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Getting Connected: How Sociologists Can Access The High Tech Élite

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Abstract

Élite studies have been relatively neglected in the qualitative methods literature (Coleman, 1996, p. 336; Hertz & Imber, 1995) . As a consequence, the interview methods literature in the social sciences does not adequately address the issue of access to élite interviews. Nor does it address the élite interview process itself (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 1995; Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985; Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Fog, 1994; Fowler & Mangione, 1990; McCracken , 1988; Stewart & Cash, 1997; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982; Weiss, 1994) . Despite its élite sample (scientists, engineers, policy- makers) the science and technology studies (STS) community (Undheim, 2002) suffers from the same lack of attention to access, with Traweek (1995) as a notable exception. The author discusses the small literature on qualitative élite studies (Hertz & Imber, 1995; Walford, 1994) as well as contributions on élite interviewing (Burgess, 1988; Cassell, 1988; Dexter, 1970; Moyser, 1988; Spector, 1980; Thomas, 1995) . Practical consultation for interview practice is also given. Seeing access as an ongoing, precarious process, the author recommends improvisation by ways of a threefold journalistic, therapeutic, and investigative modus operandi. The author draws on a study of the situated nature of high tech practices and is based on interview experience with knowledge workers, experts, and high tech CEOs in the United States, Italy, and Norway. As well, he brings experiences from a previous study of regional innovation in Norway and Great Britain (Thorvik & Undheim, 1998) .

Keywords

Interviewing, Elites, Access, Modus Operandi, Interview Literature, Knowledge

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Élite studies have been relatively neglected in the qualitative methods literature (Coleman, 1996, p. 336; Hertz & Imber, 1995). As a consequence, the interview methods literature in the social sciences does not adequately address the issue of access to élite interviews. Nor does it address the élite interview process itself (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 1995; Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985; Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Fog, 1994; Fowler & Mangione, 1990; McCracken, 1988; Stewart & Cash, 1997; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982; Weiss, 1994). Despite its élite sample (scientists, engineers, policy-makers) the science and technology studies (STS) community (Undheim, 2002) suffers from the same lack of attention to access, with Traweek (1995) as a notable exception. The author discusses the small literature on qualitative élite studies (Hertz & Imber, 1995; Walford, 1994) as well as contributions on élite interviewing (Burgess, 1988; Cassell, 1988; Dexter, 1970; Moyser, 1988; Spector, 1980; Thomas, 1995). Practical consultation for interview practice is also given. Seeing access as an ongoing, precarious process, the author recommends improvisation by ways of a threefold journalistic, therapeutic, and investigative modus operandi. The author draws on a study of the situated nature of high tech practices and is based on interview experience with knowledge workers, experts, and high tech CEOs in the United States, Italy, and Norway. As well, he brings experiences from a previous study of regional innovation in Norway and Great Britain (Thorvik & Undheim, 1998).

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Introduction

Elites are people who occupy, by heritage, merit or circumstances, a key place in power networks both online and offline. Often associated with power, privilege and position, the élite might not as such constitute, or embody readily observable traits, or group itself in a way that is easily categorized. Rather, the élite way of influence is sometimes better described in retrospect, by analyzing how actor-networks were mobilized. Actually, elite impact is often quite invisible, and the most influential might not look like they are. This, of course, is also due to the prevalent elite strategy of staying behind the scenes while deploying a multi-faceted power game. Here, online elites play a particular role, immersed as it were in *cyberpower* (Jordan, 2000), largely invisible to most of us, yet arguably quite effective also in manipulating real-life events (Nye, 2002) .

In the following, I will discuss how élites can be found, accessed, and interviewed, starting out with an analysis of the science and technology studies (STS) community as well as some classic approaches to interviewing found in the existing literature. Scholars who study the interplay of technical, scientific and social aspects of reality (STS) are critical towards taken-for-granted assumptions about how society is configured. Rather, they prefer to show the precise *construction* of actor-networks by tracing the impact of technological determinism, identifying actors and their *place-making*, that is, the ongoing sense making, cooperation, and exchange online and offline (Undheim, 2002).

Since science and technology is widely regarded as housing elites, I will start there. While a substantial part of the science and technology studies (STS) literature investigates people and settings that we normally would classify and regard as élite, relatively little is written about how these groups and settings were accessed. However, access to high-energy physics labs, molecular biologists, or NASA scientists, is not self-evident. In fact, we should assume that there must have been many barriers before access was obtained, restrictions that were encountered underway, and many missed attempts at access that are not reported. This makes access a more interesting phenomenon, a feature of STS research in need of more sustained reflection.

In addition, within STS there has been little explicit discussion about what characterizes the relationship between researcher and informant as crucial moments in the research act, with exception for Hess' (2001) recent claim about the co-production of knowledge between scholars and informants in STS ethnography. I will not speculate at length about the reasons for this neglect, but the fact that STS is an emerging subject, especially compared to the groups it attempts to study, and the very practice they uphold - 'Science' - may have something to do with it. Élite studies are irrevocably immersed in issues of power, domination, and authority, but also in issues of exchange, reciprocity, and altruism. Knorr-Cetina's (1999) experience is that 'it can't do any harm' often is the best legitimating voice of leading figures when trying to explain the presence of sociologists in their labs:

> […] many thanks to Pierre Darriulat, who, at an early stage was the first to allow us in [the particle collider experiment UA2 at CERN in Geneva] - even though, as he told me at the first contact over the phone, he did not think this research would lead anywhere, he believed that UA2 was an open environment and that it should depend on participants what they did with us. (Knorr-Cetina, 1999, p. vii)

Researchers need access to people, settings, materials, and documents. Access implies inside knowledge, and is a precarious, ongoing, and renegotiable process (Johnson, 1975). Traweek (1995) is a case in point. She investigates the powers at play when a young, female researcher ventures into high-energy physics labs in the US, Japan, Switzerland, and France. Sometimes ironic, other times bitterly laconic, Traweek (1995, p. 48) recounts how she, in fact, learned about science, access and sexual dynamics:

> I learned that wearing my miniskirts to the lab reduced the physicists responses to one […] Thirty years and fifty pounds later I found that in Japan I was assigned [the role of] *obachan* […] This might be translated as auntie".

Traweek (1995) compares access work to the characters at play in *My Fair Lady* (Shaw, 1941); Eliza, Henry Higgins, Mrs. Higgins, and Colonel Pickering. In fact, Henry Higgins uses all of them to build his 'voice over', to give voice to 'Science'. While Traweek clearly identifies with Eliza, the seduced girl who must re-learn to speak (Traweek, 1995, p. 39), the girlish attitude could also lead straight into Henry Higgins' 'innocent' scientific experiment, or in fact to claiming to be a technical device - "I am a detector" (Traweek, 1995, p. 39). Studying up, to Traweek, is also about watching access relations among her research subjects. In order to counter their empire-building male counterparts, the Japanese women physicists the studied had devised networking strategies to get business donations of expensive equipment. Traweek (1995, p. 49) also highlights how Japanese high-energy physicists use *bachigai*, outsider positions, *gaiatsu*, foreign pressure, and *kokusaika*, the concern about Japan's identity in global politics, to build support for new labs like the Japanese National Laboratory.

But while many STS people may have followed Laura Nader's (1972) anthropological plea to 'study-up', Traweek (1995) seems quite alone reflecting about what studying-up means as a strategy of inquiry. In the anthropology community at large access is embedded in discussions of establishing rapport in the field. In the classic accounts of Goffman (1961) and Garfinkel (1967), as well as in Hannerz (1969), Van Maanen (1988), and Clifford and Marcus (1986) we find extensive descriptions of 'entering the field'. Ethnographically oriented studies or handbooks like Marshall and Rossman (1995), or Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) also discuss the topic. However, most of these accounts do not take in the 'élite' problematic as such. Typically, anthropologists find people 'very curious and very friendly' (Rainbird, 1990, p. 89).

By strategy of inquiry, I intend the skills, assumptions, enactments, and material practices of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 371). I invite the reader to reflect on what happens when interviews are embedded in power asymmetry. This is meant as an effort to identify some methodological issues related to élite interviewing, pragmatic as well as principal, in order to invite a more sustained reflection on such matters. Even if ethnographic approaches may have the STS ideal, given the importance attached to so-called laboratory studies (Knorr-Cetina, 1995), there is little doubt that interviews loom large among the research techniques applied by STS researchers.

Many scholars today argue élite influence on society is growing because of globalization, high tech, and the emphasis on knowledge and expertise (Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1991; Knorr-Cetina, 1999). Accessing this emerging high tech élite poses an additional challenge to social scientists. STS is potentially at the center of this debate, because of its ongoing access to scientists, engineers, technologists, and other professional and élite groups.

The Interview in Social Science Methodology

The scarcity of STS contributions that explicitly address methodological issues may well be understandable when we notice the abundance of methodological contributions in the social sciences at large. Still, the relevance and validity of the standard fare for STS type of studies should be addressed. The interview is a good starting point.

Most research strategy includes the use of interviews in some form. The literature on interviews is vast and diverse (Breakwell, Hammond, Fife-Schaw, 1995; Brenner, Brown, & Cantor, 1985; Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Fog, 1994; Fowler & Mangione, 1990; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Kahn & Cannel, 1957; McCracken, 1988; Mishler, 1986; Seidmann, 1991; Spradley, 1979; Stewart & Cash, 1997; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982; Weiss, 1994).

However, interviews with the élite present an additional challenge. Here, access must be negotiated against the rigidity of public or corporate bureaucracy, being aware of how governments, policy-makers, or institutions see interviews as potential threats to the public 'brand' (Aaker, 1996) or subjective reality constructs of the institution itself and its members. Actually, Spencer (1982, p. 25) found élite members of the US Military Academy West Point were honestly committed to the military 'mission', but were wary that an interview might threaten their career and their identity. Likewise, the exchange itself might not be viewed as balanced. After all, the value of contributing to social science is highly symbolic, and seldom contains direct, tangible exchanges that contribute to the interviewee's status or well being (Kahn & Cannel, 1968, p. 149). Thirdly, the legitimacy of the researcher might be in question (Spencer, 1982, p. 24). Leaders ask what right researchers have to intrude in 'their organization'.

Social scientists too rarely study up (Ostrander, 1993, p. 7), maybe because it has been assumed to be easier to 'study up' than 'study down' (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 25). At least, discussions of such methods are scarce, and some claim it has been neglected in the literature (Coleman, 1996, p. 336; Hertz & Imber, 1995). Conceptual confusion might complicate the matter. While Nader (1972) instigated the debate using the term 'studying-up' to describe non-natives, westerners, and élites, discussions on this issue are now found under several headings. Some of these are: 'access' (Chandler, 1990, p. 124), 'negotiating entry', 'getting in' (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 31), 'reciprocity' (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 105), 'trust relations' (Johnson, 1975), 'sampling' (Lee, 1993), 'studying-up' (Cassel, 1988; Nader, 1972), 'gatekeepers' (Broadhead & Rist, 1976; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 38), 'élite oral history' (Seldon & Pappworth, 1983), 'researching sensitive topics' (Lee, 1993), or 'participant observation' (Jorgensen, 1989). However, while some of these volumes deal explicitly with interviewing élites, none are exhaustive in their understanding of the matter.

What types of élites do social scientists study? A short list of élite monographs will do some justice to this question. For instance, we find public figures (Spector, 1980), female leaders (Puwar, 1997), surgeons (Bosk, 1979), national defence intellectuals (Cohn, 1987), nuclear weapons researchers (Gusterson, 1996), physicists (Knorr-Cetina, 1999; Traweek, 1995), upper-class women (Ostrander, 1984), and top business executives (Thomas, 1995). Élite typology is complex and will not be discussed in detail. See Moyser and Wagstaffe (1987) for a useful introduction.

Élite studies have been important in the social sciences at least since Mills' (1956) classic study, but qualitative interviews are not so much discussed in this regard. While the literature is not abundant, a handful of monographs, edited books, articles and book-chapters deal with access to élite interviews or observation (Cassell, 1988; Coleman, 1996; Dexter, 1970; Grønning, 1997; Moyser, 1988, Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987; Ostrander, 1993; Spector, 1980; Spencer, 1982; Thomas, 1995; Winkler, 1987). Most scholars agree access is time-consuming and entails coping with rejection and scepticism by both formal and informal organizational gatekeepers that constrain fieldwork and interviews (Jackall, 1998; Smith, 2001; Thomas, 1995). However, the issue of access to high tech knowledge workers, CEOs, and managers in particular is not so much discussed. Notably, there is little practical advice on how to do such studies if you do not happen to be 'connected' to a Business School, or have academic or public credentials that ensure access almost everywhere. Exceptions are Brannen (1987), Galaskiewitz (1987), Hoffmann (1980), Thomas (1995) and Winkler (1987) who underline the importance of inside connections, persistence, social skills, and improvisation.

Winkler (1987, p. 135) states access always involves face-to-face negotiation, and demands time, effort and risk on part of the researcher. His best strategy was to arrange 'group discussion' with drinks at a business venue just after the close of the business day. One reason for success was that the élites are anxious about their status and seek confirmation in such events. Second, the practice of inviting others you have not met, and going to business events to 'network' made the turn-up rate quite astounding.

Access has been particularly tied to discussions of research ethics, and with good reason. Where access is problematic, there is always an ethical issue involved. The research community has responsibility towards the subjects or institutions under scrutiny, towards society (potentially threatening information), and towards the researcher. For example, when doing research on deviant groups, particularly hazardous settings exist, and situations might arize (Lee, 1993, p. 9). For instance, Friedman's (1990) covert work as a Hollywood actor, a High School substitute, and a religious school supervisor brought about several ethical and personal issues; he got 'false' friends, was bored because of routine work and low status, and was challenged on his truthfulness and sincerity in religious matters. Although some advocate avoiding the traditional protecting measures of confidentiality and anonymity when writing about public figures (Spector, 1980, p. 99), this poses ethical issues. Mainstream research ethics advice, however, is to be 'truthful, but vague' about your objectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), and keep anonymity. For a thorough and thoughtful discussion of ethics in covert research, see Lofland and Lofland (1995).

Even though qualitative research is well suited to study élites, this research tradition is most frequently associated with studies of marginal or powerless groups. This may be inherited from the Chicago School tradition (Lee, 1993, p. 12). Studies of deviant groups, outsiders (Becker, 1966), gang-members (Whyte, 1943), and delinquents (Shaw, 1930) have set the dominating strategy of inquiry. In effect, this tradition meant that the powerful were neglected in favor of the powerless (Smith, 1988).

After the Chicago School decline, interviews for some time became the domain of empiricist survey research. In the United States, these were lead by Lazarsfeld (1962) and Merton (1947). Here, quantification and statistical sophistication were key strategies. What Lazarsfeld (1944) called 'open ended interviews' were supplying measures, in that they do not set fixed answers in terms of which a respondent must reply. Such interviews had their major use in (a) clarifying the meaning of a respondent's answer, (b) singling out the decisive aspect of an opinion, (c) deciding what has influenced an opinion, (d) determining complex attitude patterns, (e) interpreting motivations, and drives and (f) clarifying statistical relationships (Lazarsfeld, 1944). With the empirical tradition, 'interview error' became a methodological topic (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). The inheritance from that time is found in textbooks and articles on qualitative methods, as well. For instance, in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Kahn and Cannel (1968, p. 149) wrote:

> […] the research interview has been defined as a conversation with a purpose [and] may be defined as a two-person conversation that is initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining information that is relevant to research. […] In the research interview the respondent is led to restrict his discussion to the questions posed.

Clearly, this is a quite rigid, quantitatively inspired expression of the research interview. Subheadings like 'the interview like measurement' (p. 150), expresses a clear positivist mindset. Here, the conception of a strict 'interview guide' is still strong and interviewing is a research technique rather than a mode of inquiry.

The 1970s-1990s brought about a resurgence of qualitative inquiry. Glaser and Strauss (1968) outlined 'grounded theory', an approach where both research design, theory, and method is deliberately 'stumbled upon' because of the richness of 'data' when you approach your research setting with an open mind. Nevertheless, they have since developed rigorous rules of coding procedures. Also, Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology, and Goffman's interaction analysis (1961) brought attention to the value of unfocused face-to-face meetings.

The early 1980s brought feminist methodology. Oakley (1981, p. 55) states that a feminist approach is needed when interviewing women. In her account, interviewing women is a cozy, friendly and sisterly exchange of information. Similarly, other feminist accounts discuss empathy, trust, and ethics (Finch, 1984). In the 1980s, the long, in-depth interviews were again in fashion, and McCracken (1988) is the most cited guide from this era. He states interview studies begin with literature reviews, continue with an examination of your own associations and cultural categories, and end in the final questionnaire which will consist in a set of biographical questions followed by a series of question areas. Each of these will have a set of grand-tour questions with floating prompts underway. It will also consist in planned prompting in the form of 'contrast', 'category', 'special incident',' and 'auto-driving' questions. The 'rough guide' specifies topics, but the interview itself is negotiated (McCracken, 1988, p. 37). However, the empiricist advice from survey research still holds the stances: "To avoid bias, the interviewing must be done nondirectively", and "questions must never be asked in a leading or directive manner as this exerts pressure on informants to answer in particular ways (Brenner et al., 1985, p. 151).

In reaction to this, a narrative tradition also has emerged (Mishler, 1986). When we conduct interviews, states Mishler (1986), we are *pattern makers* more than we are *pattern finders*. In historical scholarship, too, this trend is prevalent. Élite oral history, Seldon and Pappworth (1983, pp. 36-52) maintain, gives facts not recorded in documents, like the spirit in which a document was written, insight into the personalities of leaders, clarifications of factual conclusions, underlying assumptions and motives, but also atmosphere and color. In fact, the interview relationship itself might be personally enriching.

The 1990s, finally, is a decade of consolidation for qualitative interview methods. By now, interview studies have gained acceptance in more mainstream American academic journals, and the qualitative versus quantitative controversy is put to rest, at least for the moment. Sensitive research topics (Lee, 1993) receive major attention, and feminist scholarship is in vogue. There is no need to hide that intensive interviewing seeks to discover the informant's *experience* of a particular topic or situation (Lofland & Lofland, 1995:, p. 18).

But experiences are more mixed. For instance, Cotterill (1992) incorporates issues of friendship, openness, and power. Feminists stress the need to 'learn to listen' (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 11). Still, in the literature we find that 'difficult people' to interview still tend to be workers, women (Faimberg, 1996; Kaul, 1999), people with learning difficulties (Booth & Booth, 1994, p. 415), children, and the elderly (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 1995, p. 236). Depth interviewing is seen as a means of giving 'vulnerable subjects' voice in the making of their own history. There is the fear of forcing or manipulating individuals into discussing topics they do not want to talk about (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 13).

Similarly, the importance of an improved discourse on élite interviewing may be emphasized with reference to the increased interest in networks and knowledge workers (Castells, 1996, p. 198). This emerging network élite consists of 'switchers', initiators of networks with a huge amount of what Granovetter (1973) labeled "weak ties". These are potential social relationships that extend your networks exponentially in an important direction. In the words of Malcolm Gladwell of the *New Yorker Magazine*, switchers 'stand at the intersection of different worlds, connecting people, creating opportunities, and spreading ideas' (Gladwell, 1999, p. 52). Also called the digerati (Brochmann, 1995), they include the traditional élite like politicians, experts of all sorts, scientists, businessmen, famous people, musicians, and artists. The new aspect is that they are intrinsically connected to the new, growing businesses in information and communication technology. These may be the people we are looking for in future élite studies. The question is how to approach them; how to make them give us a timeslot in their incredibly busy schedule. And once we have accomplished this: how to get something useful out of the interview itself. The importance of being able to access this élite is growing. However, this emerging high tech élite may be more difficult to research than the scientists and engineers of traditional STS research because of their more intimate relationship with politics and business and because of the symbolic importance attached to being busy and unavailable to people outside of their networks. So how may we get to interview them?

In the following, I will try to describe a set of strategies of access. This is based on experience from previous and ongoing research that have necessitated access to the high tech élite, like CEOs, scientists and policy-makers in the United States, Norway, Italy, and Great Britain. This experience emphasizes the need for a reflexive approach, but also a particular daring, directness and inventiveness. In this respect, we may learn from other professions that are interested in the same group of people, or at least from their 'spirit'. This is necessary in order to transcend the technical, neo-positivist attitude that still characterizes a lot of interview methodology.

Shifting Modes of Inquiry

The interview appears to be a situation of asymmetrical exchange. The researcher receives information, without giving the informant anything back. To remedy this situation, it is suggested that the researcher may pay her debt by acting as a public voice of the informant group or use the information as a source of suggesting improvements. However, this perception overlooks the possibility that there may be other rewards in being interviewed. It may be a change to present one's views or arguing one's own version of events. It may even be interesting, since many interviews also offer opportunities for the exchange of points of views or experiences.

To understand these implicit advantages of being interviewed, we may draw upon experiences and images from other types of interviews than the research interview. I will argue that it is advantageous to the approach to high tech élites that we at least consider in a metaphorical manner what interviewing may mean when performed by other professions. In the following, I will briefly explore three such mindsets or modes of inquiry: the "journalistic", the "therapeutic" and the "investigative". The use of quotation marks is meant to underline that this is not a study of what journalists, therapists or detectives really do. Rather, I use some commonplace ideas of their roles as a way of exploring different ways of doing interview research in relation to the high tech élite. The aim is for the interviewer to manage a three-fold framework both when negotiating access and when performing the interview (which calls for maintaining, re-negotiating, or even improving access).

The "Journalistic" Mode

Sociology and journalism has for long has a dubious relationship. Especially the Chicago school, in particular Robert Park, was close both in method and writing-style (Lindner, 1996). More aggressively, Douglas (1976) argues for an investigative, rugged, combative style of inquiry modeled on investigative journalism. Thus, there are several reasons why social science should reflect on how journalists operate. Some journalists do more than 10,000 interviews in their career, a number very few social scientists aspire to. While you could make the case that journalistic interviews have a different purpose and go after different things or claim research interviews go deeper, we find there are numerous lessons across these boundaries. Moreover, journalists are already out there doing interviews, affecting the ways political or other élites understand the interview situation (Puwar, 1997, ¶ 1; Williams, 1980, p. 310).

The journalistic approach is intuitive, quick, active, and the journalist is not afraid to ask, even to ask twice. The journalist often takes keynotes during the interview, instead of, or in addition to listening to the tape-recorded version. This is both quicker and more apt for catching the core issues. Then you might not need to write out the entire text, and you only have to listen to parts of it - and you save a lot of time.

Journalists are used to working through acquaintances, contacts, friends, and secretaries. As a researcher you might gain from mastering social situations to the extent that you can fire away questions, be ready to jot down a few lines, be happy with a few comments, and do interviews on the spot, in elevators, or on the move. As Ostrander (1993, p. 25) points out, taking advantage of chance meetings or one's own social contacts may be as important as careful planning. In short, the key informant approach is the treatment you get from journalists. They do not care that you are a researcher. They want the facts now. That is in five minutes. While this is a source of tension for both groups, they can learn from each other. Journalists have the type of active knowledge-seeking that Castells (1996) claims characterizes contemporary society, where information flows freely, quickly, and often through the virtual grapevine. If you want to get something out of your empirical attitude, you might not have the luxury of waiting for people to call you. I will illustrate this with an account of how I snowball sample recruited, accessed, and employed a journalistic, improvisational mindset.

I have said that using informants is a key, both to acquire an interview (get access), and to know what to look for once you have got it (maintaining access). Key informants are people with special knowledge about your subject, or access to data you can not get to, or that you need to familiarize yourself with. You can call them up many times, check information, acquire new contacts, or ask additional questions. Some informal contact with key informants is useful, and entails less work than people you have consciously found, called-up, arranged an interview with, and where the transcript is written out. You may combine these loose types of interaction with more standard research interviews.

But how do you choose these particular key informants? In my project on the telecommunications industry, one informant came as a result of a phone call to the Regional Information Director. On my questions about the Telenor *Nomade* campaign, she directed me to several different people working at Telenor Mobile, who were responsible for the general marketing campaigns. The people I sought were not there, but the secretary told me that a person who now had left the firm really was the person responsible for the idea itself. I asked for his number, and called him repeatedly, with no luck. But after a few days he suddenly called me back, and I could hear by his voice that he was ready for a phone interview here and now, not a planned encounter next week that would take him even more energy.

I then dropped everything and improvised an interview, still in the middle of constructing an interview guide, and somewhat unprepared. After 20 minutes, however, he had given me several interesting reflections as well as several good hints about new informants. This is the real sense of the term "snowball sample". It is also the journalistic approach. With my traditional 'researcher' mindset I would be crippled and would have asked him to call me back when I was prepared. But social science is a creative venture not to be controlled by rational planning alone. We need to improvise and make use of Mills' (1959) *sociological imagination*. If you cannot improvise, most data is out of reach. After all, data is somewhat ephemeral.

Hans-Wilhelm Steinfeld, 48, is a Norwegian journalist who has lived 12 years in Moscow. Respected for his accomplishments as a reporter, but also for his temper and powerful presence, he has done hundreds of interviews, both for TV and for radio. A former correspondent to Russia, he explains his approach in this way:

> In the Secret Services there is the principle of the Pilot fish; you attach yourself to somebody you think can become something. In the case of Gorbatchev [whom he has interviewed ca. 40 times] and Jeltsin it was this principle that counted, in combination with the old axiom from Russian plan economy: "Good planning can not compete with pure luck[2].

Steinfeld's luck was to live 12 of the most turbulent years of Eastern Europe in Russia. His dissertation brought him to Northern Caucasus, where he met the local party leader Mikhail Sergejevitz Gorbatchev: "I had no idea, then, how strategic my acquaintance would become", Steinfeld states.

Apart from a talent in meeting the right people, networking skills also include some down-to-earth methods that could be used by anyone. For instance, it is always important to remember who and what you represent, and employ that in different ways that suits the occasion. Big is not always beautiful. Reminding us of Traweek's (1995) experience as 'Eliza', Steinfeld remembers one particular occcasion of power dynamics, acccess and improvisation:

> I always had the privilege of representing the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. It is small, but respected. In the middle of May of 1980 there was a meeting between the American and Soviet foreign ministers in Vienna. Kevin O'Ryan from BBC and I went against the current, ignored the announced American press conference and placed ourselves outside of Hofburg castle to try for Andrej Gromyko. I approached Gromyko by pointing to my colleague, asking whether BBC and Norwegian TV could get a question. Gromyko looked aggressively at my BBC-colleague and said in English: 'Oh yes? BBC - the organization that knows everything in the world and maybe a bit more than everything?' I quickly pointed to myself and asked whether or not little, innocent NRK from Oslo then could ask instead, and we got a six-minute interview.

Now, what can we learn from this story? Many who refuse an interview are in reality afraid of not having enough interesting things to say to you. Contrary to what it might seem like, if you are famous or have a privileged position, you might never get them 'on the hook'. And when you do, what they say will be influenced by who you are. For this reason, famous scholars who have a public image are unfit for interviewing most of the time.

Secondly, Steinfeld cleverly uses the authority of the other person, then twists it to his advantage when he finds out this does not work. This is a move that could be described as re-translation of a discourse (Latour, 1987). The discourse was about big broadcasting having high thoughts about its own role. Steinfeld turns this around, using Gromyko's own logic.

The "Therapeutic" Mode

Establishing rapport is about gaining trust, whether or not this is spelled out. Previous research points out that identity and trust play a key role in getting access (Johnson, 1975; Lee, 1993). Hoffmann's (1980) respondent discovered that he knew a member of Hoffman's family. Insider status was thus granted, and considerable new insight on the recuitment of Boards of Directors was provided. We might not always be that lucky, but being aware of how identity plays into the process is still a key. In fact, the interview is a rare occasion for high tech leaders to open up, share thoughts and profit from the human touch and undivided attention that the interviewer provides. As the modern proverb goes, "It is lonely at the top". Even a leader might not have room for such self-exploration in his daily life. Often s/he finds being interviewed quite fulfilling (Coleman, 1996, p. 339). Feminists like Oakley (1981, 2000), Fog (1985) and Kaul (1999) share such a perspective, as do systemic therapists like Andersen (1991), White (1991) and Anderson (1997) who value relationships and narrations over early diagnosis, since research subjectivity is the condition, not the qualitative bias of interview practice. Actually, the interview should be a collaborative relationship between equals where meaning emerges (Anderson (1997). But to achieve it, we need to learn to listen:

> Women often mute their own thoughts and feelings when they try to describe their lives in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions. (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 11)

Therapeutic mode, however, does much more than helping the access to the 'muted' channel of woman's subjectivity. What we want to do, sometimes, is to grasp the situation. We want to react by intuition, discover by uncovering layers, much like the psychotherapist. We need to be observant. Maybe we even need to experience, in order to understand, as would be the phenomenological claim at this point.

We may share the urge to understand how the actor has experienced important life-events. We do not share the interest in resolving those problems, if they cannot be remedied by that particular encounter (Kahn & Cannel, 1968, p. 149). That is to say, unless we really have a lot of time and want to enter a fieldwork informant relationship to this person, in the way that Whyte (1943) was able to befriend his main informant Doc.

Psychoanalyst Haydee Faimberg (1996, p. 668) recommends listening to how the patient has listened to the interpretation. She then assigns new meaning to what he said, beyond what he thought he was saying, a move she calls "listening to listening". Therapeutic mode can be manipulative, smart, and cynical, but also calm and empathetic. The strong point of therapeutic mode is the way it makes you understand the interview relationship.

Many interviews become easy after you "get going". Why? Because you let people talk about themselves. If you manage to find a topic that's dare to your subject, you practically just have to steer the interview in your direction. This is what McCracken (1988) describes as "grand tour questions". Only that you sometimes have to dig for a while to find it, it does not come prepared from your guide.

In a previous experience with interviewing CEOs (Thorvik & Undheim, 1998), we often found ourselves being totally fascinated and immersed in the world of the other. Sometimes this is necessary, in order to 'get the whole story'. Instead of the promised ten minutes, we often got an hour's interview, just by showing up two people, and by giving exclusive attention. One example is our interview with an industrialist in Leksvika, an industrial township quite far off of Trondheim, Norway. We were impressed with what this person and his father had built up through the years, and made no secret about it. We overtly expressed our fascination with this 'industrial adventure' - an informant term we adopted. As a result, he took the time to give us anecdotes, and detailed insights that went way out of his prepared schedule. He felt flattered, and gave us the interview in appreciation. The interview became the backbone of our reflection from then on. It embodied the social entrepreneurial spirit we had been looking for.

On another occasion, I drove for two-and-a-half hours each way to interview the *Fylkesmann* of Nord-Trøndelag County. In her otherwise busy schedule, we had three hours together. She said it straight out: "If you come such a long way, you must think this is important. Then I do, too".

The point about the therapeutic mindset is easily interpreted as unethical because it appears to be manipulative. Thus, we need to be careful with this metaphor and the kind of manipulative practice it may suggest. However, it is important to consider the fact that an interview may be an opportunity for a kind of exchange of views and an expression of altruism that may make people feel important and even comfortable, relaxed and at ease. To overlook this fact may make us unable to understand the rationale for giving us access in the first place.

The "Investigative" Mode

Already Sanders (1976) wrote about the sociologist as detective. Sharing the fascination for physical evidence and physical features with the STS scholar, the detective is an investigative, methodic and curious type who dedicates him/herself to solve mysteries and problems. Supposedly, s/he investigates to resolve other people's mysteries, but as detective novelists reveal, detectives are most of all fascinated by solving them. The detective wants to find out "what really happened", but in doing so, s/he is always testing theories (Sanders, 1976, p. 3).

Sociologists need to learn from historians, journalists and detectives how to tell a story, how to give an account of the turn of events. It is what people want to hear, anyway, and it is what they will remember. Giving a believable account of the turn of events is important. Especially when interviewing politicians who have their own political agenda, even in interviews: "one never knows if one has managed to access how things really are […] one might receive filtered, quick sound bites, that are clichéd responses" (Puwar, 1997, ¶ 4). This is an occasion where the best detective novels can teach sociology a lesson. In the introduction to Dashiell Hammett's detective novel *The Continental Op*[3], Steven Marcus reveals the essentials of this powerful method:

> The Op interviews the person or persons most immediately accessible. They may be innocent or guilty - it doesn't matter; it is an indifferent circumstance. Guilty or innocent, they provide the Op with an account of what they know, of what they assert really happened. The Op begins to investigate; he compares these accounts with others that he gathers; he snoops about; he does research; he shadows people, arranges confrontations between those who want to avoid one another, and so on. What he soon discovers is that the "reality" that anyone involved will swear to is in fact itself a construction, a fabrication, a fiction, a faked and alternative reality - and that it has been gotten together before he ever arrived on the scene. And the Op's work therefore is to deconstruct, decompose, deplot and defictionalize that "reality" and to construct or reconstruct out of it a true fiction, i.e., an account of what "really" happened. (Marcus, 1974, p. xix)

We need to learn to use investigative mode to find out what exactly is going on in our field. We need to find the 'story line', the exact turn of events. What is the real agenda here? (Obviously, by 'real' I do not mean to retort to the pattern-finding agenda, only to direct attention to the empirical threads the interviewer could follow). Who is hiding what from whom? Am I getting the right information? Who is holding something back? What is going on backstage?

For instance, in a study of Norwegian and Italian telecom carriers, I had one employee tell me: "it seems you are some sort of industrial spy. You cannot come to see our secrets. Are you crazy?" This person was some sort of a social scientist, but worked for Telecom Italia. So, they did not want me to run to their competitor.

A little later, when presenting my research topic to a Norwegian telecom employee, I knew that they were giving me the tourist explanation. So I experienced that he did not think I was interested, or capable of grasping the real issues at hand. The result was that they did not come up in the interview. In the end, if I had not been able to change his perception of me, and my ambitions, I would have to read it out from the context. Or, worse, I would have to come back. But many times, these things never catch my attention. If I forget to take the 'investigative' mindset, I risk taking everything I am told at face value.

What the investigative mode consists of, is a detailed inquiry. Without resorting to extreme Sherlock Holmesian methods, this means doing what otherwise is known as a cognitive interview. Cognitive interviews cover police interrogations, military briefs, lawyer interviews with clients, testimonials, in short, all type of interrogatives. This can, of course be done to children, adolescents, adults, elderly, celebrities, élites or novices. Cognitive interview is a powerful perspective because it points to the fact that events are very soon 'forgotten', or hidden behind the many layers of imaginative reconstruction, so familiar to anyone who has tried to get the 'truth' out of someone.

The cognitive interview was devised to improve eyewitnesses' memory by using mnemonic strategies which ask witnesses to think about what happened and encourage them to make as many retrieval attempts as possible (Campos & Alonso Quecuty, 1999, p. 47). In the legal context, obviously, the elicitation of complete and accurate statements from witnesses and victims is essential.

Although the police generally receives too little training, and should be informed by both laboratory and field methods from psychology in assessing and documenting eyewitness accounts, a lot can be learned from the police approach as such. Directness, authoritative behavior, and clear, short questions are all characteristics that could be applied with luck in other interview contexts. One study of cognitive interview techniques surveying 96 trained and 65 untrained police officers found trained officers were significantly more likely to use instructions to mentally reinstate context, use different orders, change perspectives and imagery. Frequently used techniques were to establish rapport, to report everything, to encourage concentration, to witness compatible questioning, and to give mental reinstatement of context (Kebbell, Milne, & Wagstaff, 1999).

Mixing Mindsets

Having sketched three mindsets, we should not fail to mention that these may overlap quite naturally, and that previous studies have documented the hybrid practices of the investigative journalist (Guba, 1981; Smith, 1992). Actually, the ideal would be to manage all of them at the same time, switching between them, or adapting as you go along. Here, again, the merit of my threefold distinction is to underline how the journalistic mindset catches the ephemeral nature of things on-the-go, the investigative mindset digs deeper, is suspicious and penetrates commonplace, faulty, or concealing behavior, while the therapeutic mindset repairs aggressiveness by treating the interview as a honest human exchange. This way, more, better, and meaningful interviews occur quite naturally and might release tension and contribute to deeper understanding of the human condition on the part of both interviewer and interviewee.

Accessing Élite Settings

There is a notable difference between expert and élite interviews. Experts are often narrow-minded specialists, whereas élites are more generalists as ideal types. This demands a different approach. Among other things, the preparation for the interview is different. To experts you might need to show your familiarity with technical jargon, in order for them to take you seriously. To élites, who might be equally clever, or influential, a general grasp of the issues, and showing you have an overview can be equally in demand.

Now, these strategies could be combined with network technology. The opportunities of getting access to interviews could be summed up as improved communication tools and increased communication through the use of new, mobile media (Internet, e-mail, cellphones). The potential is, at first sight, that getting in touch with the élite becomes easier since availability is increased. Another advantage is psychological. Actually, some claim physical presence is higher valued in a network society, since the interview thus becomes a very real situation in the midst of mediated or virtual communication. But since élites protect themselves, they might be further away than before, just accessible to the 'insiders' (secretaries, family, friends, and colleagues). Increased mobility means people are difficult to find in their offices. Busy people also switch email accounts often. Also, the diffusion of technology might make everyone else catch up with you and your 'advanced' access methods.

Looking at the interviewer as a "journalist", a "therapist" or a "detective" could be done all at once. We need to be able to switch perspectives during the interview. They serve as complimentary mindsets.

Knowing why you will not get hold of a person is part of the research agenda. There has to be a reason why you are not deemed important, or why a certain source will not speak. STS has been concerned with this, but has not spelled it out as a methodology. Who you get access to, and also whom you think you might get access to, of course, will set limits to your research agenda. It limits you in significant ways, and it puts discursive frames to your thinking. Sometimes this is a threat to the treatment of the topic. Often, this is the case in qualitative studies in political science. Not every professor who is interested in US foreign policy gets access to the President.

Studying regional development (Thorvik & Undheim, 1998) we interviewed 80 people from the power élite in the region of Trøndelag, Norway, as well as national actors. Our sample included mayors, politicians, cabinet members, business leaders, bankers, industrialists and University professors. The sample choice reflected our desire to explore the reasons for pessimism on regional economic possibilities in one of Norway's most resourceful regions, for instance home of the largest private research institution of Northern Europe, Sintef, as well as the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Getting an interview took from one to five weeks at most. We phoned up several times, faxed interview proposals, followed up, and did so several times, if necessary. Our proposal consisted in a brief description of our project and of ourselves. Most of all we made sure to point out why it would be so important to us that this particular person took the time to talk with us. To each person we had a different strategy. We always worked in a team of two, so I had to synchronize what I said to what my partner had said earlier.

Sometimes we did not take "no" for an answer, and said we needed to speak with this person. We could also play 'good guy/bad guy'. I would try to express how thankful we would be if we could get a confirmation now, he would call the day after, saying we had no more time, and needed to speak with our guy in person - now. Only one person refused to talk to us, and this was the Minister of Industry. His aggressive and some would say ill-informed comments formed the background of our research agenda - the public view of our region's potential for growth and prosperity. His secretary maintained it was appropriate to talk to someone on a subsidiary level. We did not think so, but even persistent efforts to convince his secretary did not produce results. It is very likely that he was not prepared to defend his comments, and did not want more fuzz about the whole affair.

Intellectual craftsmanship is a lifestyle, an attitude towards your intellectual projects that has no off-hours: "the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community you have chosen to join do not split their work from their lives" (Mills, 1959, p. 211). Getting access also means allowing your self to get exposed to the problem, getting inspiration, getting into it. Mills (1959, p. 211) wrote:

> You do not really have to study a topic you are working on; for as I have said, once you are into it, it's everywhere. You are sensible to its themes; you see and hear them everywhere in your experience, especially, it always seems to me, in apparently unrelated areas. Even the mass media, especially bad movies and cheap novels and picture magazines and night radio, are disclosed in fresh importance to you.

Working in this way, as journalists or entrepreneurs, we get new ideas frequently, and are able to act upon them. Now, let us take a look at the issue Spencer (1982) and Mills (1956) raised; sociologists need to access élites more forcefully and intelligently.

Borrowing Power from the Powerful

While previous research suggests using social ties, own status, and personal contacts (Hoffmann, 1980, p. 47), sometimes your own personal authority is not enough to secure access. Access might also be denied because your agenda seems threatening (Moyser, 1988, p. 119). To alleviate these problems, various strategies exist. Spencer

(1982, p. 29) suggests two strategies in order to access the Military Academy at West Point; either to try to make an influential person pave the way, or become a journalist. Likewise, Lofland and Lofland (1995, p. 60) recommend the use of allies both to get in and to ensure continued access. Let us study a variation of this theme that contains using other people's authority as a benchmark of your own importance. The following is an excerpt of a phone conversation I had in March 1999:

> I am writing a Ph.D. on ICT-based companies and their view on societal development", I start out, hopefully. "In this context I would much like an interview with Morten Lundal […]" The quick response pulls me back in the chair: "I think I can tell you immediately that he has no time for that […] we get a lot of these inquiries, you know!" Telenor Nextel CEO Morten Lundal apparently has a fierce secretary. Refusing to give up, however, I blast back: "But I think he will look at it differently […] I have chosen Nextel, Mobile and Corporate communication, [two Telenor subsidiaries, as well as the main corporate office] and I have an interview with VP Technology [name] on Friday". A short pause makes me hold my breath, but then it comes, surprisingly: "Yes [that is something else] where did you say you called from? I will notify you, so if you don't hear anything, call back around three.

The secretary changed opinion of me when I mentioned some powerful people. What I really did was to transform the discussion by claiming allies (Latour, 1987). In Latour's (1987) terminology I was going from weaker to stronger rhetoric. To students, graduate students, younger researchers and the like, these methods are vital, in order to bypass the important corporate veil of secretaries and other gatekeepers. What are the appropriate techniques for getting through this filter?

The most important advice is to try to find some commonalties between you and the high tech CEO or engineer you want to interview. (1) Draw on pre-existing contacts (élites, friends-of élites, family connections, school affiliation, or religious community). When face-to-face, or on the phone you may refer to a common context, like "we met at […]", even though the contact was ephemeral. (2) Your presentation needs to be brief and "self-important". There is no need for academic language, just get straight to the facts. (3) Be creative with e-mail. In my attempts to get in touch with CEOs, I often sent out five emails for each response, out of which only one became an interview. (4) With or without email, proposals can be sent directly to powerful people if you know their exact name, address, and use prominent letterheads, for instance from your university affiliation. (5) Especially with email and Internet, you can afford easy, cheap and quick follow-ups. Here, secretaries are they key. Once you have got your feet inside the door, their responsibility is to take care of your inquiry. They will go to great lengths not to miss appointments. (6) With email you may obtain quick response time. I sometimes got interviews in a matter of minutes. But the email pitch must be succinct, crisp, and clear. You need to praise, explain, impress, and respect all parties involved. (7) Tell the secretary that you are currently talking to a lot of important people, and that you thought it would be fair to give your boss a chance to voice his opinion on this, as well. (8) Gatekeepers are sometimes more important than CEOs. Make 'friends' with the secretary, be polite, smile, or come visit. (9) Attend, or better organize gatherings, 'business meetings' and cocktail luncheons. You can arrange with guest speakers, or speak yourself. But beware, Winkler (1987) warns of the costs of the expected alcoholic and gastronomic bribery. (10) Lastly, be persistent, and do not give up. They will give in if you take the time. This happened several times with me. Once, after 15 phonecalls, 3 faxes, and 3 emails by two team-members, we finally got through. The secretary admitted she got 'tired' of us, and had to ask her boss at last.

When gatekeepers try to keep you out, they do not state their real reasons. Such as: (a) "I don't know who you are". Therefore it is important to present yourself using the right "code", whatever that might be. Believe me, it is worth finding this out. (b) "I don't have anything to say". The fear of having nothing to say could also apply to élites, but especially to experts whom you might want to ask questions outside of their expertise. Here, make sure you are not posing a threat. Encourage them by toning down the knowledge needed to be helpful to you. In fact, you might think it is important to find out why s/he is 'silent' on this matter (c) "I don't see what's in it for me". You must then change your approach and maybe give out different types of 'candy'. You might not have monetary rewards (this might actually have worked with rich people, who are notorious for being mizors), but do not mind that, since it is ethically questionable. Rather, you should here somehow manage to appeal to the therapeutic relief of a good conversation. Maybe, you can suggest joining him or her in their sailing boat? Or, you might ask to see their mansion that you have heard so much about, or just say that you would not mind doing the interview in the taxi to and from the airport.

From Access to Information

Once you sit with your élite sample, Jorgensen (1989, p. 86) rightfully says you should try to ask several types of questions. (1) Grand-tour questions that give an overview, and gets the interviewee going, hopefully for half an hour, (2) mini-tour questions that go in more detail, (3) example questions for illustration, (4) experience questions (what actually happened), and (5) native-language-questions to clarify insider terms. However, a main challenge may be in the creation of a productive setting of the interview. Access is not just about being able to meet, but also to get answers to your questions.

The interview itself could be seen as a process with three elements: the opening, the grand tour, and the follow-up. The opening mainly calls for the "therapeutic" mindset, because of the sensitivity and social intelligence necessary to grasp the situation, and create the right social setting for the interview. The grand tour, where you want to get long answers, calls for all three mindset ("journalistic", "therapeutic", and "investigative") because you may need to vary your mode of inquiry. The follow-up, in turn, is the task suited for the "detective". She or he wants to make sure all the facts are on the table.

The literature rightfully claims the opening of the interview is important. You have to establish the right atmosphere. While some advocate "admitting you are nervous" (Maaløe, 1996, p. 191), I would consider that the situation may call for making a joke, talking about the weather, hobbies, commenting the office you are in, or something of that sort. As I was walking into the room at the beginning of my interview with a CEO in a large industrial corporation, I caught that the CEO and his secretary were discussing whether the weather was good for repairing his sailing boat. I quickly hooked on to this conversation as I passed through the secretary's room and into his office. I started talking about the joy of sailing and about how relaxing it must be to work outdoors, getting away from the hectic life in the office. This won his appeal, and both of us were at ease with the situation from then on. Two-thirds into the interview, I felt confident enough to raise critical questions about his role in the corporation. This also went ok. The interview situation calls for confidence, calmness and control - but also for improvisation. The Norwegian journalist Steinfeld explains: "If I improvise during an interview, it is the rule rather than the exception". Of course, the way you improvise depends upon your personality, experience and current state of mind. Are you confident, are you rested and calm, or eager, stressed, and nervous? McCracken (1988) points out that you need to use yourself as an instrument in the research process. As Oakley (1981, p. 41) states: "[...] the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when [...] the interviewer is prepared to invest her own personal identity in the relationship".

Thinking like journalists, we would be more direct. As Steinfeld, the Norwegian journalist explains: "The first question is often just a formality. I use it to warm up the interview object if time and frames allow it. Then I try to catch him, partly through following up important thing said, or by surprising and contradictory contra-questions if the chance comes up. I try to avoid being rhetorical because rhetorical questions do best without answers. Often the answers can, should and do become corrective. I partly "hunt" the temperature in an interview to stimulate engagement among the viewers. But when it is important, the technique is to stimulate the interview object to explain herself or himself richer, for instance let the power holder express herself or himself in detail about a pressed situation".

Another move is to establish links between your and their worlds. In her interviews with women MP's in England, Puwar (1997, ¶ 2) found it useful to use her background from Coventry. The MP had her first constituency there, and had taught Puwar's nephew. Mentioning this created a powerful bond that lasted long after the interview.

The interview gives a double challenge. It challenges you, and it challenges the person you are interviewing. You need to be on the edge, risking something, risking to be asking naive questions, to be passive since you are mostly listening. You need to be provocative, to inspire to open up, to stimulate discussion, reflection and interest. You need to show you find his or her thoughts on this issue important. If you interview a scientist, the interview is not at all a nice "conversation with a purpose", as Kahn and Cannel (1957, p. 149) claimed long ago. It is about challenging status quo. It is about discovering structures by opening up new layers in people's thinking, opening black boxes.

What kind of competence should you display when interviewing the high tech élite? Traditionally, the literature claims the ideal position is that of an "accepted novice" (Maaløe, 1996, p. 146). Most interview textbooks claim you should pretend you do not know anything about the issue in case. You should open up, allowing others to use the words of their own. Actually, in my experience the opposite is true. The élite resists interviewers with little or no knowledge about what they are doing. In fact, it is better to "show off" some of your knowledge, and then discover that you get some respect. While it might be true that a foreigner has certain advantages when it comes to fieldwork because she or he is not viewed as a threat (Maaløe, 1996, p. 146), the general advice of appearing like a novice is of questionable value. You risk loosing respect, getting little or no time to talk, and you might be unable to steer the interview in the direction you want.

The interview is a reflective process where your informant might learn as much as you. A good interviewer participates in the reflection, and leads your informants further when they feel they do not have more to say (Lie, 1998, p. 53). A good interviewer uses his social intelligence (Gardner, 1993), his intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and his emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Most of all, what matters, is to give exclusive attention. Nothing else is as flattering as that. Nothing will make the other person open up to you like careful but active listening. Listening, then, becomes a form of activity (Faimberg, 1996).

Final Remarks

The issue of getting access has been relatively neglected in STS., maybe because STS scholars do not see the problematic. But even researchers who are lucky enough to obtain access do well in reflecting on their own role. Johnson (1975) states access is a precarious, ongoing, and implicit bargaining process. The importance of inside connections, persistence, social skills, and improvisation suggested in the literature (Brannen, 1987; Galaskiewitz, 1987; Hoffmann, 1980; Thomas, 1995; Winkler, 1987) can be appreciated by ways of detailed empirical examples. Trust, respect, reciprocity, professional prestige or even self-esteem comes into play.

Human encounters cannot and should not be completely planned out. After all, what we are after is subjective meanings, the discovery of hidden, surprising, boring, or shocking 'realities' inherent in the research setting. If we partly accept Johnson's (1975) paradox (that the knowledge needed to access a setting can only be known once inside that setting), imaginative, playful choices will outdo rational, planned ones.

With recent advances in technology (Castells, 1996), gaining access has at once become both easier and more difficult. Easier because new access-points like e-mail have evolved.; more difficult because the powerful always find ways to protect their time.

The more general issue raised in this article is the appropriate role of the researcher. Where are the limits to what we can do without compromising our integrity as researchers? How much power do we have as a profession? How does this vary within the research community, across disciplines, and with different professional status (undergrads, grad-students, post-docs, researchers, or tenured professors)? How do personality, training, and sense of experimentation come into play? The most important lesson, in the end, is to be pragmatic about method. Apart from upholding research ethics, the other question is what method works?

What works will depend upon the setting, the mindset of the researcher (which we have tried to enlarge with the 'investigative', 'therapeutic' and 'journalistic' *modus operandi*) and the status, position and culture of the researcher. In this vein, the article could be read as a reflection on the mindset of a relatively young, Scandinavian, male social scientist. Most of the available interview literature is written by older, tenured professors who are US or UK based. That may make a difference?

Ever so often, handbooks on interview methods just assume we are all the same and have the same needs. But this is not so. This, evidently, also poses a problem with my article, where various issues are ignored or bracketed, both for brevity and for lack of attention to all aspects of access. Notably, cultural dimensions are not described in any detail. Thus, there are plenty of opportunities for future research.

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[2]Mail-interview with Hans-Wilhelm Steinfeld, 15.03.99.
[3]Op is abbreviation for operation or the operative team, and is often used in military or police intelligence jargon.

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