions you have as a researcher build on this interest: When you have been active in making or observing a performance or other cultural activity, what has made you stop and wonder what exactly is going on or why? This helps focus a general area into one that is more specific. Professional interest is germane. Consider goals you have as a researcher and/or applied professional and consider what aspect(s) of your scene could help you work toward your goals. Paired with this are the goals you have for the scene in which you take part. Are there applied problems or questions whose answers would benefit your scene? Look for those areas about which you are passionate and toward which you can reasonably contribute. Finally, consider relevance. How might working on a particular aspect of a scene help to answer an intellectual question that is not in the literature or that needs to be revised or updated? How can focusing on part of your scene address a concern held by members of the group

that participates in it? What seems so relevant and interesting that it calls for time, energy, skills, and resources to be poured into it?

Logistics follow interest. Within an interest area, consider access. Where are groups meeting? If you are already active in some but not others, is it logistically possible for you to expand your participation? If you are relatively new to the scene, what connections do you already have to the area, and where do you need to develop more links? Talk with existing point people. Call or meet with people whose expertise would be relevant, or contact them via social media or other web presences if they are more active online. If you are hoping to move into a related but somewhat separate scene, start by working with participants who you do know and ask if they might be willing to put you in touch with friends or colleagues. Taking an asset-based approach can be productive: Focus on where you already are active and build additional rapport there. This may be through a university, by way of clubs or groups, via physical spaces in your neighborhood, or starting with relevant online communities. Questions of feasibility may also include some special considerations. For example, if you anticipate working with children or doing research from within an institution that has its own protocols, plan for additional conversations to make sure that you will be able to do the work and allow additional time to respectfully and completely follow required procedures. Finally, consider the frequency and timing of events. Are there frequent enough rehearsals, concerts, film screenings, meetings, and so forth for you to interact as much as you need to when you need to? Can you make events time-wise? Can you get to them geographically? Chapter 3 delves more specifically into planning your schedule and sites around where participants are active.

Generate a Working Research Question

The design for the research will flow from this question. Your research question should define the scope of the project, articulate its relevance, and relate to previous research in your field. If this is still in development, take time to refine it now. Herndon and McLeod outline a step-by-step method by which to formulate such a question (1983, pp. 9–15). As you formulate the question, consider the following: Whom does the research serve? What inspires your interest in the aspect of your research question that you plan to investigate? With whom will you need to collaborate to address the question? Mutua and Swander offer ways to think through these questions (2004, pp. 1–23). Throughout this book, you will be invited to select the

way in which hybrid ethnography is most relevant to your particular question. Use this adaptability to create a process that fits your needs. Once you have identified your area of study, fieldsite, and working research question, you are ready to get started.

SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the theoretical and methodological shifts in ethnography that hybrid research addresses. It identified changes in technology and attitudes that alter the skills necessary for contemporary fieldwork. Rather than just inscribing social discourse experienced in a physical field, the ethnographer must also sift through large quantities of data and media. No longer one of the few participants with access to recording, photography, publishing, and distribution, the ethnographer fills a shifting role as many participants document and share their own participation. Over the next chapters, you will be able to use this book as a solid point of departure. The material here can be adapted to your specific scene as you use it, and it can and should be added to as new ideas emerge, as technologies change, and as peoples' attitudes toward and use of networked systems shift. Starting from a scene in which you are or will soon act as a participant, you have honed in on an area of study, a site, and a research question. Your work will proceed from this base, moving with fellow participants through the hybrid research space.

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