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## Diaries and Fieldnotes in the Research Process

Darren Newbury



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### Abstract

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It is common to hear people talk about 'writing up' research. Implicit in the phrase is the sense that writing is a stage that occurs principally when the research has finished and is a straightforward process of telling what was done and what conclusions can be drawn. However, the process of research involves many forms of writing, from letter writing and minute taking to academic papers and formal research reports.

The aim of this issue is to consider one form of research writing that has received relatively little attention, yet which is central to the research process, especially, but not exclusively, for those conducting qualitative or action research studies - the research diary. Research diaries are considered as part of a broad category alongside other methods of recording such as research logs and fieldnotes. Particular approaches to notetaking, the use of visual material in diary record keeping, as well as practical issues are discussed.

This issue also contains extracts from three separate research projects. The examples are not intended to be prescriptive, they are simply offered as working examples of research diaries from actual research projects.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darren Newbury is research co-ordinator for visual communication and has responsibilities for postgraduate research training and the development of electronic learning across the faculty . He has a background in photography and cultural studies, and completed his PhD on photography and education. Current research interests include photographic theory, practice and pedagogy, visual research methods and research education and training in art, design and media.

## Introduction

I was hired by the New Deal organisation the Farm Security Administration to make pictures to show the citizens of the country and the congress how desperate the conditions were for many people in the areas of the country. And each week I had to produce an expense account for the US government and I also had to have captions for all the pictures I made, and so I began to scribble down little things to myself when I was working in the field, and at night while my film was being developed in the bathroom of my hotel I would then write notes to myself from the notes I'd written during the day as I was making pictures. In time I expanded these notes and over the years I expanded them even fuller, even more fully, and you know the keeping of notes begins as a necessity and expanding them often becomes a habit, and then somewhere along the line for notebook takers it becomes a compulsion. And somewhere in my years of making pictures and scribbling notes, scribbling notes to myself became a compulsion, and it's been so ever since.  
*Carl Mydans (1998)*

Thought of publishing my photographs in an album with explanatory notes.  
*(Bronislaw Malinowski, cited in Young 1998: 1)*

It is common to hear people talk about 'writing up' research. Implicit in the phrase is the sense that writing is a stage that occurs principally when the research has finished and is a straightforward process of telling what was done and what conclusions can be drawn. However, the process of research involves many forms of writing, from letter writing and minute taking to academic papers and formal research reports. The aim of this paper is to consider one form of research writing that has received relatively little attention, yet which is central to the research process, especially, but not exclusively, for those conducting qualitative or action research studies - the research diary.

The research diary is distinct from report or academic paper writing in at least two ways. First, it does not attempt to present the process of research in the linear fashion that is typical of research paper writing, what Kaplan calls "the reconstructed logic of science". (Kaplan cited in Marshall & Rossman 1995: 15). Instead it should capture something of "the real inner drama" of research "with its intuitive base, its halting time-line, and its extensive recycling of concepts and perspectives" (Bargar & Duncan cited in Marshall & Rossman 1995: 15) an aspect often hidden from view in the final published accounts. Second, its purpose is not primarily about the communication of the research to others. The reason for keeping a research diary is to facilitate the research process through recording observations, thoughts and questions as they happen, for later use by the researcher, and to stimulate reflective thinking

about the research.

As indicated in the quotations at the top of this page, it is also the aim of this paper to consider the research diary in relation to visual research, whether this is the use of the diary as a means of reflecting on the visual domain or the inclusion of a visual component in the diary itself.

## Research diaries, research logs and fieldnotes

Although it is not easy, and as I shall argue not necessarily desirable, to distinguish clearly between the different practices that can be grouped under the heading of research diaries, it is useful to consider separately for a moment research logs and fieldnotes. A research log implies a fairly straightforward objective account, usually of experimental research. It should serve as a thorough record for the researcher, with sufficient information to replicate the study and verify that the results are valid. In areas where research is highly competitive, a signed and witnessed research log can become an important means of verifying when, and by whom a particular advance was made. Similarly, fieldnotes can be understood as an objective record of observations made in a particular setting.

However, although some would distinguish research logs and fieldnotes proper from a research diary, the boundaries between these forms are often blurred. There are some good reasons for, and beneficial effects of, this blurring. Research, particularly qualitative research in social and cultural settings, is experienced subjectively. The quality of the data gathered is intimately related to the quality of relationships the researcher is able to establish with informants in the field, as Hastrup notes "fieldwork is situated between autobiography and anthropology" (Hastrup 1992: 117). The research diary provides a form through which the interaction of subjective and objective aspects of doing research can be openly acknowledged and brought into a productive relationship. In purely practical terms, it is often very difficult to separate out the writing of purely descriptive observational fieldnotes; as one records particular events, theoretical concepts, or other leads to follow up, often come to mind. The value of the diary form is that it does not exclude the recording of these in relation to more objective descriptions. The research diary can be seen as a melting pot for all of the different ingredients of a research project - prior experience, observations, readings, ideas - and a means of capturing the resulting interplay of elements. Schatzman and Strauss allude to this function of the research diary when they refer to the researcher's notes as "the vehicle for ordered creativity" (Schatzman & Strauss 1973: 105).

This is also true of experimental and scientific research. Although Faraday's diary is primarily a detailed daily log of his scientific experiments, for the knowledgeable reader it also conveys other qualities: "The main interest of the Diary lies...quite outside the range of propositions and experimental proofs. It centres round the methods of Faraday's attack, both in thought and in experiment: it depends on the records of the workings of his mind as he mastered each research in turn, and on his attitude not only to his own researches but also to scientific advance in general" (Bragg 1932: v).

In recent years there has also been a parallel development, particularly in areas like teaching and nursing, of the use of reflective journals or learning diaries (Platzer, Snelling and Blake 1997). In some cases these can be seen to overlap with the idea of the research diary as discussed here. Although in many cases the primary focus of such diaries is the development of one's own skills and knowledge as a practitioner, this approach can often be understood as a form of action research. Particularly influential in teaching, health and art and design has been Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner. Schön argues that professional practitioners do not simply apply knowledge generated by scientists and researchers, but that they also generate new knowledge as they deal with complex real world situations. Practice is therefore a form of research, and the reflective journal a means of capturing and communicating knowledge (Schön 1991). Whether or not this form can be considered as research depends on the focus of the diary, though perhaps its most interesting contribution is the focus it can place on the observation of the researcher's self in the research process as both instrument, and in some cases object of the research. The latter approach has some appeal for researchers in the fields of art and design where the focus of research is the practicing artist or designer's own creative processes.

## Models of Note Taking

There are no rules as to how research diaries or fieldnotes should be compiled, the prime consideration is finding a format and style that fits with the needs of the research project, and which is found to be workable and useful by the researcher. Nevertheless it is often useful to be able to compare one's own approach with others. Unfortunately, the making of notes and the writing of research diaries is not often discussed when researchers report on their studies. As Burgess notes " while [researchers] indicate that part of their research activities involves writing notes and keeping diaries, they do not tell us, in any detail, about how these diaries may be established and maintained" (Burgess 1981: 75).

This section is based therefore on discussion of three examples, two from qualitative sociology and one from anthropology, where approaches to diary writing and note taking are given explicit consideration. All three examples are strikingly similar both in the way in which they categorise kinds of note-taking and in the way in which they suggest the work of note-taking can be organised, suggesting at least in a broad sense a consensus on good practice in this particular area of research.

### *A strategy for recording - Schatzman and Strauss (1973)*

Despite the title of the chapter in their book Schatzman and Strauss are keen to emphasise that note-taking and research diary keeping are much more than a mechanical means of storing information for later retrieval. Instead they argue that the "researcher requires recording tactics that will provide him with an ongoing, developmental dialogue" (p.94). They emphasise the importance of recording observations from the very beginning of the research; first encounters and the routes to gaining access to research situations are all considered important research data. In terms of the organisation of notes Schatzman and Strauss advocate an approach that "packages" material into three categories "Observational Notes, "Theoretical

"packages" material into three categories "Observational Notes, "Theoretical Notes" and "Methodological Notes"

Observational notes are "statements bearing upon events experienced principally through watching and listening. They contain as little interpretation as possible, and are as reliable as the observer can construct them. Each ON represents an event deemed important enough to include in the fund of recorded experience, as a piece of evidence for some proposition yet unborn or as a property of a context or situation. An ON is the Who, What, When, Where and How of human activity" (p.100).

Theoretical notes "represent self-conscious, controlled attempts to derive meaning from any one or several observation notes. The observer as recorder thinks about what he has experienced, and makes whatever private declaration of meaning he feels will bear conceptual fruit." (p.101).

Methodological notes are "statement[s] that reflect an operational act completed or planned: an instruction to oneself, a reminder, a critique of one's own tactics. It notes timing, sequencing, stationing, stage setting, or manoeuvring. Methodological notes might be thought of as observational notes on the researcher himself and upon the methodological process itself" (p.101).

The implication is that although written notes may more or less naturally fall into these three categories - they point out that an overly self-conscious or ordered approach to note making is unhelpfully slow - over time the researcher will develop the ability to package his or her observations in the way suggested, to the benefit of later retrieval. The degree to which any researcher would want to adopt such an approach depends on the particular project and his or her preference. It may be useful simply to identify observational, theoretical and methodological notes when reviewing continuous passages of a research diary. On the other hand for a researcher dealing with large volumes of qualitative data a packaged set of notes has some advantages. For example some of the software for managing qualitative data deals in packets of information.

Schatzman and Strauss also describe the first step in the movement from research diary notes to publishable research papers - the preparation of "analytic memos" (p.104). As theoretical notes begin to develop and expand to the point that they are in need of some further elaboration or simply tying together, the researcher should begin writing longer analytic memos. These it is suggested will become the basis for the writing of publications.

#### *Keeping a research diary - Burgess (1981)*

Although Burgess does not emphasise the packaging approach in the way that Schatzman and Strauss do, his three main elements, although under slightly different headings, are substantially the same. Burgess identifies what he refers to as the "substantive account", the "methodological account" and the "analytic account". These can be compared with Schatzman and Strauss's observational, methodological and theoretical respectively.

The substantive account represents a chronological account "of the events that have been observed and the informants who have been interviewed" (p.76).

The methodological account "involves autobiographical details outlining the researcher's involvement in the social situation in addition to the methods of social investigation that were employed" (ibid.).

The analytic account "raises questions that were posed in the course of conducting the research, hunches that the researcher may hold, ideas for organising the data and concepts employed by the participants that can be used to analyse the materials" (ibid.).

The latter point is worth emphasising. In ethnographic research the diary notes should reflect not only the way the researcher sees things, but an attempt to understand how the research subjects organise their experiences, including their perceptions of the researcher.

Finally, although he does not elaborate on this, Burgess raises the question of supplementing the written diary with additional materials including diagrams or photographs which "may be used as a means of summarising situations in which the researcher has been involved and to reveal in graphic form the pattern of social interaction and spatial relationships" (p.77).

*Anthropological fieldnotes - Sanjek (1990) and Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995)*

The available anthropological literature seems to place less emphasis on categorising the types of notes that are made and more on organising the work of note taking, although consideration of this is by no means absent from the authors discussed above. Both Sanjek and Emerson et al comment on the practice of making rough notes as and when possible during periods of observation. Sanjek refers to these as "scratch notes", whereas Emerson et al use the term "jottings". These are notes to jog the memory when writing in full later, sometimes with verbatim quotes where necessary and possible. As Emerson et al point out there are often very practical reasons why writing extended notes at the time of observation is not possible: "A female ethnographer studying women in Africa, for example, may find herself helping to prepare greens and care for children, leaving no time to produce many written notes" (p.17). It is recommended that as soon as is possible, and preferably the same day, the rough notes are expanded into fieldnotes proper.

Emerson et al go on to look in detail at the process of expanding fieldnotes through the inclusion of asides - "brief, reflective bits of analytic writing that succinctly clarify, explain, interpret or raise questions about some specific happening or process described in a fieldnote" (p.101) - commentaries - "more elaborate reflection on some specific event or issue" (p.102) - and in-process memos - "products of more sustained analytic writing [which] require a more extended time-out from actively composing fieldnotes" (p.103).

They then consider the process of "coding" or sorting the various ideas and observations contained in the fieldnotes into categories. Sanjek uses the term fieldnote records for what is essentially the same process. And finally, the transition from coded fieldnotes to written ethnographic texts.

In recent years the impact of postmodernist concerns on the practice of anthropology as a research discipline has stimulated interest in the field diary as a literary form, and drawn attention to the importance of the anthro-

pologist's self and biography. Clifford refers to a "general trend towards a specification of discourses...who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints?" (Clifford & Marcus 1986: 13). Both in its literary form and construction, and in its emphasis on the mediation between the subjective and the objective, the field diary provides an interesting alternative to the authoritative ethnographic text.

## Visual Diaries

The keeping of a research diary, particularly in research that depends on observation in social and cultural settings, can in itself sensitise the researcher to the visual. Adequate descriptions of the settings in which such research takes place will necessitate some reflection on the organisation of space, and the general look of the place. It seems a logical extension then that in some cases this element of the project will be sufficiently important to warrant a visual record to go alongside the written account. As Young points out in his discussion of Malinowski's fieldwork, the descriptive power of photography is highly significant: "Anyone who has glanced through his three major monographs will have been struck by the narrative force of his photography, the capacity of his images to evoke a distinctive and, to European eyes, exotic way of life. His photographs do more than simply embellish his texts, they recreate a distant world in quotidian detail" (Young 1998: 1). Though of course, as ethnographers have become increasingly sensitive to their role in the construction of fieldwork, so to has the idea of photography as a purely objective record been problematised. Prosser and Schwartz make this point:

*The notion of photographs as visual diary reintroduce the researcher and the qualities of the medium into the research process. That is, a diary is a self-reflexive and media-literate chronicle of the researcher's entry, participation in, and departure from the field. The images generated within this paradigm are acknowledged to be the unique result of the interaction of a certain researcher with a specific population using a particular medium as a precise moment in space and time (Prosser & Schwartz 1998: 123).*

Prosser and Schwartz go on to make a distinction between a visual diary and a visual record, though it is likely in practice that there will be a considerable overlap between the subjectivity of the former and the objectivity of the latter.

Research in the area of visual sociology has tended to view photography as a means of documenting a variety of social settings, for the purposes of producing a richer ethnographic account than can be achieved through words alone. However, taking this further it is clear that for some projects the visual or artefactual is not simply of contextual significance, but is itself the focus of the research. In these cases visual images and objects are the main subject of reflection in a research diary, with some form of visual record being a necessary counterpart. Indeed, in the visual and media rich context of (post) modern societies research into visual culture has become increasingly significant. The sub-discipline of visual anthropology has seen a shift of emphasis from the dominance of ethnographic film-making to an approach that also includes the anthropology of visual communication, and the role of anthropological knowledge and methods in popular forms of visual display.

Although the social science disciplines concentrate on watching and recording the activities of others, the research diary is also of particular value to practitioners seeking to observe and research their own practice, for example in the visual arts. Herivel (1997) in a study of her own practice as an artist employs a diary as a central means of recording: "My objective was to discover what it meant to experience the process of being immersed in the discipline of visual art making" (p.55). Importantly, as those in other disciplines have also discovered, diary-keeping is not merely a passive means of recording: "As the 'drama' of the five months progressed, the act of writing took on a more important role. I found that it clarified many of my ideas in the creation of art objects. I began to think of writing as part of the creative process of making art. It became a significant aspect in understanding how I construct visual knowledge" (p.58).

Perhaps one of the most interesting roles a research diary can play in relation to the variety of visual research topics is that of bringing together words and images. For the researcher the diary can be the place where the central theoretical and methodological issue of how to write about the visual is struggled with and worked out.

## Practical Issues

There are considerable benefits for the researcher who chooses to keep a research diary. Perhaps, most important of these are the role the diary can play as a coherent central record of project ideas, information and activities, and its use as a stimulus for reflective thinking. However, to set against these benefits there are a number of practical issues that need to be considered.

One of the first things to think about is what kind of research diary - is it to be a daily record of all research activities, a weekly log, a record of clearly defined periods of fieldwork? Underlying this issue is the question of time. How much time do you have to commit to the keeping of a research diary, and importantly are you able to sustain the level of commitment you intend over the period of the research?

There are no rules over what should or should not be included in a research diary. Following is a list of things that might be considered, though of course the scope and detail of the record is a matter of personal preference:

- thoughts and reflections
- a record of reading (with comments/summaries/quotes)
- a record of phone calls and meetings
- notes on methodology
- observations
- unresolved problems, issues or questions
- plans for action
- keywords
- visual material

It is also important to give early consideration to how you might want to use the information in the diary later in the research. How will you retrieve information from the diary? Schatzman and Strauss's idea of packaged notes is one possible way of managing the material. Large volumes of fieldnotes often require some kind of keyword or subject index if they are to be easily searched. Alternatively, some form of weekly or monthly summary may be useful. If the diary is used to record reading material it is important that this can be easily retrieved for the use of quotations and the construction of a bibliography. A diary would not usually be the only record of bibliographic references.

There are also a number of technical issues that need thinking about. Is the diary to be kept on loose sheets of paper (this is preferable if you are likely to want to photocopy notes), in bound notebooks, or electronically using word processing software. If you are using the latter it is advisable to keep back-up copies (printed and electronic). It is also worth considering the use of abbreviations in the diary. For example, it is common where notes are made from observations and interviews to distinguish exact quotations - in double quotation marks "" - from recorded remarks about which one is less sure - in single quotation marks ". Is it clear where words are your own, or those of others, or things you have read and paraphrased? Although a research diary is not a polished piece of writing, it will need to be sufficiently clear that the researcher can return to it after a long period of time and still understand what has been recorded.

Finally, one should consider the ethical issues involved in keeping a diary. Although a diary is primarily considered as a private document, and in fact part of its value is that it allows a licence for the researcher to record and test out on paper thoughts and reflections that may never reach a wider audience, there may be points at which the diary is read by others. In some cases the diary may be a useful vehicle for communicating the complexity of a research project. If this is the case then clearly there is a need to consider issues of confidentiality both for the researcher and the characters that appear in the research story.

#### **EXAMPLE 1**

### **The research diary as a methodological tool in action research with young people**

This extract comes from the daily research diary kept by a student working on PhD project involving action research with young people. The research project is concerned with two major issues: the impact of new forms of cultural production and distribution on the opportunities for cultural participation by young people; and the means by which young people are able to explore and promote their own identities and concerns, particularly through digital visual media.

The extract comes from early on in the project, and records a period of observation at an Internet Café. It is interesting that the extract records not only the observations made but also the entry into the setting. Note also in the

second paragraph, where the diary records the informant's (Simon) categories for video games. The diary also records a quantitative description of the activity observed in addition to more qualitative comments.

**MONDAY 4 AUGUST 1997**

I visited Netplay where Simon, the son of the couple running the café, showed me some of the more popular games played at the café. Simon was engrossed in a game called Civilisation 2 when I arrived. This game is based on long term strategy and is about building up cities and defences.

Simon told me that almost all the people using the café to play games are young people. He said that there are two types of popular games: games which Simon called violent or adrenalin games and games based on a mixture of long term strategy and battle. Simon said that the 'immediate adrenalin' games are played more by younger young people and that the more long term strategy games are played by older young people.

I then observed a group of 8-12 year olds using the café. Of the group 6 were girls and two were boys. The group were given the option of playing 'violent' games, accessing the internet, using educational games, some of which were creative, or playing other games such as monopoly. The group varied in their choices and in how long they spent using any one of the options. The following shows how the group changed their options during the one and a half hours spent at the café:

( > indicates that this option was adhered to until the end of the session )

PERSON	INITIAL CHOICE	20mins	40mins	60mins	80mins	90mins
Boy 1	violent games	>				
Boy 2	violent games	>				
Girl 1	violent games	>				
Girl 2	violent games	Internet	monopoly	>		
Girl 3	violent games	Internet	monopoly	>		
Girl 4	educational games	(spelling)	>			
Girl 5	educational games	(spelling)	violent games	Internet	>	
Girl 6	educational games	(drawing and making music)	Internet	>		

Of those playing violent games throughout one boy had a computer at home but it's his dad's and he has limited access to it. He said there weren't any games on it. The girl however had access to games on a computer at home but not three dimensional games like these. The girl continually won all the games that these three played against each other. Three adults from the café were present to give advice and support but many of the girls relied upon each other for this information rather than asking any of the adults present. For those who spent just the last ten minutes on the Internet the purpose of doing so was to look up the Spice Girls page. I spoke to the girl who had spent almost the entire session making images and music who said that she did not have a computer at home and that she really enjoyed what she had done during the session. It was difficult to persuade the group to stop using the computers when it was time to leave.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: THANKS TO ROZ HALL FOR PERMISSION TO USE THIS DIARY EXTRACT.**

## **EXAMPLE 2**

### **'In the middle of nowhere but at the centre of the world': fieldnotes from Irian Jaya**

This extract is taken from a diary kept during a period of fieldwork in Indonesia as part of a study of 'traditional' Asmat culture and its engagement with the modern world. The diary was written up each evening based on shorter notes made during the day. It was also supplemented by a second notebook which detailed the photographs taken, recorded any books or publications that the researcher came across, as well as contact names and addresses.

The extract consists largely of observational notes relating to an Asmat carving contest. However, it is also cross-referenced to visual material, and the inclusion of theoretical reflections and methodological notes (including the researcher's observations of his own role in the setting) interspersed with the observations. The final paragraph begins to develop what will become an important theoretical theme, and one that comes up again during later periods of observation.

**8TH OCTOBER 1998**

The start of the judging for the festa in SOSKA on Thursday morning. The first element is to select material to go into the auction (and hence the competition). The first stage is divided into regions (Kejamatan), five in all, one each half day. So the first group was the Casuarina Coast (SE Asmat). Erik Sarkol called out a list of entrants and each then came forward and laid his (yes, there were no women entrants) piece on the floor. There are seven categories; traditional, mythical depictions, panels, story boards (ajour) and small medium and large work. Traditional = shields.

The first judging went ahead with Yufen, Ursula, Gunter as the judges. 100 pieces out of a 350 were selected. This was definitely Ursula's show. She

called some carvers up when there were items she wanted to discuss with them. Most of their replies were fairly subdued even monosyllabic. The range of work was quite varied with a good number of shields, story pieces and some innovative pieces that did not appear to fit any category easily. After the selection the refusès were meant to line up for advice on a guide price to ask of the dealers a few of whom had arrived by now. But it all dissolved rather indecisively. I went to the mission to check travel arrangements with Mr Funghi and as I emerged I met firstly Katerina and her mother both at the head of processions of 20-30 people carrying carvings. I thought that they were taking these pieces in for safe keeping - but, no, they were Ursula Konrad's purchases.

The afternoon group from Sawa brought much more work but there was a heavy preponderance of panels. There was too much work for it all to be shown at one time so there were two sittings. Yufen excused himself from the judging panel, as this was his home area - a wise decision as subsequent events showed. His place was taken by Steve Chiaramontre. The selection process went on much as in the morning. But the all white panel of judges was much more conspicuously set against the room full of Asmat carvers. The presence of a range of other white "hangers-on" mostly German but also including me, who walked up and down inspecting the work during the selection reinforced this racial division in the room. The criteria for selection appeared to involve technical facility, compositional strength and innovation. At the end of the afternoon trouble erupted. The judges had chosen 8-10 pieces from some villages but none from others. Those disenfranchised were vocal in their disappointment and at what they no doubt probably perceived as unfairness. The judges were asked for a solution (picking out some additional pieces?) But Ursula was probably correct [whatever the justice of the whole process in the first place NS]. If you went down that road you probably ended up making even more enemies. Fr Virgil was brought in to explain why the selection had fallen the way it had. The problem was that so many of the carvers had made inferior copies of good panels. Now, if they had instead submitted paddles, bowls or other types of work they would have fared better

In one sense I was not surprised at the row. The whole idea of competition in the Western Art sense seems so problematic in a Melanesian context. Ursula was not surprised either - it happens every year.

#### **9TH OCTOBER 1998**

The second day of selection. By now the artefacts are starting to become somewhat blurred. In the morning it was the turn of the Agats Kejamatan. The range was certainly much wider than the previous evening's selection. The day started with a series of harangues by Erik followed by two other members of his staff. It lasted in all some 20 minutes. No eye contact was made with any of the assembled carvers who all looked stoically into the floor. The afternoon had a similar pattern but the assembly members did talk quietly to one another. The major difference in attitude was the presence of a chief in regalia who from time to time sang and occasionally drew an electrifying low but very loud "wow" from the carvers. The judging panel consisted for both morning and afternoon (pm = coastal villages, Ewer etc) sessions of the Konrads, Steve Chiaramonte, and Ursula's Balinese architect friend (in fetching blue water socks). But the character of the afternoon was changed fairly markedly by the arrival of Kal Muller who started by literally 'in your face' flash photographs from 1 ft distance from the face of the chief. He similarly had pieces moved, held to suit the camera shot. A few more dealers also put in an appearance. Steve said at the end of judging that the selection had born

no relation to categories. But on the other hand when there were few examples of a particular category then irrespective of artistic merit, they had to be selected in order to encourage next year's entrants.

In the afternoon session a large model of a jeu (?) was submitted 1.5 metres high x 3 metres across x 1.5 metres deep. This was rejected as breaching the rules of the competition which restricts entry to carved objects (no bags, no daggers, no mask costumes). But there were in all the 210 items selected and the perhaps 1,000 - 1,500 submitted not one example of a flute - a major item of carving. Curious: must raise this with Ursula. The category restriction appears both arbitrary and unnecessarily restrictive but it is Ursula's rule and she is, as Steve calls her "the Queen of the Asmat".

What has become clear over the two days is that the criteria for the competition set the agenda but the decisions of the judges are entirely based on Western criteria of technical competence, balance and innovation. It is the last element that is the most problematic. It is clear from the Atsj experience that carvers are keen to evaluate successful designs (the panels) but their efforts are rejected by the judges as derivative and of inferior quality. Judges, in defence of their decisions, try to explain how to meet their criteria - do different things: paddles, spears, shields. But what is innovative rather than merely excessively decorated (shields with 3 dimensional additions like crocodiles on the plain shield surface) does not seem conceptually easy to communicate. The groans of the judges at the panels from Atsj and their ubiquity seem to reveal as much about the judging process as the carvers' intentions.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: THANKS TO NICK STANLEY FOR PERMISSION TO USE THIS DIARY EXTRACT.**

**ILLUSTRATIONS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:**

Yufen Biakai & Ursula Konrad judging, Carvers attending the competition, Contemporary design shield, A refused entry - woven not carved, Examining a piece of contemporary filigree sculpture



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### EXAMPLE 3

## 'A world apart': notes on interviews with photography students

This extract is taken from a set of notes made after conducting a series of interview with photography students. The interviews formed part of a funded project looking at the teaching of photography. This does not represent a sustained daily research diary, but rather a set of descriptive and reflective notes made in response to a particular aspect of primary research. The notes were made after a series taped interviews and are cross-referenced with the tapes.

The extract records reflections on the way in which the students being interviewed talked about their photographic images (the researcher also made a record of a number of the photographic images discussed at the time of the interviews). In retrospect these reflections can be seen as the first step towards an analysis of the interview material.

### NOTES ON THREE INTERVIEWS

#### MARCH 1993

Of the three students two predominantly spoke about their work in technical-aesthetic terms; talking about subject matter or meaning in any detailed way didn't happen. The third student was slightly different in that he more regularly tended to think in terms of what he was trying to say or explore about his subjects, though again his ideas were often only partly articulated.

The students seem to be making 'common sense' choices of subject matter, style and approach without fully thinking through the available choices (or even that they were making a choice at all). On the one hand this is a deliberate and structured part of the course (though from the students perspective not a fully conscious choice, I feel) projects are often based around existing styles and act as a way of ensuring students assimilate the conventions and genres that are dominant in professional photography and on the other hand they become part of the 'common sense' of the course without articulating the values they imply. Particular subjects, ways of working, styles imply particular clients or outlets and hence particular class and culture specific audiences.

One particularly striking example was that of fashion photography; all three students had done some fashion work and were able to cite influences from magazines such as the Face and particularly Vogue and Elle, and two of the students had replicated the simple black & white style of such as Elle - all the models in the images had serious, cold expressions - and when I pointed this out despite the fact one student had pointed out "you've got to make yourself familiar with whatever area you're working in" she admitted to having "never really thought about it" [16/2/A], and when I suggested that they may have looked at other magazines such as Bella, for example, for a style to emulate, I was perceived as being nonsensical. It is 'common sense' for students on the course doing fashion work to aspire to the conventions of Elle or Vogue (and by implication the values they represent) without either subjecting them to challenge or fully articulating what those conventions are. It seems to be both

a structured part of the course and also to happen by peer group socialisation perhaps.

Technical aspects also serve to mark a boundary for some students, "I want to do studio 5x4 work, I want to do location 5x4 work and what I'd like to do is get into large format and do it out on location cos I think there's something exciting about that because as soon as you're using a large format camera you tend to feel, cos when you're using a 35mm camera and you're doing a shoot it becomes more of a snapshot and so easy, when you're using a large format camera it becomes more of an event." [15/2/A]

It seemed to me unusual to hear the third student talking consistently about the subject matter and what he was trying to say about it through technique, though his use of language was not necessarily any more sophisticated, "the approach is relevant because when you go to a place like that you never have that much time to study things you just go to enjoy the place.....some of them [the photographs] do have something to say about the place, it's about donkey rides, kids enjoying themselves, other people getting pissed off." (Weston-Super-Mare, flash-blur technique, 35mm b/w) [16/2/B].

## Further Reading

Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S.J. (1975) *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Phenomenological Approach to the Social Sciences*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

As well as advice on how to collect qualitative data in social settings the book contains extended examples of written field notes.

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Bragg, W.H. (1932) Foreword. In T. Martin (ed.) *Faraday's diary: Being the various philosophical notes of experimental investigation made by Michael Faraday during the years 1820-1862 and bequeathed by him to the Royal Institution of Great Britain*, seven volumes, London: G.Bell and Sons Ltd.

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Burgess, R.G. (1981) Keeping a research diary. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 11(1): 75-83.

This short article draws attention to the role of diary keeping in the process of research, with a particular emphasis on qualitative or ethnographic research in education. It raises questions such as: "What data do you record? How do you record it? What categories can be used in recording data? Should the diary be supplemented with interview transcripts, tape-recordings and photographs?". The article also briefly refers to the role of informant diaries and the diary-interview.

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Clifford, J., & Marcus, G.E. (1986) *Writing Culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I. & Shaw, L.L. (1995) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Excellent book focused on writing fieldnotes as a core activity in ethnographic research. Deals with issues such as when and where to make notes in the field (including ethical issues and the impact on the field), memos, coding, and developing material into an ethnographic text. The book is written from an interpretative perspective, the emphasis therefore is on capturing detailed accounts from the informant's point of view, rather than on theory building.

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Hastrup, K. (1992) *Writing Ethnography - State of the Art*. In J.Okely & H.Callaway (eds.) *Anthropology and Autobiography*, London: Routledge, pp116-133.

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Herivel, A. (1997) *A Voyage between Tide and Time: Creating Research in the Studio*. *Canadian Review of Art Education: Research and Issues*, 23(2): 55-73.

Article based on an artist's study of her own practice, which involved keeping a detailed diary for five and a half months of studio based work.

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Hutchinson, S. (1988) *Education and grounded theory*. In R.Sherman & R.Webb (eds.) *Qualitative Research in Education: Forms and Methods*. Lewes: Falmer Press.

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Janesick, V.J. (1999) *A Journal about Journal Writing as a Qualitative Research Technique: History, Issues and Reflections*. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5 (4): 505-24. Based on paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, April 13-17.

This paper is written as a journal "in order to show how journal writing may be used as a qualitative research technique in long-term qualitative studies". Gives a brief history of types of diary/journal writing, and provides a number of examples from the author's own journal and those of fellow researchers and students.

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Malinowski, B. (1967) *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. London: Routledge

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Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (1995) *Designing Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition. London: Sage.

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Mydans, Carl (1998) 'History by Carl Mydans': A Multimedia Presentation by The Digital Journalist, The Digital Journalist, February-March 1998 (transcript from Real Player audio file, available at [HTTP://DIRCKHALSTEAD.ORG/ISSUE9802/MYDANS01.HTM](http://dirckhalstead.org/issue9802/mydans01.htm)).

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Okely, J. & Callaway, H. (1992) *Anthropology and Autobiography*. London: Routledge.

Collection of articles that explore the relationship between autobiography and anthropological fieldwork. Although the emphasis is on fieldwork and how this is affected by experience and the building of relationships with informants, many of the articles deal with reflexivity and forms of writing.

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Platzer, H., Snelling, J., & Blake, D. (1997) Promoting reflective practitioners in nursing: a review of theoretical models and research into the use of diaries and journals to facilitate reflection. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 2(2): 103-121.

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Prosser, J. (1992) Personal Reflections on the Use of Photography in an Ethnographic Case Study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 18(4): 397-411.

Discussion of the use of photography as a tool to aid in an ethnographic study of a comprehensive school. The article reflects on the impact of introducing the camera into the research setting, as well as its potential as a source of data.

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Prosser, J., & Schwartz, D. (1998) Photographs within the sociological research process. In J. Prosser (ed.) *Image-based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*, London: Falmer Press.

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Sanjek, R. (ed.) (1990) *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Extensive collection of chapters on the role of fieldnotes in anthropology. Summary chapters by the editor for each of the main sections of the collection are particularly useful.

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Schatzman, L. & Strauss, A. (1973) *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Chapter 6 'Strategy for Recording' offers advice to researchers on the practice of taking notes. Introduces a model of note taking based on the division between the observational, the methodological and the theoretical.

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Schön, D. (1991) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Aldershot: Avebury.

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Young, M. (1998) Malinowski's Kiriwina: *Fieldwork Photography 1915-1918*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.1.

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