

WRITING CULTURE AND RECORDING CULTURE

Historically, practices of cultural representation have emerged against a backdrop of an ideology and a materialization of Progress that enormously transformed urban and rural landscapes and the people who lived in them. Industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of mass communication at the beginning of the 20th century radically changed the way people live and work together. Some of the mass communication technologies that helped facilitate this new way of being, and ultimately contributed to the transformation of local cultures into an increasingly homogeneous national culture in the United States and abroad, were the same tools that allowed people to document and then disseminate, via text, sound, and images, information about the cultural transformation, and, in some cases, destruction of different ways of life. Writing about culture and recording different ways of life were a kind of preservation effort inspired by an ethic of concern and obligation, and an implicit nostalgia of modernity. Various recording technologies allowed anthropologists, photographers, ethnographers, and nonprofessional observers interested in culture to capture aspects of culture that seemed curious and fascinating in the face of progress and growth. Some observers were motivated to collect and salvage forms of culture that they sensed would eventually disappear in the face of industrialization and expansion, which went hand in hand with modern life.

From the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century, the "discovery" of indigenous people by anthropologists also motivated a desire to understand the lives of an Other; this desire reflected a combination of exoticizing that Other as well as a general curiosity about people who were living different lives from those of their observers. As local indigenous cultures either died off, were swallowed up by a hegemonic national culture, or were studied to the point that a general public believed there was nothing left to learn about them, many documentarians and ethnographers began to study cultural practices and groups that were closer to home geographically and experientially, or the researchers sought out subcultures within the broader national cultural sphere. The history of these qualitative studies by anthropology's and sociology's founding fieldworkers is well known among students of ethnography. For the most part, the bibliography of ethnographic work since the end of the 19th century offers an index of

written texts that testify to the efforts of different scholars who wrote about the cultural life of different groups. However, what is less known is how different individuals were also experimenting with different ways of recording cultural life in a manner that falls outside the practices of conventional academic research. Along with the formalized ethnographic writing of anthropologists and sociologists, nonacademics responded to the same impulses for recording cultural life by using new sound recording technologies. Some of these people had academic interests, some were supported by educational institutions, and some were amateurs whose interest in technology was paralleled by an interest in capturing the sounds of cultural life.

This chapter charts some important efforts of individuals who worked mostly outside the academy, who set a tone for diverse approaches to recording culture, modeling the very spirit of polyvalency that has become a central thrust for contemporary interpretive and critical qualitative researchers. We argue that many of the same issues that concern qualitative researchers today were also at work among professional and amateur observers during various periods of the 20th century. In particular, we find that their efforts to record and document cultural life reflect many of the goals advanced in our most important contemporary theoretical debates about qualitative research. But most important, we show how audio recordings can provide qualitative researchers with opportunities to more fully engage the people and places being studied while functioning as an alternative to a written representation of cultural life.

Looking back on various instances of sound recording, we find that many of the same impulses that fueled the observation of and reporting on cultural life by anthropologists, sociologists, and journalists were also a force for those who sought to document through sound. In many ways, the practices of writing and recording culture share a common set of interests, and in some cases the practices of sound recording and audio documentary actually anticipate some of the same concerns about cultural representation that occupy current ethnographic work. Although more recent audio documentaries have had a tremendous impact on people's sense of the past, present, and future, as evidenced in the sheer number of listeners who tune in to public radio programs such as *All Things Considered* and *This American Life*, documentary efforts to record, interpret, and represent cultural life have not really been viewed as a mode of qualitative research.¹ Instead, the sparse literature on audio documentary tends to serve as a guide for aspiring documentarians and radio journalists, providing tips about interviewing, logging tape, writing a script, and editing.² Meanwhile, qualitative researchers have avoided audio documentary altogether as a site of analysis and a model for creative fieldwork. Here, we look back at the work of individuals from various periods in an effort to show how writing culture and recording culture share a lot of common ground and how audio recording in particular offers an exciting and refreshing set of possibilities for qualitative researchers.

HEARING VOICES

J. Walter Fewkes, a Harvard-trained marine biologist who turned his ears and eyes toward ethnology and anthropology, is among the Passamaquoddy tribe on the eastern tip of Maine, south of Calais, on the St. Croix River. This is the story of how "Glooscap reduced the size of the animals," claims one member of the tribe. Here is an old tale about "how Pookjinsquess stole a child." This is the song of the "Snake Dance." Then, there's the story of the medicine man who turned into a cedar tree. The Passamaquoddy sing more songs. One of them speaks the days of the week and the numerals from 1 to 20. Another speaks a "collection of Indian words corresponding with those found on page 82 of the schedule of the United States Bureau of Ethnology." It is April 1890, and Fewkes is listening and cranking the handle of a phonograph, allowing a needle to record the sounds, stories, and songs of the Passamaquoddy.

"The songs and stories were taken from the Indians themselves, on the wax cylinders of the phonograph," Fewkes wrote in *The Journal of American Folk-Lore*. "In most cases a single cylinder sufficed, although in others one story occupied several cylinders. None of the songs required more than one cylinder." He discovered that many of the tribal members spoke English.

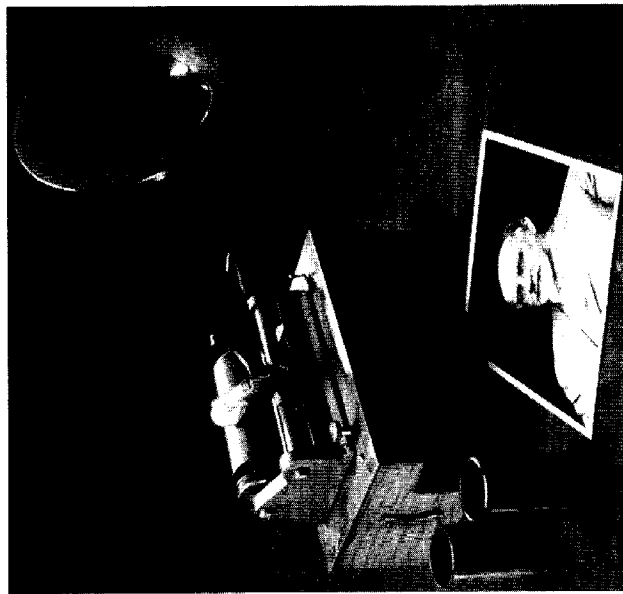


Photo 1.1 Jesse Walter Fewkes and a cylinder recorder

Therefore, his efforts to record their stories and songs and the pronunciations of terms and names and characters was not only part of a project to learn about another group and their cultural practices but also an opportunity to engage in the big modern salvage effort to capture what was left before Progress erased it all. "I should judge from my own observations that the language is rapidly dying out," wrote Fewkes. "The old games, dances, and songs are fast becoming extinct, and the Passamaquoddy has lost almost everything which characterized his fathers." Fewkes had great faith in the accuracy of the phonograph to preserve something that phonetic and written methods could not provide. The sounds of a disappearing culture and recordings of language and stories also allowed members of the tribe to recognize their own voices. Fewkes believed his Passamaquoddy recordings were the first of their kind. This was an experimental use of new recording technology, and during the summer of that same year, Fewkes hauled his phonograph to New Mexico to record the sounds of Zuni culture on wax cylinders.³

Three decades later Robert Winslow Gordon is in the San Francisco Bay area. He's turning the crank of a heavy wax cylinder recorder that he brought down to a waterfront—probably in Oakland—to capture sea songs and shanties. The singer is unknown, but we can imagine him an experienced sailor as he calls out directions to assemble a crew:

Cast her up! Sweat up that weather main brace.

Fetch on there, boys, look to it, come on,

Shake a leg, all together now.

And then he sings:

Yankee John with his sea boots on,

Haul the woodpile down.

Yankee John with his sea boots on,

Haul the woodpile down . . .

Gordon made more than 300 cylinder recordings of songs like "Haul the Woodpile Down." Throughout the 1920s, he lugged his gear from San Francisco to the Appalachian Mountains and to the Georgia coast to record American folk songs from sailors, captains, stevedores, hoboes, and hillbillies. He had worked on a PhD in English literature at Harvard (but never completed his dissertation) and took a position at the University of California at Berkeley in 1917. It was during this time that his interest in folk songs and recording began to flourish. Gordon was "successful in his

fieldwork, but most of his colleagues in Berkeley's English department failed to recognize it," noted Debora Kodish in her biography of Gordon. "Few of them knew what he was doing on the waterfront, and many expressed the wish that he would spend his time on more orthodox academic pursuits."⁴ Rather than write for conventional academic journals, Gordon wrote a regular column, "Old Songs That Men Have Sung," for the popular magazine *Adventure*. In it, he published the transcribed verses of the folk songs he'd collected and, through his readers, made contacts for gathering more folk music throughout the country. In 1928, Gordon was recognized as the nation's authority on the collection and study of folk music and was named the first director of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress.

In July 1933, 65-year-old John Lomax and his 18-year-old son, Alan, are at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola.⁵ They had been on the road for a month, roaming Texas prison farms and recording prisoners singing the blues, ballads, and work songs. The previous summer, John Lomax visited the archive of folk music that Gordon had built at the Library of Congress. Lomax made a deal with the library to help grow its collection. It provided him with recording equipment, and he agreed to travel the country recording songs that would be added to the archive. Now, in Angola Prison, with a new 315-pound acetate disc recorder mounted in the trunk of their Ford sedan, John and Alan turn the microphone on 45-year-old Huddie



Photo 1.2 John Avery Lomax standing next to car

Ledbetter, who plays blues on a 12-string guitar. Better known by his nickname "Leadbelly," Ledbetter's songs are a staple of American folk music culture: "Goodnight Irene," "Midnight Special," and "Where Did You Sleep Last Night?" are three of the most popular.

These three scenes are a small part of the history of recording culture and, in many ways, are the story of an academic pursuit. They reflect both a fascination with modern technologies and a fear about the obliteration of local and regional knowledge through modern progress. Fewkes among the native tribes, Gordon on the waterfront, and the Lomaxes roaming the South collecting work songs from prisoners and laborers demonstrate that

sense of a documentary impulse that is at once fueled by a desire to find culture and a fear that the culture may disappear if nothing is done about collecting it.⁶ The same aim to rescue a disappearing culture drove numerous anthropological field studies and ethnographies during the first half of the 20th century; however, for many scholars, the salvage project played out in the written text of books and journal articles. The absence of a *textual* record in these audio projects can be disconcerting for academics. For instance, Norm Cohen noted that Robert Winslow Gordon was a prodigious collector of folk music, accumulating nearly 3,000 songs between 1922 and 1929, but Cohen concluded his assessment of Gordon's work with a powerful question about the privilege of written text in academe: "Why did Gordon never publish a case study based on his research?"⁷

In the face of Gordon's enormous audio collection, Cohen is left baffled by the absence of the familiar academic text. What? No ink absorbed on peer-reviewed paper? What? No traditional account that will provide some definition and interpretation in a journal article or a book? Being puzzled by the idea of conducting research that does not yield to the traditions and conventions of university departments is indicative, perhaps, of the deeply rutted road of an academic culture traditionally invested in the written text that emerges from complementary faulty dualisms: research-production and process-product. In his history of sound recording technology, David Morton noted that even oral historians, a group of scholars who work directly with sonic recordings, never seemed to find an appreciation for the actual recorded sound of their subjects. "Partly for practical reasons, almost all oral history archives sought to transcribe taped interviews into typewritten documents," wrote Morton, suggesting that most researchers supposedly found transcripts easier to use than recordings. "Edison had insisted that the phonograph's virtue in historical documentation would be the preservation of men's memories 'in their own voices,'" claimed Morton, "but through the early 1960s Columbia University among others *routinely destroyed the original recordings following their transcription* (emphasis added)."⁸

In part, privileging the transcription over the audio recording was and continues to be a practical matter. Reading transcripts, editing them, and even allowing the subjects of oral history to rewrite, clarify, or edit their own comments were tasks much more easily accomplished by putting a pen to paper than by using the original tape recording. But the impracticalities of recording equipment and media offer only a partial explanation for scholarly preferences that gravitate toward the fixed word and image of the document and a more ambivalent (and at times dismissive) stance toward other modes of documentation. This privileging of the written text and the maintenance of the research-production distinction runs counter to the ongoing calls among many of the leading qualitative scholars for alternative approaches to qualitative research and representation.

INSCRIBING CULTURE

In the early 1970s, Clifford Geertz distinguished the practice of ethnography as a process of writing equated with inscription. Geertz, who tended to see the possibilities of "textualizing" nearly everything, said that the "ethnographer 'inscribes' social discourse; *he writes it down*. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in inscriptions and can be reconstructed."⁹ For Geertz, the term *inscription* moved the ethnographer away from the fantasy of objectivity, the mechanical posture of neutrally recording an event, and toward a more interpretive stance. Relying on the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, Geertz aimed to conceive of ethnography as interpretive description. Writing is a means of inscribing social discourse, he suggested, of fixing it so it can persist as a source of perusal, another level of interpretation, and a starting point for provisional forms of knowledge that can expand and contract with even more interpretation.

An analysis of culture should be a process of "guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses," argued Geertz.¹⁰ But even as Geertz's ethnographic enterprise seemed largely motivated by a view of the world as written, it was a mode of writing (or an ethnography) not so much motivated by an ethic of preservation.¹¹ If his approach differed from that of Fewkes, Gordon, and Lomax in terms of preservation, Geertz seemed to share some of the same intentions of these men: listening and recording (and we use *recording* in the broadest sense of documenting and interpreting and making available) as a path toward making sense of the complexity of culture and allowing for an emergence of multiple meanings. These issues and distinctions (writing and recording; salvaging and preserving; transcribing, documenting, inscribing, and interpreting) are part of a larger series of debates about the representation of cultural experience, and Geertz is clearly one who anticipated and fostered this dialogue about culture and representations of cultural life.

The crisis of cultural authority that made such a big splash among ethnographers beginning in the late 1960s clearly opened the door for a consideration of the politics of representation and the possibility of nontraditional forms of scholarly work. By the mid-1980s, James Clifford's critical observation that anthropologists and ethnographers have always been engaged in a process of writing culture only underscored the politics of cultural representation by emphasizing the absence of any neutral vantage point from which to observe culture.¹² Instead, Clifford stated that the ways we understand and make claims about a culture are products of how we "write" a culture. More directly, the process of writing brings culture into being. To a large extent, Clifford was coming back around to the prospect of textualizing cultural experience, but he did so with a sharper critical edge. In fact, Clifford's

approach would bring a critical perspective to bear on Geertz's work, pointing to an interpretive paradigm that was ethnocentrically based in Western thought. Clifford's concept of writing culture found its shape through a Bakhtinian-influenced notion of dialogism. For Bakhtin, this dialogic perspective was a feature of the novel. The novel is a site of multiple discourses that energize each other through their differences; the novel is an arena of different voices in dialogue. Clifford extended this idea to address the ways in which the ethnographer, subscribing to a dialogic perspective, would understand his or her own voice as one among many that circulated and spoke to and against each other in an ethnographic text.

In contrast to treating culture as a bounded and contained concept, Clifford advocated a dialogic approach that treats culture as polyphonic and nonfinalized. This view of culture emphasizes listening to multiple voices. In this sense, the tensions of dialogue and differing viewpoints help refract utterances as light is refracted and bent through a prism. Clifford heard in this sense of dialogism a metaphor for understanding culture as a polyphonic enterprise, a way of hearing the multiple voices at work in any given instance or event. No longer would the ethnographic document offer the final word on culture. Instead, it would be a record (still usually written) of how one engaged in a dialogue with others in some elsewhere, of how one spoke of what he or she had learned from others somewhere away from that nebulous concept of "home," and how one tried to provide a context where other voices could be heard.

Clifford's argument for a dialogic approach to fieldwork asked qualitative scholars to consider the shared and divided methodological terrain for taking culture into account or, perhaps more precisely, making culture into an account. Much has been written about the possibilities for new ethnographic practices, and the critiques of ethnography have been widely circulated; amid all of it, the calls for alternatives seem to persist.¹³ In part, our description of the cultural recording projects undertaken by Fewkes, Gordon, and John and Alan Lomax offers some perspective of and balance to histories of qualitative methods that draw on anthropologically based methods as the sole means of understanding, writing about, and preserving culture.¹⁴ In the context of the conventions of ethnographic observation and writing, these men provide an alternative method of apprehending and salvaging what seemed a disappearing sense of cultural life.

Media historian Lisa Gitelman pointed out that from the phonograph's very inception Edison imagined the technology as having a capacity for saving the sound of culture from oblivion. "In keeping with the important public uses of phonetic shorthand for court and legislative reports, the phonograph would also provide a cultural repository, an archive for sounds," wrote Gitelman. "The British critic Matthew Arnold had only recently defined culture as 'the best that has been thought and said in the world,' and now the phonograph could save up the voices, Edison suggested, of 'our Washingtons, our Lincolns, [and] our Gladstones.' And there was plenty

more to save. The American Philological Society, Edison reported to the *New York Times*, had requested a phonograph 'to preserve the accents of the Onondagas and Tuscaroras, who are dying out.'¹⁵ This is precisely what Fewkes did, and Gordon and the Lomaxes followed suit, although they certainly (and thankfully) opened up the category of "culture" to include laborers and prisoners, as well as politicians and presidents. They were materializing through their sonic recordings the very ideas that Raymond Williams would advance in 1958, when he argued that culture is ordinary.¹⁶ As we consider the ways that the practices and motives of writing culture and recording culture diverge and reconnect, it's worth noting that—despite all the weight he placed on texts—Geertz could at least imagine other modes of ethnographic practice. "Most ethnography is in fact to be found in books and articles, rather than in films, records, museum displays, or whatever," he noted. "Self-consciousness about modes of representation (not to speak of experiments with them) has been very lacking in anthropology."¹⁷

Blending this broadened sense of fieldwork and representational practices with Clifford's dialogic vision of qualitative work leads us to invoke some other, different voices that help move scholars toward recovering the practices of listening to culture in a literal and textual sense. Ethnographers seeking imaginative models for writing and recording culture could (and should) easily shift their attention to some other domains of cultural observation and reporting and find a whole realm of work and discourse that seems to deal directly and practically with the questions posed by those searching for an ethnographic alternative.

MICROSCOPIC SOUNDS

In the decade before Williams would propose a more inclusive conception of culture as a "whole way of life," and without the benefit of graduate coursework in ethnographic methods, Tony Schwartz uses a tape recorder to study the migration of a population of people to New York City. He is interested in understanding how this latest group of migrants occupies the city, how they move through the same spaces and places where others from elsewhere have come before. He records the voices of immigrants speaking about their feelings of rejection and how it feels to physically move through the city. He listens to them and records their comments about housing conditions and food, and he records them singing traditional songs. He talks with people who already live and work in the places where the migrants have come to live, and he records their comments about what it is like to have strangers move into their space. He also listens to people who run businesses in these neighborhoods. Schwartz records them talking about how new magazines are appearing on the shelves, how there are different kinds of movies playing in the theaters. Here are some teenage boys playing drums and

singing on the street, so he records them. Here are some children playing in the street, so he records them and has one of them describe how the game works. Schwartz goes to the airport to record the voice of the announcements of flight arrivals over the public address system. He makes recordings of the sounds of these immigrants learning to speak English. All of these voices come together to provide a composite portrait of Puerto Ricans immigrating to New York City. Schwartz begins making these recordings for *Nueva York* in 1948 and continues for 8 years, creating a documentary that captures something unable to be conveyed in print.

In 1945, Tony Schwartz fashioned a portable audio recorder by modifying a Webcor wire recorder with a VU meter that allowed him to regulate the volume of sounds he was trying to capture, and he began documenting people and places through sound. That same year, he started producing a weekly radio program for WNYC that featured the sounds he collected as well as recordings made by other enthusiasts around the country and around the world. Eventually, he amassed thousands of recordings through exchanges with these other hobbyists and collectors. In addition to gathering materials for his radio show and trading them with other collectors, Schwartz also produced multiple albums for Folkways Records. Among these was the compilation of the audio recordings that formed *Nueva York: A Tape Documentary of Puerto Rican New Yorkers*, which is a particularly important documentary because of its polyvocal features and because of Schwartz's understanding of the microscopic nature of his work on this piece.

Of this study of new urban immigrants, Schwartz noted that it was by no means a definitive account: "I feel there were two ways this documentary could have been done. One would be all in Spanish which only Spanish speaking people could understand, and the other would be with various forms of translation. Since I spoke no Spanish, I gravitated toward the latter," he wrote in 1956 for the liner notes for *Nueva York*. "I think this form has enabled this record to be a bridge between the Puerto Rican New Yorker and other New Yorkers, most of whom speak English. It is my hope that this record will bring some understanding of the problems a people have in moving to a new location, leaving their old homes and ways of life."¹⁸



Photo 1.3 Tony Schwartz recording in New York City, 1962

We find in the example of Schwartz a documentarian motivated by his own experience and curiosity. His early adoption and adaptation of the wire recorder certainly fits with the practices of recording culture presented in the work of Fewkes or Gordon, among others. Additionally, Schwartz is neither a trained anthropologist nor a folklorist or a sociologist, yet he has a penchant for recordings that show the common terrain those disciplines share with documentary. And he is only one of many people who were fascinated by and interested in the sounds of the world around them. Although early forms of audio recording technology were available to consumers during the early 20th century, the mass marketing of portable magnetic tape recorders for home use really took off in the 1950s. Public school systems were a major market for these recorders in the United States, and they became part of a growing audio-visual curriculum that involved teachers and students recording themselves as well as listening to commercially produced educational tapes.¹⁹ These early reel-to-reel recorders were also available to consumers for home recording and were followed by the later popularity of the cassette. Although sound recording as a hobby never flourished in the same way that home movie making would, there were many who used audio recorders to collect sounds, take notes, record friends and family, record their own music, put together mix tapes, bootleg live performances, and create inventive sound compositions. This is not the place to engage in a discussion of audio recording as a hobby, but we cannot and should not overlook the extent of these early consumers' inventiveness and imagination in the use of new recording technologies. They operated on an experimental, do-it-yourself ethic, and they were constantly trying new approaches to listen to their worlds and document the sounds. Rarely officially recognized for their efforts, and although many of these private recordings remain obscure, they, too, comprise a record of sounds and voices that are part of a culture of popular uses and interest in sound. As audio projects such as *Lost and Found Sound* have shown, early recordings can be rescued from obscurity to provide interesting forays into how sound captured the imagination of people in everyday life and also offer insight into the culture of popular recording. A nonacademic use of such recordings has even become the source of more contemporary creative artists, such as Negativland or The Books, who create a new form of audio culture by incorporating a collage of various found recordings, old radio broadcasts, answering machine messages, and recorded conversations and music into their compositions.²⁰

In terms of innovative approaches toward writing and recording culture, we can look to Schwartz's work as setting into motion modes of observing, recording, and representing cultural experiences that are now not only commonplace in audio documentary but also are representative of the research processes and ethics that were at the core of Geertz's and Clifford's arguments. Even though it was made between 1948 and 1956,

Nueva York offers an example of cutting-edge work that remains instructive to ethnographers today.²¹ It is a work that exemplifies the dialogic principle that Clifford described as a progressive quality of ethnographic practice. In these recordings, one hears a polyphonic expression of diverse experiences and viewpoints as well as languages in juxtaposition.²² Schwartz, like the ethnographer presented in Clifford's critical ethnography, is a recorder of sound and speech, a conduit for bringing together multiple voices and the atmospheric contexts where these participants dwell. Also, *Nueva York* reflects the focus on culture as public, which Geertz identifies as the site of ethnographic study. Finally, Schwartz's claims that his documentary is not a definitive study of culture, but one that could have taken a different direction, would anticipate Geertz's argument that a central characteristic of ethnography as thick description is that ethnography is microscopic; the goal is not "large-scale interpretations of whole societies, civilizations, world events, and so on."²³

Nueva York is a project that emerges from Schwartz's own generational understanding of immigration and his own family history. "When I was a child, I remember my father telling me about his parents' experiences in coming to New York from Europe. In future years I was shown places where they had first lived and worked," he wrote in his liner notes for *Nueva York*. "In the 1940's and 1950's I saw Puerto Rican families moving into the same areas. . . . New Yorkers who a few years or a generation ago had been in the same situation were dealing with the Puerto Rican New Yorkers with the same misunderstanding they had been dealt." Schwartz is not simply a witness to contemporary stories of immigration; his observation of life in the city takes a more panoramic view. The same spaces move through cycles of occupation. The same stories are told. The same practices of marginalization and misunderstanding return. It is a narrative that carries—even today—a sense of immediacy because it is a record of cultural presence, preserved in the sounds of voices and places that exist in the form of Schwartz's sound recordings.

What Schwartz realized (as do many others who document their worlds through sound), and which is crucial for qualitative researchers to understand as they seek out alternative approaches to qualitative work, is that recording culture provides for a unique means of experiencing and making sense of reality. To listen to the world as captured through a microphone and subsequently heard through headphones or stereo speakers is to grasp a sensory experience of a present. That is, recorded sounds—regardless of their temporality—preserve a sense of presence and immediacy that places the listener in a scene. In this way, making an audio recording shares some of the same elements of making field notes.

Another form of experimental "recording" began to emerge around the same time that Schwartz was producing his radio program on the sounds of the city. This new form reflected a similar desire to preserve a sense of presence and

shows how the research-production and process-product dualism imbues critiques of many ethnographic alternatives. During the 1960s, journalists began experimenting with new approaches to observing and reporting that emphasized the idea of putting readers in the scene. Initially dubbed the New Journalism, and later identified as literary journalism and eventually known as creative nonfiction in university English departments, this style of cultural reporting provided alternative models for researching and writing culture that explicitly challenged the limitations of conventional "objective" prose. In different ways, the practices and manifestos of the New Journalism offered a parallel to the emerging world of longer forms of audio documentary that Schwartz was pioneering in works such as *Nueva York*.

The efforts of writers such as Jimmy Breslin, Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion, who are often associated with the New Journalism, share some of the same impulses that critics of conventional ethnography have been looking for in their critiques. Two decades before anthropologists and ethnographers became preoccupied with the crisis of cultural representation, the reporters mentioned previously and many others were practicing a form of cultural reporting that seemed to model some of the features people such as Geertz and Clifford were proposing for new practices of ethnography. During the 1960s, the "New Journalism took its energy from the shifting relationship between the individual and the society, which located the process of creating meaning in diverse subcultures, and chronicled the symbolic quest for significance in a fragmenting society," noted David Eason. By the end of that decade, the New Journalism had "revitalized reporting as a form of storytelling while giving shape to many of the cultural changes occurring."²⁴ These journalists used dialogue, scene-by-scene construction, shifting point of view, and recording of the everyday in an effort to create more engaging stories and to reflect the kinds of experiences they had while conducting their research. Although journalists had used literary techniques in the past (most notably reporters who would make names for themselves as novelists, such as George Orwell), those journalists who began to experiment with literary techniques during the 1960s in their features and columns created a new movement that raised issues about the practices of cultural reporting.

For our purposes, the New Journalism is important because it provides a textual model that aspires to some of the same informative and aesthetic values people associate with audio production. The immediacy of sound recordings and the layering of voices and sounds in a common arena point to the dialogic quality of audio documentary. In many ways, audio documentary puts listeners in a scene and allows them to listen to what is going on in much the same way Tom Wolfe's story "Radical Chic" brings readers to Leonard Bernstein's apartment for a cocktail party where New York high society liberals court members of the Black Panther Party.²⁵ The essay is an event, one that focuses on details of a single gathering but is highly

symbolic of a larger set of political and status relationships that tell a cultural story. Rather than simply providing a detached authorial analysis of the occasion, Wolfe's story offers an implicit analysis. In other words, the essay allows a reader (or one who "listens" to the story) to comprehend the story and make sense of it without an expert pointing out the significance of everything going on in the room. Wolfe offers a way of knowing through a witnessing of an event. In the same way, one can listen to a sound portrait in David Isay and Stacy Abramson's "The Sunshine Hotel" and be taken to a place where one hears the voices and sounds of the residents of a Bowery flophouse, a world one might not likely enter on one's own. Rather than a voice-over narration by one of the producers, the narrator of the piece is Nathan Smith, the hotel's manager. "Welcome, come on in," Smith tells the listener in the opening of the story. "If you got the rent money, you can stay. If you ain't, beat it!" This audio sound portrait of a single place recorded over a 24-hour period speaks to a larger dimension of cultural life imbued with hard luck, poverty, and its own sense of poetry.²⁶ The New Journalism has a parallel set of interests with audio recording in the sense that the story itself becomes a way of knowing, and that knowledge resides in the details.

Of course, New Journalism has not been without its critics, particularly among ethnographers. Some critics in the past accused New Journalists of fabricating stories, arguing that the time journalists spent developing a story couldn't be sufficient to produce such rich dialogue and detailed accounts.²⁷ Tom Wolfe and other literary journalists countered that a rich text could be produced only if writers had in fact spent enough time in developing their stories. Though such critics were flirting with a sense of journalists' ethics (and to some extent the journalists were opening a door to an ethical attack), these critics also were raising larger concerns about issues of production and research methods.²⁸

John Van Maanen's *Tales of the Field* was published amid the calls for reconsidering a critical ethnography. His categorization of realist, confessional, and impressionist ethnographies provides some latitude in conceiving of ethnographic objectives and styles, and affirms the notion of ethnography as text. He also was one of the first ethnographers to acknowledge the intersections of literary journalism and ethnography, claiming that fieldwork is not "the exclusive, protected-by-patent business of anthropologists and sociologists alone," even if he did not directly address the research dimensions of creative forms of nonfiction reporting.²⁹ Other qualitative researchers have been less open to reading New Journalism or literary journalism as a model for ethnographic fieldwork. For example, Michael Agar wrote that "the text-oriented celebration of the neglected product will cause us to lose sight of the process side."³⁰ He argued that this mode of reporting is an example of the "dilemma that occurs when process and product turn problematic."³¹ In other words, he is anxious that scholars have become so concerned with writing that they will overlook important details when doing fieldwork. Essentially,

Agar's criticism of literary journalism suggests a question of privileging style over substance, with these journalists focusing on the production of a final text at the expense of a sufficient process for researching their subjects. Agar wrote, "The material on method provided by CN [creative nonfiction] critics and authors tells us that an account of fact/fiction relations is elusive at best; their methodological discussions suggest the discontinuity between process and product rather than resolving it."³²

Perhaps Agar views literary journalism as more style and product oriented because the bulk of reflection on the craft of this form of cultural reporting by its practitioners tends to focus on the creative features of literary journalism. Literary journalists' own evaluation of the craft tends to take for granted the depth of research needed to produce such rich texts. Even Van Maanen's desire to include literary journalism in his textual schema further distances this form of cultural reporting from qualitative research for those seeking innovative approaches to ethnography. Van Maanen treats literary journalism as a textual model but not as a form of research.³³

What do these criticisms and concerns have to do with audio documentary and recording culture in the ways we have been discussing? A tendency to bifurcate the research product from the research process leads to a dualism that typically discounts how the writing or recording process ties to the final product. In other words, recording is itself a form of research. Of course it is important for a documentary producer to capture good sound, but getting any kind of recording is also a mode of exploration and investigation in its own right. Recording people during an interview and obtaining a variety of relevant and interesting sounds that can be used in the composition of a documentary are all aspects of a research process that will take shape and form in writing and producing an audio documentary. It is much the same for the literary journalist who gathers interviews, facts, and impressions from observing a scene or an event. These observations become the basis for interpretation and analysis, and the writing process becomes part and parcel of telling a compelling story with depth and insight. In both cases, recording and writing, narrative can be seen as a mode of inquiry. This means that the process of trying to find the story and telling the story are intimately tied to each other. In the case of audio documentary, the research process can be contingent on several modes of investigation—fieldwork, interviews, historical and archival research, the use of institutional sources of information, personal experience—that are closely aligned with both journalism and ethnography. All of this provides for the possibility of a final work, and it is in the final work that the final test of knowledge, interest, and aesthetic appeal will come to rest.

None of this is to say that the New Journalists of the past or audio documentarians today strictly focus on the process of research and reporting. Certainly, the finished product has always been important because it represents the commitment and talent of the researcher. Instead, what we see in the example of someone like Tony Schwartz is a curious individual who is very much reliant on the kinds of sounds and interviews he or she can manage to record and

the choices an individual makes during the recording process. It is not as though the story exists before someone goes out to make the recordings. Instead, the recordings give some sense of the scope of what is possible to know about the subject, how the recordings will either help to tell a story or not, and how a particular story limits what it can say about any subject. When people listen to a documentary like *Nueva York*, they can recognize Schwartz as a fieldworker who uses sound to explore and represent issues big and small in ways that embody thick description, a microscopic focus on cultural stability and transformation, and he does so in ways that allow listeners to not only hear and feel the nuances of his choices but also to realize that he has made good and provisional choices. As with any story or ethnography, the critic may always point toward some absence or deficiency that might prevent a piece of work from being more complete or comprehensive. In our view, an audio documentary such as *Nueva York* suggests an avenue that models the possibilities of an alternative approach to ethnography. Much the same is true of using literary journalism as a research model. That doesn't mean researchers need to treat such alternatives as an all-or-nothing option, one requiring that ethnographers either fully embrace an ethnographic alternative or fully reject that alternative in light of the conventions of early incarnations of the ethnographic genre. In many instances, researchers have been too quick to reject alternatives because they have internalized problematic dualisms relative to the research process.

LAYERED SOUND AND THE CRAFT OF COMPOSING A STORY

The Kitchen Sisters (Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva) are in Santa Cruz, California, in the 1970s. A flyer for an event at a local dive bar catches their eye: *Pool Shark in Town Tonight!* Nelson and Silva go to the bar with their recorders and find a one-handed pool player named Ernest "Ernie" Morgan shooting pool and telling stories about his life. The bar is hopping. The music from the jukebox blends with the sonic hum of the crowd. People are excited by Morgan's storytelling. Nelson is one of them, and she follows the one-handed pool shark around the table with her microphone, recording his stories, his laughter, and the clacking balls crashing together, banking off the padded sides, and eventually dropping into the pockets. Nelson and Silva know they have hit upon a timeless story; this subject will entice listeners for years to come, and the sounds they record are so rich that people listening will feel as if they are in the bar watching Ernie Morgan perform his magic.

The next day Nelson and Silva listen to the tape and realize they have a major problem. The layers of sound that conveyed the overall vibrancy of the event are impossible to edit without making the whole story sound disjointed. Every cut would be heard. Listeners would wonder what happened to the second verse of a song playing on the jukebox if that verse were spread out across the cutting room floor. And they would question why the people

talking in the background seem to be speaking incomplete sentences. "That's how we had our rude awakening to how you do the craft," said Nelson.³⁴

The Kitchen Sisters believe in the story and know how to tell it, so they contact Ernie Morgan and arrange to record him again. This time they control the sonic environment so they can isolate clean sounds that will be layered with the recordings they made the first night at the bar. Nelson and Silva follow Morgan around a nearly empty pool hall during the day, recording him while he shoots pool with just a few people around the table. They mic him up close and record him while he moves through his routine of shot selections. Again, they record the crack of the break and the chalking of the cue.

Next, the Kitchen Sisters go back to the original bar on a crowded night and record the general room sounds, including people talking and laughing, arguing with and teasing one another. They put coins in the jukebox and record the same songs that played the other night, which can then be mixed with the other ambient sounds to put listeners in the scene. In short, the Kitchen Sisters are now engaging in the creative treatment of actuality to make *The Legend of Ernest Morgan: The World's Champion One-Handed Pool Player*. All of these separate recordings will be layered in a manner that allows for an engaging and coherent narrative, one where there is a sense of continuity rather than abrupt cuts and jumps in the sound. This dense layering "has really become our style," noted Nelson. "What sounds as if you are there in real time is often a very concentrated layering that's a re-creation of what is, but if we recorded it as is, we would never be able to cut it."



Photo 1.4 Nikki Silva recording in the 1970s

In terms of Van Maanen's categories for ethnographic writing, the Kitchen Sisters are the impressionist storytellers compared to the stark realism of the recordings made by early practitioners such as Fewkes or Gordon. Of course, the ethnographer who makes use of impressionist techniques will likely face resistance from critics who remain invested in a false notion that literary flair and theoretical depth are mutually exclusive. That is, the objective voice that pervades realist writing has historically been considered proof that the researcher has remained a detached and objective observer throughout the research process, whereas the interjection of the observer into the impressionist tale and her or his clear concern for the prose that represents the fieldwork can lead critics to claim that the ethnographic text is more important than the research process (as shown earlier in Agar's critique of creative nonfiction). Similarly, the Kitchen Sisters, rerecording of Morgan and their layering of sounds recorded in various sessions and times might lead documentary purists, who seem to forget that all documentary is representation rather than reproduction,³⁵ and ethnographers, who may consider such practices to be fictional, to claim that Nelson and Silva manipulated reality to tell a good story—that is, that they moved well beyond the kind of factual reporting that is central to qualitative fieldwork. But if one considers the amount of work that went into the creation of *The Legend of Ernest Morgan*, the Kitchen Sisters did what any good qualitative researcher would do: They went into the field again and again to understand the complexity and nuances of the cultural practices that they were studying, and they did so in an effort to represent the world as they experienced it on that night in a Santa Cruz dive bar. Rarely would an ethnographer show up at a particular place one time and then claim that the totality of that event was covered. Instead, ethnographers study a place or group of people and record field notes, set up interviews and follow-up interviews, and go back to a place repeatedly before actually writing an essay or a book. Then, when they write a more comprehensive article, chapter, or book, ethnographers usually pull together what they learned over the course of months or years in a fashion that often appears to be temporally seamless.

The Kitchen Sisters came to audio work individually and then collectively because they were dissatisfied with the limitations of writing about culture and were drawn to storytelling. "I loved radio as a little girl," claimed Nelson. "The rhythms of speech in disc jockeys fascinated me. And then when I went to college I studied the history of folk culture through music." She was an undergraduate student writing an essay about Woody Guthrie in one of her music classes and thought, "Why am I doing a written piece? I want to hear it and that's how I decided to make my first audio piece."

Nelson's initiation into the world of audio documentary research and production and the motivation for such work are shared by many of today's radio producers.³⁶ "I think we have influenced the work of other radio producers by showing that you can get out of the way; you don't have to be



Photo 1.5 Davia Nelson recording in the 1970s

in everything that you do and still be there," observed Nelson. "I think a Kitchen Sisters piece is very narrated; it's just not our voice. It's our hand in a way. There is a designated narrator, a lead voice in a story usually." To apply this approach to qualitative research would require a major transformation of that trustworthy authorial paradigm so central to the conventions of academic writing. The approach of layered sounds and voices, instead, leans more toward that sense of polyvocality that is central to critical ethnography. It is an approach that blends the researcher's voice with the voices of the participants, calling forth the researcher as a bricoleur who combines various recordings to make a new composition that represents a sense of a world and those who dwell in it. Moving beyond the "voice of God," that omniscient documentarian-narrator who so often leads listeners through documentaries,³⁷ and relying on heavy editing to achieve a level of sonic complexity in telling a story contribute to the unique sound of the Kitchen Sisters' work. "I think we cut more than most people I know. We just cut, cut, cut," noted Nelson. "We were always interested in that idea of quilting, where we are taking scraps and shards and pieces and working that into the contemporary thing we were doing." This sense of bricolage and quilting inherent in their work is analogous to the kinds of metaphors for qualitative work that began to circulate among qualitative researchers who were interested in democratizing ethnographic texts to numerous voices and subjects.³⁸ To a large extent, the Kitchen Sisters' work embodies this

same ethic and models a sense of interdisciplinary interests. "I think we've done a little bit in the area of women's history, never intending to do women's history but following our instincts," said Nelson. "I think we've helped be part of that group of people who have done oral history and unusual stories and immigrant histories and nontraditional voices."

Part of the Kitchen Sisters' repertoire for offering creative representational models for research involves documentary work that blends their own contemporary recordings with archival recordings. In doing so, they implicitly ask listeners to reexamine how they hear the subjects of research. "The research is one of our favorite parts," argued Nelson. "We start by looking at a story and try to find archival recordings." This emphasis on archival recordings provides an important addition to the type of historical research most academics conduct to help situate their fieldwork. Typically, qualitative researchers tend to seek out archives in libraries and other official collections that provide historical textual evidence and accounts. But sonic recordings are important and useful archival sources that can serve as the basis of new compositions as well as provide insight into historical periods, social movements, and the works of particular individuals. For instance, the kinds of recordings made by Fewkes and Gordon are good examples of recovering the sounds of a language or folklore that may have become lost over time. Such recordings are cultural texts in their own right and can be incorporated into audio documentary works that recuperate interest in people, places, events, and periods. In fact, the Kitchen Sisters produced a profile on Tony Schwartz, using a large array of the recordings Schwartz made since 1945. Their 20-minute documentary, "Tony Schwartz: 30,000 Recordings Later," was part of the *Lost and Found Sound* project and features portions of individual recordings from Schwartz's collection and his radio shows in New York. The piece is "narrated" by Schwartz, who reflects on his career and interests in the recording of sound and the sharing of recordings with others.

In their audio documentary on Schwartz, the Kitchen Sisters recognize continuity between not only generations of radio producers but also generations of people who have recorded sound as a hobby and understand its cultural significance. The Kitchen Sisters are a culmination of nearly a century's worth of recording efforts, making use of audio technologies that were created and improved by hobbyists and professionals. They are influenced by oral historians, ethnographers, and journalists and blend a do-it-yourself approach to cultural research and reporting with a challenge to the idea that research and representation are the products of single authors. As Nelson said about their style, "It has always been about culture, it has always been about history; we always use the documentary form; and we have always wanted our stories to be heavily layered and entertaining by using humor and various styles of speech."

SONIC ALTERNATIVES

Clearly, there are many more examples that show how people have been recording and writing culture during the past century. Our aim in this chapter was to discuss a few of the folklorists, anthropologists, ethnographers, and journalists who provide us with some insight into the common motives and interests of cultural representation and expression, and how those interests intersect in the possibilities and practices of recording culture. In different ways, the work of people such as Fewkes, Gordon, the Lomaxes, Schwartz, and the Kitchen Sisters parallel a set of practices of representation and an interest in culture that can be found in the concerns and issues faced by ethnographers and journalists of different periods. To some extent, the work of these audio practitioners anticipated some of the questions and critiques that engaged ethnographers in the 1980s and challenged them to seek alternative modes of cultural representation. Our effort here has been to suggest that audio recording offers a compelling set of possibilities for qualitative research and ethnographic work. Against a backdrop of academic conventions that privilege the writing and reading of ink on paper, an approach to ethnography that relies on recorded sounds and voices as well as listening may seem peculiar to some. Audio reporting has largely been a province of radio journalists, but in their work we find considerable commonality with the interests of ethnographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and anyone else interested in the study of culture. This is not to suggest that ethnographers should aspire to radio journalism. Instead, given the creative potential in the use of audio recording for qualitative work, we see the efforts of Tony Schwartz and the Kitchen Sisters and many others (Joe Frank, David Isay, Jay Allison, Barrett Golding, Scott Carrier, Dmae Roberts, Larry Massett, Ann Heppermann, and Kara Oehler) as offering excellent examples and models for making use of audio recording as an alternative mode of ethnographic representation. In their work we find creativity, imagination, and a sincere interest in and appreciation for understanding many dimensions of cultural experience; they allow us to listen to the world in a manner that can intrigue and inform, which is what any good ethnographic report seeks to accomplish.

Although radio journalism has been one of the more popular and prolific arenas for audio work, it is by no means an index of possible uses of sound recording and qualitative research. Instead, it is a place where we can look to see how good work is accomplished and then consider what other possibilities we might find in the medium for ethnographic work. In Chapter 2 we look more closely at a variety of approaches to audio documentary that open up some of the possibilities for using sound in qualitative research and how these approaches might serve as a starting point for recording and representing cultural life.

story, Wolfe's analysis of great writing not being sent from the heavens but emerging from detailed and dedicated research, Gay Talese's reflection on industry practices that have negatively affected the time and depth required for good research and writing, and Mark Kramer's analysis of literary journalism as a mode of research and writing that requires lengthy and detailed immersion in the lives of others). See Tom Wolfe, "Like a Novel," in *The New Journalism*, eds. Tom Wolfe and Edward Warren Johnson (New York: Picador, 1975), 23–36; Gay Talese, "When Frank Sinatra Had a Cold," *Esquire* (November 1987): 161–166; and Mark Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," in *Literary Journalism*, eds. Norman Sims and Mark Kramer (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

34. Davia Nelson interviewed by Daniel Makagon, September 14, 2007.

35. For an insightful discussion of reproduction versus representation relative to the documentary form, see Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001).

36. For instance, see the "Guests" section at Transom.org.

37. For a thoughtful discussion of the voice of God in documentary film and video, see Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

38. See Denzin and Lincoln for a summary of literature about bricolage and quilting.

SONIC COMPOSITIONS

Contemporary documentary radio programming is attempting to create something special. "It is trying to do something Aristotelian. It is trying to provoke in you the fabled epiphany. It is trying to enact a revelation, a manifestation of the truth," wrote author Rick Moody in a guest column for the online audio workshop Transom.org. "It is trying to make you aware of your surroundings, by exposing you to new environments, and new subcultures, especially those you might not know about, from off in your middle American redoubt. In short, it is trying to create in you the impulse of humanism."¹ For Moody, the construction of radio documentaries is an effort toward transcending local geographies and communities; they are routes toward listening and looking in on the conversations of other neighborhoods and taking an interest in the nooks and niches of culture that reveal what binds and divides people. Such stories can inspire listeners to think critically about issues that are both strange and familiar, and, to that extent, Moody's thoughts about radio documentary reflect the goals of many qualitative researchers: We want to explore something new and unique (even if what is new means reimagining and revisiting something or someplace that is old) and to share that information with readers who will gain a more complex understanding of culture.

Using audio recording technologies as a fieldwork practice and as a mode of presenting qualitative research spawns from some of the same impulses found in other contemporary efforts to represent cultures, communities, and the lives of those who open their worlds to others' curiosity. Through sound recordings, researchers can cultivate a different, sometimes deeper, sense of an environment. Listeners can hear the knocking diesels at an interstate truck stop, the shrill of the train whistle as it barrels through a small Midwestern town, the vibrational tone of the Tibetan singing bowl. Through recorded interviews, listeners hear not only people speaking for themselves but also the culture their voices carry. Listen to the strong brogue of a Scottish soccer fan or the exuberant passions of the skaters at the half-pipe or the clipped and measured *institutionalese* of a government spokesperson explaining new policy and you understand something larger of the worlds where they dwell. These sounds and their voices are indexes of the humanism that Moody alluded to when he described audio documentary as vehicle of exposure. "Sound is intrinsically and unignorably relational: it emanates, propagates, communicates,

vibrates and agitates; it leaves a body and enters others; it binds and unhinges, harmonizes and traumatizes; it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating," wrote Brandon LaBelle.² Besides moving listeners beyond the limits of sight and awakening other senses, recorded sound often invites visions of objects and scenes. In this way, composing a richly textured audio documentary is also an occasion for providing listeners with the sonic resources that awaken imagination and allow them to enter that proverbial theater of the mind.

Whether it is a process of creating original sound recordings or using recordings someone else has made, audio-based qualitative work offers two major opportunities to researchers. First, audio can foreground the aural world, pushing the audience to listen to their surroundings and contemplate those sounds. Second, using audio in creative ways can engage others to help them hear unique features of the sonic world. The former can add sensorial depth to qualitative studies that has been missing from written accounts. The latter has been a feature of documentary work broadcast on public radio stations and Internet sites, as *Re:Sound* producer Roman Mars noted. "I really do think the goal of public radio in particular is to cultivate an engaged and active listener," he claimed.³ However, this notion that sound can engage audiences for qualitative work has not been a feature of discourse among qualitative researchers. It is time that qualitative researchers begin to seriously consider alternatives that will inspire active listening in academe and among a broader public.

In this chapter, we examine various forms of audio that can be used to record and represent fieldwork: soundscape recordings, soundwalks and sonic maps, radio diaries, and audio essays, as well as audio documentaries and historical documentary using archival sound. Each of these sonic recordings provides a set of models for taking into account the possibilities of the audio form. We explore how each approach can provide researchers with unique ways to expand their representational repertoire. Although audio most explicitly focuses on helping audiences hear culture in practice, implicit (and at times explicit) in our discussion are the ways in which audio also allows researchers and audiences to see and feel the environment being studied and how these approaches extend forms of observation, participant observation, historical research, and interviewing. We conclude this chapter with a discussion of the unique possibilities that emerge for researchers who use audio to record and represent culture and some of the challenges that might be encountered. This section explores the various ways in which audio can be used to supplement and complement written accounts (i.e., two different products created from the same study) or be used with ethnographic writing in novel ways (e.g., public presentations and Web sites that feature text and sounds). We address what might be gained and lost when comparing audio pieces to written accounts.

SOUNDSCAPES

The image of the landscape painter standing in a meadow with easel and canvas in front of him is a familiar one. A sea of black-eyed Susans covers the lush green pasture. A stream rolls beyond the pasture. Three cows are drinking from its waters. A blue mountain range lies farther in the distance, and the late afternoon sun throws light on all of it. Our painter is here to record the scene with his palette. Obviously, pigments and brushes cannot capture every detail; there are limits to what can be painted. The canvas frames one's vision of the place, in part, because the land extends in every direction and no one can paint it all. But this is more than an effort to capture the geography. The painter wants to create a work that conveys what it feels like to be standing in this meadow—how the clouds cast shadows over the field, the way sunlight illuminates the distant peaks, and the feel of the breeze blowing through the grasses. Of course, there is more to it than this. The painter carries the brushes, the easel, and the canvas to this meadow believing this environment is worth showing to others. How to capture this light? Will he include the chevron of geese passing through the sky? An image of this place may seem complete to viewers because they are not able to witness the scene firsthand. The painter composes a scene from available elements, selecting what to include or leave out, so that the viewer may sense drama and beauty and feel some larger sense of the spirit of life—perhaps even the spirit of a larger life. The conventions of the landscape-painting genre are well known; more than likely the viewers have been taught to see Nature. Yet, when considering the history of landscape painting, one realizes such images are not pure and objective recordings of a scene. They are renderings that emerge from a witnessing of the world and an imagination of a painter who tries to represent something that is, perhaps, ineffable. We offer this brief example because it is worth asking how one might accomplish something of the same through the sonic palette. How would one listen to a scene? How would one compose a *soundscape*?

Soundscapes are acoustic fields that take many forms.⁴ Some musical compositions are attempts to do something akin to landscape painting, except through sound. For instance, composer Ferde Grofé's work aspired to create musical journeys through landscapes such as the Grand Canyon, Hollywood, Broadway at night, Death Valley, the Mississippi River, and the Hudson River Valley. Essentially, such compositions are typically symphonic attempts to convey a sense of a place with drama and sentimentality. Horns and strings signal a sunrise. Drums convey the rhythms of a city. Rhythms, melodies, and instrumentation offer a vocabulary for listening to an "idea" of a place. Beyond the realm of musical compositions, recording the sounds of an environment offers a way to understand and convey a sense of place. Soundscape studies, or studies of acoustic ecologies, promote "active listening, environmental

awareness, cultural practice sensitive to questions of place, and location-oriented musical education," claimed LaBelle. "While pinpointing local sound as a powerful presence affecting the human condition, ecological balance, and the rhythms of life, acoustic ecology, in turn, expands locality to global proportions."⁵

For more than a few decades, qualitative methods practitioners have been experimenting with different approaches in an attempt to understand different dimensions of social and cultural life, ways of capturing experience through participant observation techniques and getting inside the life worlds of people. These efforts have largely been oriented to visual observation, the reflective dimensions of self-report about experience, and textual transcriptions of conversations and interviews. Researchers have had respondents write letters to reflect on their passions,⁶ photographically documented the scenes of social groups and used the images as a means of eliciting interviews for broader and deeper meanings about their activities,⁷ and tried to capture the nuances of speech, knowledge, and dialect in their studies of communities.⁸ Ultimately, researchers have devised a number of ways to develop critical observation and have extended that information in analyses and in texts designed for undergraduate and graduate students.⁹ Yet, as Paul Stoller noted, ethnographers have failed miserably in the literature when it comes to considering other senses, which might suggest that researchers have also been remiss in the use of senses when conducting fieldwork.¹⁰ Listening more closely to the sounds in public and private spaces can produce richer and more complex engagements with, and representations of, the people and places studied. Soundscape recordings are the best way to start this aural engagement. However, the use of recording technologies to construct soundscape recordings of an environment or community has not been a feature of the literature that discusses qualitative research methods. We can learn a great deal by studying the sonic environments that emerge from social interaction and the cultures of social scenes. Listening to the world through headphones as captured by a microphone offers a unique perspective on taken-for-granted sonic environments that might otherwise be lost as "background" noise.

Sometime when you are in your home, put on a set of headphones attached to a recorder and a microphone. This exercise will work better if others are in the house or apartment, doing what they normally do. Start in one room and begin recording; leave the tape running throughout this exercise. Slowly move through the rooms, opening and closing doors as you go. Use the microphone as a way to capture the particular sounds of each space. Point the microphone toward the radio or a television set. Hold it close to a ticking clock. Let it pick up the voices of people talking in another room and listen to their voices become clearer as you move closer. Record a phone ringing and someone answering it. Stand in the kitchen and notice

the hum of the refrigerator. Record the sound of someone grinding coffee beans. Walk through the front door and listen to the sound of the street from the front porch. As you do this, you will notice how the direction of the microphone helps to isolate particular mundane household sounds. Sometime after you do this, rewind the tape and listen to the recording. Listening to the tape can offer a different sense of your home as a sonic environment that you might otherwise have not been able to appreciate without the benefit of the recording equipment. The spatial differences between sections of the home become more amplified. The elements of what sounds exist to comprise the general atmosphere of the home become distinctive. In many ways, making such a recording fosters a means of focusing attention on what would otherwise not be given a second thought.

In his well-known essay on mechanical reproduction, critic Walter Benjamin noted that photographs of deserted city scenes made by Eugene Atget around 1900 "demand a specific approach; free-floating contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way."¹¹ Much the same might be said of recording a soundscape in this way. Because the photograph isolates an instant of time from the flow of experience, capturing it for a fraction of second, viewers are able to contemplate and study a place through an image wrested from time. In a similar manner, a recorded sound allows for an aural contemplation of an environment by focusing on recorded sounds. Such recordings detach and amplify the resonance of an environment or a specific place by detaching sounds and magnifying them in such a way that one can reflect on them as sonic images. Try listening to the recording you made of your home in this way. If possible, listen in a darkened room wearing headphones; it is likely the experience will allow you to recollect the auditory experience of your home in great detail and depth, as a combination of sound and image.

Experimenting with recording in this manner deepens one's appreciation and understanding of places by providing a unique sense of familiar and new environments. As with nearly all forms of documentary-based audio recording, one of the chief features of a soundscape is the sense of realism conveyed through the process of making and listening to what is captured by the microphone. At the same time, a soundscape is often a composition—it has structure that comes from an active, aural engagement with recordings for both the creator and listener. Put simply, composing a soundscape is often a matter of editing and combining elements of different recordings to create a sense of a place. This is a practical dimension of creating a soundscape. Letting a recording run in real time risks losing the attention of listeners. Instead, the realism of a soundscape stems from a willingness to enter into a sonic sphere of representation, a construction of a scene that beckons toward real voices and real sounds, but it is also a kind of imaginary space and time that exists in its own right.

A momentary return to the example of the landscape painter offers a good analogy to better understand the compositional dimensions of the soundscape. When the painter Thomas Moran created his famous landscape of the Grand Canyon, *Chasm of the Colorado*, in the 1870s, he traveled to the canyon to see the place for himself. The painting he unveiled in 1874 shows a dramatic canyon, a desolate and striking landscape of geologic monuments lit by patches of sunlight. A thunderstorm is breaking, and mist rises from the shadows of the abyss. It is a compelling scene. It asks the viewer to look around and see what is going on here. It is a view that many visitors would see before ever traveling to the canyon, yet no one could ever see the canyon from this vantage point because it does not exist. To make this painting, Moran traveled to the canyon and made sketches from a variety of vantage points. When he returned to his studio, he used different elements of his sketches, along with photographs, to compose the scene depicted in *Chasm of the Colorado*.¹² Moran's approach to painting the canyon was an effort to convey more than a singular and accurate representation of a scene at a particular time. His painting lets viewers feel the place as an active environment. Things are happening here. The earth is vibrant, changing, and vital. It is a representation that lets viewers experience a sense of the canyon as a space that is alive.

A soundscape is similarly an occasion for composing a scene. The producer of a soundscape engages in a level of craft and artistry that blends various recorded sounds and voices to develop a sonic portrait, allowing a listener to enter a scene that unfolds over time. Creating such a composition becomes an exercise in constructing a text that aims toward an engagement with the real yet is also a fabrication of a real place that can never be visited except as a recording. The process of creating such a composition ultimately becomes a way to study the sonic environment. The creator of a soundscape repeatedly listens to a multitude of recorded elements, deepening an awareness of the environment, making choices to convey particular elements of a scene, blending sounds, allowing some sounds to fade away as others rise to awareness. In doing so, the soundscape takes on a structure; there is an implicit narrative that conveys a feeling of being somewhere.

For the listener, the soundscape can bring one into a world that he or she has not experienced but comes to know as a holistic experience. In some instances, a soundscape can offer a sense of mobility, where a listener has the effect of moving through a space over time. It is important to remember that such audio compositions have the characteristics of what John Fiske described as participatory producerly texts.¹³ Rather than have a singular authoritative narrative structure that leads a listener or viewer along a narrow path of specific meanings, or require one to possess or develop certain qualities or competencies to find any value or meaning in a text, a producerly text assumes that listeners, readers, or viewers already possess the qualities and strategies that will allow them to engage in and find a variety of meanings in a composition. The

creator of a producerly text "does not put meaning into the text, but rather assembles a multitude of voices within it, what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia," wrote Fiske. "These voices cannot finally be pinned down in a 'hierarchy of discourses,' for different readers can 'listen' more or less attentively to different voices. The reader makes his or her text out of this 'weaving of voices' by a process that is fundamentally similar to that of the writer [or producer] when s/he created the work out of the multitude of voices available in the culture."¹⁴

The composition of multiple voices is a feature of many forms of audio documentary work. In this instance, soundscapes are compositions that call attention to this process of production and listening. Soundscapes are open to multiple meanings and are sources of knowledge and pleasure for a listener. Listeners again recognize that they have an active role in making sense of what they find in a soundscape. They bring a level of imagination and self-interest to the experience. The soundscape is a moment where the theater of the mind stages scenes that encourage listeners to locate themselves in a world at once real and imaginary, consisting of and encompassed by recorded sounds woven together into a complex rendering of an environment that they witness and understand as an "elsewhere" through listening.

Most soundscape recordings consist of sounds recorded in public spaces, and they allow listeners invariably to travel into other worlds. For instance, the Favorite Chicago Sounds Web site indexes popular sounds drawn from public places such as the El and Metra trains, the Lake Michigan shores, and street performers.¹⁵ Some soundscapes are attempts to capture events, such as Barret Golding's *Rainbow Family*, an audio collage of the Rainbow Family of Living Light, a gathering of more than 20,000 people who make a temporary community in national forests in Idaho or Montana.¹⁶ Sometimes a soundscape allows for an unexpected entrée into the spheres of private life. For example, sound artist Lars Spuybroek designed a traffic noise barrier near Eindhoven in Holland as part of a broader sonic project. The barrier shielded the residents from traffic sounds, but Spuybroek wanted to reverse the sense of the public and the private by recording "household sounds—people watching TV, shouting at their children, vacuuming, running showers, having sex" and transmitting those sounds to drivers who could tune in via a local radio network.¹⁷ In all of these examples and others, the soundscape functions as a mode of production that parallels some of the same ethnographic goals that inspire participant observation. That is, the documentarian, like the participant-observer, seeks to build an interpretation of various social and cultural domains. The process of creating and listening to a soundscape, however, begins with an aural interest in and exposure to a social life and registers the significance of sound in the ways audiences experience and make sense of worlds where they live or those they are curious to understand differently. On a pragmatic level, the soundscape teaches listeners about recording and composing sounds. They are exercises in listening, capturing the sonic dimensions of the world with

recording equipment, and editing these elements into a composite that reveals something interesting about places and people.

Soundscapes are in many ways a kind of audio *vérité* that requires producers and listeners to observe with their ears rather than their eyes. It is a form that asks listeners to pay attention to details of acoustic environments and make connections that reveal the aural texture of places and people. Like other forms of audio documentary, soundscapes model a polyphonic culture and reveal how questions of identity and location are continually emerging as relationships among voices and sounds in harmony and dissonance, a process of listening and responding as a means toward locating one's self in the world. For those with ethnographic aspirations, creating a soundscape is an effort that asks one to listen closely to how the world sounds and then make a compelling portrait that sonically translates that experience into an experience for others. What can be learned from listening to the sounds of a suburban neighborhood? What depth of understanding might be gained about social life from listening to the sounds of city dwellers gathered on the stoop at night as people talk in the streets? What are they saying? What concerns them? What amuses them? What do the sounds and voices of daily life in a public school tell listeners about institutions, socialization, and authority? Take a microphone and a recorder into an airport or a bus station and try to discover the meanings of modern mobility. Where are people going? What do they expect to find there? Soundscapes allow listeners to travel, too. What do they want to find out when they arrive? Soundscapes not only entail listening to places for knowledge and understanding of how people live; they also allow listeners to cultivate a way of hearing places.

SOUNDWALKS AND SONIC MAPS

In his canonical essay about the city, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Georg Simmel noted that urban dwellers reflect a *blasé* attitude that emerges in response to the amount of stimuli that flood them as they move through the city. Simmel suggested that urban survival requires that people inevitably develop a kind of "stimulus shield" that helps to filter the sensory overload of the city. Closing off the world would essentially keep a person from becoming overwhelmed, but the price of such insulation would mean a closing of the environment and a sense of indifference toward one's surroundings.¹⁸

Various consumer technologies have provided people with different incarnations of equipment that tend to shield people from the sounds of life and replace them with a different kind of aesthetic experience of moving through urban and rural spaces. The Sony Walkman® cassette player, first introduced to the public in 1979, changed the way people were able to listen to music.¹⁹ With headphones and a small portable tape machine, music could go anywhere. The effect of this technology only fostered Raymond Williams's notion of mobilized privatization, a quality of urban industrial society that

considers how communication technologies allow for increasingly mobile forms of consumption.²⁰ The portability of the Walkman® epitomized this phenomenon. People could be in public spaces, but the experience of listening to one's own music is an interior experience. Much the same could be said of traveling in a car with a playlist of songs created to make the drive an aesthetic, and perhaps a cinematic, experience of moving through the world with a private soundtrack.²¹ The social and cultural space of this privatized mobility soon had new and more compact forms of technology devoted to portability. The Walkman® was followed by the portable CD player, and then came the MiniDisc player, which was soon followed by the enormous popularity of the Apple iPod®. All of these technologies created a means of closing off the surrounding sonic environment and interiorized the consumption of music as a private experience in public space.

Hildegard Westerkamp's concept of soundwalking is an effort to recover the experiential dimensions of people's sonic environment by offering a kind of phenomenological orientation toward the sounds of daily life. For Westerkamp, soundwalking is a way of moving through places that gives "our ears priority."²² Writing in 1974, at the time of Williams's comment on communication technologies' penchant for mobilizing privatized consumption of information, Westerkamp aimed toward a kind of organic, bodily recuperation of sound as a dimension of daily life. In a seemingly ritualized practice of attention, she encouraged people with strategies for listening. "Let's climb out of our bubbles now, emerge from behind our screens, walls, loudspeakers and headphones and open our ears directly to the environment," she wrote. While she admitted that being fully tuned in to surrounding sounds can be tiring and painful, ignoring the sounds "seems to be even more of a senseless undertaking." For Westerkamp, the idea of soundwalking is part of a larger effort to educate people and make them more interested in the quality of sound. "When critical listening becomes a daily practice, the demand for sound quality will eventually triumph over the dull acceptance of sound quality," Westerkamp advised. "This may be reflected in simple actions like: not playing the radio all day long, using a hand lawnmower instead of a power mower, and making as many people as possible aware of their own acoustic actions and of our collective responsibility for the sonic environment."²³ Clearly, Westerkamp envisioned soundwalking as an exploratory and educational activity that aims for a preservationist ethic. She liked certain sounds and wanted others silenced. Although her views at times tended to equate some sounds with pollution, the larger scope of her ideas about soundwalking cultivate a sensitivity for the sonic environment as an all-encompassing dimension of social and cultural experience. Soundwalking is a way to study the world from the vantage point of careful listening.

In some sense, this attention to detail mirrors Erving Goffman's claim that researchers learn more during their first day of fieldwork than at any other point during an ethnographic study, although Goffman focused on sight-based observations.²⁴ "Our first soundwalk is thus purposely exposing

the listener to the total content of his environmental composition, and is therefore very analytical," noted Westerkamp. "It is meant to be an intense introduction into the experience of uncompromised listening."²⁵ This environmental composition should be heard by beginning with the self—hearing one's body while moving—and then shifting to nearby sounds. Westerkamp advocated classifying sounds in terms of type, length, quantity, and pitch. Next, people should listen to what they hear in the distance. Again, people should take apart the sounds, isolating each sound from the other and the features of the particular sounds. Finally, listeners should put the sounds back together and hear them as they coexist within the soundscape. Westerkamp's model for soundwalking is useful for qualitative research more generally because it calls for a more intense sensorial form of observation.

The soundwalk as described by Westerkamp complements the types of close visual detective work most people do when first entering the field but, again, pushes for a more complete investigation. Additionally, Westerkamp's project emerged from a desire to confront other mechanisms in life that have stopped people from fully engaging their senses. For example, she noted that the "Sunday-walk has become rare and has generally been replaced by the Sunday drive." This means our excursions are "purely visual: on the windshield two-dimensional landscapes appear; we are watching a film about landscapes to the soundtrack of a running motor; what we see has no relationship to what we hear; and what we hear makes the visual experience monotonous. No intense contact is made between the environment and the human senses."²⁶ Although Westerkamp's description of the soundwalk clearly emphasizes sound, the focus on walking (in addition to starting by listening to one's body) signals that she advocated a more complete sensorial engagement with the spaces in which people dwell and through which they move.

In the three decades since the development of portable sound technologies that promote the mobility of music, privatized experience, and consumption, and the absence of such technology in the soundwalking experiments proposed by Westerkamp, we want to consider how mobile audio technologies make possible a whole realm of exciting documentary-based audio projects that encompass mobility and recorded sound. In particular, we are interested in the alignment of this portability with creating soundwalks and sonic maps that provide people with another way of using privatized listening for sociological, pedagogical, and aesthetic audio projects.

Soundwalk recordings clearly emerge from this type of phenomenological connection with one's sonic environment, especially through the important inclusion of soundscape recordings as part of a quality soundwalk. However, unlike soundscape recordings and Westerkamp's soundwalk, soundwalk recordings usually include narrative elements that help signal a clear purpose and, at times, a clear plot. Soundwalks, like soundscape recordings, tend to be recorded in public spaces and have been used by a number of different individuals and groups for a variety of purposes.

Museums, for instance, were early adopters of portable audio technology and created a wide range of audio tours that allow visitors to tour an exhibit with headphones. Typically, visitors who take audio tours are given a map of an exhibit that indicates stopping points where they can look at an object or a display while listening to a narrator describe what they are seeing.

In recent years, with the proliferation of MP3 players such as the iPod®, the concept of the audio walking tour has expanded well beyond the walls of museums. Various entrepreneurs and organizations have created a variety of walking tours of neighborhoods, historic sites, and business districts that can be downloaded as a series of MP3 files into an iPod®. The user can also download and print a map that shows the tour route through an area and can stop to hear information along the way. For instance, a company called AudioSteps offers downloadable walking tours of San Francisco, Sacramento, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, London, Bath, and Bristol. In Philadelphia, visitors can download "The Constitutional Audio Walking Tour," which covers more than 15 historic sites and attractions on a tour that lasts 75 minutes and takes visitors on a 1.25-mile journey past the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, and the National Constitution Center. Tourists can also get the same tour by dialing a number on their cell phone and listening to a recorded narration about a site they are viewing while strolling through Philadelphia. In New York City, anyone with a computer and an MP3 player can download the "Weekend Explorer" walking tour of the East Village. This free audio tour, sponsored by *The New York Times*, allows users to visit a specific site and listen to a narrator tell stories about why the place is interesting or significant to life in New York.

For ethnographers, recorded soundwalks like these audio tours offer considerable potential as a vehicle for studying neighborhoods and creating innovative ways of sharing information with others. Companies that make audio walking tours (such as those mentioned earlier) often tend to lead people toward typically popular tourist attractions and historic sites. In other words, the technology is often used as a way of delivering conventional information about a place and the kind of history that we might normally read in a guidebook. We suggest expanding the idea of the recorded soundwalk beyond the predictable index of sanctioned sites and scenes. Instead, recorded soundwalks can be an avenue toward understanding the lives and events of people, neighborhoods, and places not included in official histories nor identified by historical markers. For example, a researcher studying gentrification in an urban neighborhood could conduct interviews with residents who are moving into the neighborhood as well as those who are being pushed out due to rising housing values and rent increases. These interviews can then be incorporated into a series of sound files along with an interpretive narration that could be downloaded and used as a basis for visiting the same neighborhood and hearing the commentary of those who either once resided there or who currently call the place home.

In a similar vein, recorded soundwalks offer a mechanism toward providing alternative histories of places already inscribed by historical markers and discourses. The public projection works of visual artist Krzysztof Wodiczko offer a useful point of departure for considering the potential of recorded soundwalks. Wodiczko's public projections use existing architecture as a surface for projected images meant to incite discussion and debate about political issues. For instance, at the domed Centro Cultural Theatre of Tijuana in Mexico, where a documentary about the history of Mexican civilization was screened daily, Wodiczko created a projection based on the theme of undocumented Mexican workers who illegally cross the border in search of work. His projection used the image of a Mexican worker with his hands clasped behind his head as if being arrested by the U.S. Border Patrol. The idea behind these projections is to reinterpret existing architectural space toward other areas of cultural life and practice. In the same way, recorded soundwalks can be used to create alternative tours of public spaces by offering histories other than those sanctioned by cities and governments. Such projects allow different constituencies to offer alternatives to the dominant narratives that tend to colonize interpretations of urban and natural landscapes. For instance, the Soundwalk company describes its project as "Audio tours for people who don't normally take audio tours."²⁷ A variety of rising stars, independent film semicelebrities, and average folks narrate the tours, which are available as CDs and MP3 downloads from the company's Web site and book retailers. Anyone can purchase the soundwalks and then take the tour either while sitting on one's couch or when following the route during a visit to the destination. The description of "The Bronx: Hunts Point-Graffiti Walk," for example, exemplifies the idea of how these audio tours might offer alternative interpretations of social space:

For some, it is called vandalism, for most, it is art, yet graffiti art has cemented its place in urban culture, our culture. Appreciate it, recognize the styles, learn what tagging really stands for, where it comes from. The 5 train will lead you to this neighborhood, which once was avoided. Walk past old-school music stores and barbershops, and indulge in art, graffiti art, your own street museum.²⁸

The divided nature of local and conventional interpretations of how public space is used is apparent in this description and points out how the soundwalk can offer a different perspective. In other places, soundwalks might similarly give voice to different interpretations of scenes. At the Grand Canyon, for example, National Park Service narratives tend to orient visitors toward geologic and natural history interpretations of the landscape. However, the same trails where park rangers lead visitors on their guided walks can also be given an alternative viewpoint through recorded soundwalks that inform visitors about the canyon as a sacred site of Native American cosmology or other religious viewpoints that are largely absent

from the official framing of this place. Similarly, the local histories of places where political and government injustices have been obscured or ignored can be brought to public attention by creating different paths through cities via the use of the recorded soundwalk.

Apart from the historical and cultural possibilities of using recorded soundwalks to create ways of moving through space, some artists have employed the soundwalk approach to make private stories of urban experience into aesthetic experiences for an interested public. For example, artist Janet Cardiff blends documentary reporting with fictional storytelling to create mobile installations. Her soundwalks tend to be available from galleries or museums, where patrons can check out a CD and portable CD player and accompany Cardiff's voice through the city. Sarah Boxer wrote in a *New York Times* review of one Cardiff installation about picking up a map of an East London neighborhood, a Discman[®], and Cardiff's "The Missing Voice (Case Study B)." Cardiff narrates the walk, guiding the listener into a variety of public spaces and a few private ones as well. Her soundwalk blends in with the soundscape of the streets to create a surreal sensorial experience. "I had long since given up sorting out the layers of sound and story in my head," wrote Boxer. "There were literary voices reading hard-boiled crime stories, loud birds in the plaza, skirmishes on the street, working people having lunch, a man singing lieder, another man saying, 'Her letter made no sense to me.'"²⁹

Others have used the soundwalk in ways that mirror Cardiff's multifaceted sonic layering but have done so in a way that is motivated by creating a sense of place more than designing a mobile installation. For example,



Photo 2.1 Janet Cardiff recording in Central Park for "Her Long Black Hair" (2004)

actress Florence Loiret-Caille narrates, in English or French, the Soundwalk tour of the Belleville neighborhood in Paris. "Now you're outside," she says. "If you come back at night, you'll notice this place is packed. I often hang out at the Nouveau Casino just next door on your left; it's a big black door. Do you see it?" She pauses and listeners hear some low-level street sounds before she continues with her narration. "Walk in the rhythm of my footsteps: one, two, one, two. Don't make any turns or stops unless I tell you to." We hear her footsteps on what sound like cobblestone streets. A bluesy acoustic band called Spleen provides the musical soundtrack that is meant to sound like street music. People in the neighborhood speak about the neighborhood's history. Although the listener can stop the tour at any time, the details of the walk are built in to guide the listener as though accompanied on a private tour with Loiret-Caille through the neighborhood she knows as her own. Linear movement through a place tends to be a feature of most soundwalks, even if the overall form might be more avant garde; the location might literally remove listeners from a grid and place them on the spiraling streets of a Parisian *arrondissement* or take them off the beaten path, so to speak.

We want to expand the concept of the soundwalk to introduce sonic mapping. The sonic map is influenced by the soundwalk as well as the current use of do-it-yourself digital mapping efforts with global positioning systems (GPS). Although the sonic map is similar in general spirit to the soundwalk because both tend to use long-form recordings, the sonic map contains more deviations from a specific path than does the soundwalk. This type of recording is meant to incorporate the diverse internal and external features of an area. The purpose of a sonic map is to create a recorded document of the physical and human geography of a neighborhood; provide the detailed information that one would find in a census map or in GPS mapping projects, such as the Mapchester project in Manchester, England;³⁰ and to also humanize that information through biographical, narrative, and soundscape recordings. Sonic maps bring together demographic and spatial analyses with the type of thick description of ethnography. The sonic map may also be considered the investigative complement to the artistic features of the soundwalk, reflecting localized and organic forms of cultural politics. In other words, the sonic map functions to gain greater understanding of people in a place (what they do, why, when, with whom, for how long) and emerges from a belief that individuals can help create cartographic representations of contemporary spaces. These maps emphasize a collaborative relationship between researchers and those who live in the place being documented. The sonic map might feature physical descriptions of an area, such as environmental sounds found in a soundscape, as well as interviews with people who live, work, or just hang out there. The goal is to create a map that can help the listener interact with the place and the people who inhabit that place. In this way, the sonic map offers audio descriptions of how people work and

live, what they remember about the history of the place, and what it is like to be part of the contemporary scene. For instance, recordings might include people describing architectural features, reminiscences of people who used to live there and how the place has changed, immigration experiences, what people do for a living and for leisure, and events such as public protests or other forms of social activism.

The sonic map is, therefore, less of a catalog of cultural life, as we hear in many soundwalks, and more of a multilayered narrative about a specific area, which listeners can interrupt as often as they like. As an interactive project, people in the recordings may carry on a real-life dialogue with those using a sonic map. In these projects, users can stop the recording and enter the business of someone who contributed to a recording and learn more. In this way, the life of the recorded sonic map functions as an invitation to continue a conversation. It is not a fixed form contained by the temporal dimensions of the recording but a way to engage more deeply with the life of a community.

RADIO DIARIES AND AUDIO ESSAYS

Ethnographers of cultural life have gone to great lengths in their attempts to get inside the life worlds of people, groups, subcultures, and institutions. Participant-observation research has been a staple among those who aim to understand the nature of experience from an insider's perspective. In different ways and through different techniques, ethnographers have experimented with the concept of self-reporting as a means of creating texts that allow audiences to consider how different people make interpretive sense of their experience.³¹ Radio producer Joe Richman saw the value of self-reporting in 1995 when he gave a tape recorder and a microphone to Josh Cutler, a 16-year-old New York City high school student with Tourette's syndrome, and asked him to keep an audio diary of his experiences, including managing his involuntary verbal and physical tics. Josh recorded more than 40 hours of tape. In addition to recording his own thoughts and everyday actions, Josh recorded the sounds of his friends and family members as they negotiated and learned about his disease. Richman then worked with Josh to produce a 15-minute story for National Public Radio (NPR), and it became one of the most commended works in public radio, helping initiate a new form of cultural production that was especially appealing to youth.

If the soundwalk and sonic map emerge at the intersection of sound art and documentary reporting, the radio diary reflects a connection between documentary and oral history. To some extent, Cutler maps the emotional space of Tourette's, providing an alternative to the mapping of physical space we hear in the soundwalk or sonic map. "Recording these diaries made me realize something important: I'd never really talked to anyone at

school about Tourette's," said Josh. "Talking in this way showed me that people were interested and did care."³²

Historically, these kinds of recording projects are the result of a collaborative relationship between established or emerging radio producers and so-called average people who do not possess the technical skills or equipment to produce their own radio works. Typically, a producer provides a person with recording equipment and shows the person how to use it to get a good recording. Then that person records independently. Given the kind of skills involved in operating the equipment, anyone can learn to record. As a mode of storytelling, the radio diary offers an opportunity for a person to record a wide range of dimensions from his or her life: thoughts and feelings, interviews with friends and family, and the places where the person works, goes to school, and hangs out. The techniques of encouraging people to make a radio diary are a natural fit for qualitative researchers, who want to understand a world from the point of view of those who live in it. This form of audio recording provides insight into the life of a participant in the participant's own voice and own terms. When done well, these recordings, like other quality "autobiographical accounts[.] draw a relationship between experience and language, and the individual and culture."³³

Along with the audio documentary, which is discussed in the next section, radio diaries have been recognized as an important form of cultural reporting because of their ability to reveal insight into lives that might otherwise escape our attention. For instance, WNYC Radio Rookies producer Czerina Patel guided rookie reporter Samr "Rocky" Tayehon to create "My Struggle with Obesity." Tayehon, a 16-year-old Palestinian-American who lives in Brooklyn, New York, is more than 6 feet tall and weighs nearly 400 pounds. This radio diary is an account of Tayehon's internal conflicts over his weight, how he deals with ridicule and insults, and his own battles to try and control his eating, which don't always work. Twenty-three-year-old Shomari Kress partnered with WBEZ producer Shirley Jahad to create "Picture Me Rolling," which explores Kress's struggles to choose "the righteous road" of a straight job versus the seemingly quick-fix income of drug dealing in South Chicago. The diaries recorded by Cutler, Tayehon, and Kress are only three examples, but the possibilities for using audio diaries as a source for larger radio stories is great. Such collaborations primarily hinge on the creation of a radio diary by an individual who is willing to make recordings and then work with a producer to craft the recordings into a story.

Radio producers such as Richman, who founded Radio Diaries, and New York Public Radio's WNYC, which produces the *Radio Rookies* project, both have, at their heart, a sense of democratizing media opportunities for people who would otherwise not have access to tell their stories to a larger audience. "Radio Diaries, Inc. is committed to producing a new kind of oral history. Our mission is to find extraordinary stories in ordinary places. We work with people to document their own lives for public radio: teenagers,

seniors, prison inmates and others whose voices are rarely heard," claims Richman, in the mission statement for the Radio Diaries project. "We help people share their stories—and their lives—in their own words, creating documentaries that are powerful, surprising, intimate and timeless."³⁴ Similarly, Radio Rookies strives to provide "teenagers with the tools and training to create radio stories about themselves, their communities and their world."³⁵

Beyond helping people with access to resources that allow them to create radio stories, the diary approach is also useful for developing new kinds of audio projects that rely on autobiographical accounts. They are a way of making private stories a mode of gaining insight into much larger worlds and—whether a collaborative, professionally produced project or a self-initiated amateur attempt to get out one's story—they offer ethnographers an important set of possibilities for their own research. As Elizabeth Bird noted in her examination of alternative approaches to data collection, the recording of autobiographical accounts via diaries (textual and video) and letters can provide researchers and audiences with a greater sense of the participant's point of view, "encouraging the informant to define the terms of the encounter."³⁶

As noted earlier, radio diaries emphasize an autobiographical approach to audio recording. A closely related type of audio story, one more akin to literary conventions, is the audio essay. This mode of storytelling differs from the radio diary in that radio diaries tend to feature ambient sounds recorded in the places that are central to the diarist's life as well as other voices, such as family members, friends, and coworkers. Typically, the audio essay begins as a written piece, a straightforward essay that is read into a microphone. Andre Codrescu, who provides commentaries on NPR's *All Things Considered*; Sarah Vowell, who is a regular on *This American Life*; and David Sedaris, who appears often on *This American Life* and *All Things Considered* are possibly best known in this genre. Their stories mix the personal and political, astute cultural commentary with reflection on deeper social issues; speak of personal experiences in ways that often feature witty and passionate details; and tend to provide a larger lesson or epiphany. Of course, these are all well-known and successful writers, and their recorded essays are a way of extending their work into a new medium.

But audio essays can also develop beyond the sole voice reading into a microphone. An essay can take the listener to emotional levels, for instance, through the layering of sound or music. For example, radio producer and essayist Joe Frank writes monologues, records phone interviews and prank phone calls, creates radio dramas that are anti-radio dramas, and delivers free-form poetry, all of which emerge from a desire to use the audio essay as a medium to contemplate larger social, philosophical, and religious questions. In one piece, "No More My Lord," a neo-soul rhythm track plays under Frank's description of a dinner party with history's most recent genocidal leaders, Adolph Hitler, Pol Pot, and Slobodan Milosevic. Domestic serial killers Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy, and Charlie Manson are seated

at a smaller kids' table. Frank summarizes a conversation that reflects the types of exchanges that most of us have when we gather in small groups at a restaurant, yet as the audience hears the conversation topics they are reminded that these are killers who are talking about dada or *Goodnight Moon*. In another show, "Let Me Not Dream," Frank, who is doing an 11 p.m. radio show in Los Angeles, calls ex-girlfriends on the East Coast (most of whom he wakes up with his call) to have conversations with them. At the end of each discussion he sings "I Remember You" and asks if they would like to sing along. "His monologues couldn't be more—er, *frank*. They are sensual, pungent with body fluids: blood, sweat, saliva, and semen. This isn't radio: this is Real Life," wrote Irwin Chusid.³⁷

Audio essayists have also created pieces that are built around other recorded sounds that function in much the same way as a quotation in a written essay. For example, Cheyanne Vanderdonckt's audio essay "Woman Enough" was written as a reflection on some reel-to-reel recordings she made with her sister when they were both children. They had recorded themselves singing country and western songs by Patsy Cline and Loretta Lynn. When Vanderdonckt found the reels at her parents' home, it became a source of reflection on identity and the lessons of growing into womanhood. Rather than just read the essay into a mic, Vanderdonckt uses the recordings as an entry point into a broader analysis of the disciplining of one's singing voice, the disciplining of one's body and sexuality, and the ways in which popular culture (in this case, country music) can teach audiences about cultural freedoms and repression. The archival sounds add sonic depth and a level of texture to Vanderdonckt's essay that would not be possible as a printed piece. With the sounds of her and her sister as children singing "behind" her adult voice, the essay becomes a piece that measures time and maturity and provides a source of reflective distance that animates both of these voices and the times of Vanderdonckt's biography.

Qualitative researchers who have experience with more creative and literary approaches to writing may find this to be a very natural, comfortable, and creative way to share their work with a potentially larger, and popular, audience. Through the creative use of sound and music, a researcher can open up the conventional essay in some interesting ways that are typically not afforded in written texts.

AUDIO DOCUMENTARIES

The audio documentary is, perhaps, the most complex of the different audio forms discussed so far because it needs to tell an engaging story that often makes use of many of the approaches addressed previously in this chapter. In audio documentaries, listeners hear the creative use of ambient sounds, such as soundscape recordings. Sometimes listeners hear the sounds of

people's activities, such as a crowd at a diner or someone riding a bicycle, repairing a roof, teaching a class, or using a blender to make the world's greatest smoothie. The purpose of using such sounds is to provide a mechanism for transporting a listener into a scene. Because such recordings inevitably carry the quality of being present in the moment they are made, their use in a documentary can equally suggest a feeling of presence in that moment. The use of sound can be highly suggestive rather than comprehensive. For example, the sound of paddles rhythmically stroking the water is rather innocuous and, perhaps, unrecognizable in its own right. But when it is mixed with a narrator saying, "We are up early to take our canoes across the still lake," the sound of the paddles helps the listener to establish a sense of a scene where a story unfolds.

To add to these elements, audio documentaries can feature portions of interviews that help move a story in a direction by allowing for a person to share a particular experience or expertise. The key to using interview material is to remember that it should carry some new insight and be recorded clearly. The most engaging stories tend to feature a mix of interviews that are recorded in spaces that cut out all background noises and are recorded during action sequences, where interviewees can show the audience what is happening. In this way, a researcher making a recording needs to be mindful of how to conduct an interview with listeners in mind. Sometimes it is useful to remind the interviewee that listeners will not be able to see what is happening during the moment, so interviewees need to describe what they are doing. For instance, an interview with a piano tuner might go something like this: A voice states, "Tuning a piano starts with tuning a set of strings in the middle range of the piano"; after this statement is heard the sound of the tuner tightening the strings and pounding a key to hear the tone. In this way, the interviewee makes the demonstration audible. Finally, the use of a voice-over narration can move the whole piece along. In voice-overs, the narrator works in concert with the different elements of sound that are layered in the piece. A narrator often works best when used economically, bridging different elements and allowing a sense of direction that carries listeners from scene to scene.

When done well, this use of audio to put forth a creative treatment of actuality is the most rewarding for the researcher and the most engaging for an audience. "Ideally, a documentary possesses a depth of research or proximity to its subject," observed Stephen Smith, managing editor with American RadioWorks. "Documentaries convey a rich sense of character and detail—or a substantial body of original investigative material—that simply aren't heard in the majority of public radio reports."³⁸ This form of storytelling, as we noted in the first chapter, is most clearly connected to the kinds of work most ethnographers do when conducting fieldwork in that it requires a greater investment of time in a place with other people. Instead of interviewing, observing, and engaging in participant observation, the audio

documentary involves recording all of those modes of data collection. As with qualitative studies more generally, the amount of time spent working on a particular project is dictated by the project itself. Drawing from our own work, Mark's "Jim's Grave," a piece about fans who make a pilgrimage to Jim Morrison's grave at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, used recordings that were gathered at different times over several years. The 12-minute finished work, however, has the effect of all of these voices and sounds occurring in a singular time frame. Whereas, Daniel's "Blessed," a story about the St. Francis of Assisi festival for the blessing of the animals in Chicago, was created from 2 weeks of recordings, with the bulk of the interviews being recorded in a single day at three different services. Neither the length of the piece nor the time in the field defines an audio documentary; rather, as Smith noted, the documentary's "depth of research or proximity to its subject" sets it apart from other types of audio pieces.

Although audio documentaries often grow from recordings made by a person researching a particular event or group, documentaries can also emerge from recordings made by others at different times. Given that people have been making sound recordings for decades, there is a wealth of recordings in archives and libraries that can be used to create new works. For example, in 1940, the Library of Congress hired Charles Todd and Robert Sonkin to record the lives, music, and experiences of Dust Bowl refugees. The two men traveled around California with a 50-pound Presto recorder creating an oral history of refugees from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. In 2000, radio producer Barrett Golding acquired Todd and Sonkin's recordings and edited together a complex sound portrait by layering them in an artful manner. Golding's piece, "Voices From the Dust Bowl," features music and interviews from six decades earlier and tells not only the story of the refugee, but also the process of how Todd and Sonkin made their recordings. Golding's documentary took primary recorded elements and gave them a new sense of vitality through the process of editing and combining different recordings; however, Todd, who reflects on the period he and Sonkin traveled through California, narrates the whole piece.

Golding's "Voices From the Dust Bowl" is but one example of how archival recordings can be recontextualized in the present to tell a significant and appealing story that would not be possible or as pleasurable if one were to listen to each recording on its own. In this way, the historical audio documentary can help to rejuvenate an interest in old recordings by giving them a sense of historical significance. "The word 'history' itself, made up primarily of the word 'story,' gives an indication of what it should be about," claimed Ken Burns, in an interview about the intersections of documentary and historical research.³⁹ "I think we have conspired with our mind-numbing television and with a sort of insensitivity on the part of the teachers of history who render it boring to make most people think history is useless. But my belief is that history—our story—is the great pageant of

everything that has come before this moment and that there could be nothing more important than an awareness of what went before us, because without that awareness we have no sense of where we've been in order to know where we're going." Of course, Burns is well known for making film documentaries, but his work often relies heavily on archival footage—home movies, photographs, early industrial films, television broadcasts—that have been lost or forgotten until rediscovered in an archive.

In a similar vein, the NPR project *Lost and Found Sound* has given new life to long-forgotten audio recordings. This well-known series has produced a wide range of audio documentaries. Among them, we often find that producers make use of sound recordings that initially were never intended for a wide audience but were made as personal recordings of events or experiences. Given that consumers have long had tape recorders in their households, the prospect of discovering forgotten cassette and reel-to-reel tapes can make an interesting source of material for documentary work. Marika Partridge's "The Partridge Family's Grand Tour," for example, is based on a set of reel-to-reel recordings she made when she was 13 years old. Upon her father's retirement from the military, Partridge and her family spent a year traveling through India, Asia, and Europe. Her father purchased a tape machine along the way, and the family members all took turns recording sounds, music, and conversations. In 1999, Marika Partridge produced a story for *Lost and Found Sound* that works as a personal reflection, a travelogue, and a story of family experience that is nearly entirely the product of these early personal tapes.

Whether audio recordings are created primarily for the purpose of making an original audio work, or whether one uses tapes found in an archive or attic, the function of audio documentary is to tell a compelling story that relies on sound and voice. The process of doing so is a creative challenge that requires countless hours of editing and crafting. In audio documentaries, one often finds a hybrid and recombination of many of the forms of audio productions described earlier in this chapter. There are really no rules when it comes to producing an audio documentary, but it is a good idea to listen to how others have approached their subjects. In listening to good audio documentary, one finds a set of models for how different producers have used sound and interviews to tell a story that is larger than any single recording. In a good audio documentary, one finds a strong sense that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Listen to the work of other producers and try to determine how many different singular recordings are in play. How and why did the producer choose to edit something here, use a musical interlude there, and even use a silent pause to end one scene and begin another? By critically examining the works of others, one is better able to build a repertoire of skills and techniques that help make one's own audio works resonate deeply as informative and aesthetically interesting.

FINDING THE RIGHT MIX

Each approach to recording discussed in this chapter can be used on its own for the purposes of radio airplay, podcasting, Internet download, or live play before an audience at a conference or a documentary festival or in a performance space. We hope this discussion inspires readers to explore some of the documentary forms that we discuss; however, there are also other ways to think about the use of audio recording in qualitative research. In the practice of fieldwork, qualitative researchers can use each form to gather material that can lead to a richer written text. For example, using soundscape recordings can help one gain a deeper understanding of a scene, which can then be described in greater detail in a writing project. A sonic map can provide the researcher with a range of big and small features of an area that can help produce a thicker description when writing a book, a chapter, or a journal article. The use of such recordings is an extension of traditional note taking. When we use audio recordings in this way, we find that the sounds of places and the voices recorded provide a very useful range of details that foster strong and detailed descriptive writing.

In other uses, audio projects may sometimes complement written work, or vice-versa. That is, audio works and written texts about the same subject can mutually inform each other or stand independently. This dual use of one's audio-based qualitative research points to some of the limitations of each of these modes of representation. Typically, audio works that are created for radio broadcast rarely exceed 15 minutes. The conventions of broadcast programming are partly responsible for this, but it is also a consequence of a culture where audiences don't have a lot of experience with listening to longer pieces. Audio pieces that run longer tend to lose listeners. Psychologists and mass communication scholars concerned with media uses and effects tend to point to psychological, cultural, and historical reasons for the limited attention spans of listeners. We can say anecdotally that our larger argument in this book about the privileging of sight over our other senses has influenced the amount of time people will listen closely. Moreover, the emergence of rapid editing on channels like MTV or in TV shows like *Law and Order* has certainly not helped promote an increased amount of attention to audio stories, with the exception of such things like books on tape or downloaded interview programming. Although it would be nice if people would follow the advice of Westerkamp and start to tune into their sonic worlds more often and for greater periods of time, those who study communication realize that they need to know their audiences, and most audiences for audio documentary tend to lose interest after about 15 minutes.

We mention this also because it is not realistic to assume that a 15-minute audio documentary, or a 5-minute audio essay, can do justice to a 2-year ethnographic study. Instead, a researcher might best make use of audio and textual representation by creating an audio documentary that can

address the topic in ways that will engage a general audience and then write a book, an article, or a book chapter that will provide an opportunity to explore the subject in a more nuanced and detailed manner. We do not mean to suggest that the audio piece should be "dumbed down" or that listening audiences can only handle narratives rather than the arguments often advanced in academic texts. Instead, we see the differences in terms of scale and the time a listener or reader will likely devote to a particular medium. Sound and print each have differing sets of conventions and expectations, and researchers should be attentive to the distinct modes of expression offered by each. There are some good examples that demonstrate this relationship between audio work and written texts. Sandy Tolan's radio story "The Lemon Tree" was produced in 1998 as part of a series called *World Views: Voices of Ethnic Identity* and broadcast on *Fresh Air*.⁴⁰ In his 38-minute audio documentary, Tolan tells the story of the difficult friendship between an Israeli woman and a Palestinian man who, at different times, occupied the same house. Eight years following the broadcast of his radio documentary, Tolan published an extended nonfiction account called *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East*.⁴¹ The book was a finalist for the National Book Critics award for nonfiction in 2006 and won a 2007 Christopher Award, given by the Christophers to applaud various media that recognize and represent "the highest values of the human spirit." In this case, the radio documentary served as a seed that spawned the larger story told in the book, and both relied on the same initial audio research.

Audio can also be used in conjunction with other presentational forms. For example, new media software technologies, such as Flash, have extended how scholars can share their work. A sonic map, for example, can be combined with more traditional (and avant garde) forms of qualitative studies in new media and Web-based environments. A Web site can feature an actual map, a detoured map,⁴² or a do-it-yourself GPS map that can be zoomed in and out to show photographs, drawings, graffiti, and other features as well as the sonic map. Using technology, the sounds can work in conjunction with other artifacts that the researcher thinks are important in learning about people in a place at a particular time.

Finally, audio complements written work. Scholars who do not work in departments that acknowledge production-based work (often referred to as creative work) for promotion and tenure need to publish in scholarly journals or with reputable presses. At this point, there are few peer-reviewed outlets for qualitative audio work, although that is something researchers can help change. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* is one peer-reviewed journal that has used its online status to extend opportunities to produce and engage in a variety of nontraditional (i.e., not solely written) work.

The lack of peer-reviewed outlets connects to another issue that should be considered by qualitative researchers who want to use audio either to

complement or supplement more traditional forms of fieldwork: time. Of course most of the approaches described in this book will take longer than writing qualitative work because, in addition to doing the fieldwork, one must be dedicated to spend extra time recording and editing. The time it takes to do this work is a rewarding experience; editing can be a wonderful endeavor in the art of listening and crafting as one gets lost in the sounds and listens repeatedly to a particular recording in an effort to produce an aesthetically compelling and informative piece.

Of course, it is also important to remember that the recorder can capture the sounds of a participant's life, but the activities may be altered because of the presence of the recorder. In some sense, the ongoing conversations about representation that have been present in literature about qualitative research since the 1980s should prepare researchers for this reality; however, the research-production dualism has created a range of questions that surround documentary work that leads many to believe that researchers don't always transfer what they've learned about qualitative studies to documentary work. On one hand, one's subjective voice is always going to be present in a qualitative study. On the other hand, it would be naïve to think that the documentary production process is value free and not a factor in the final audio production. "So much of what we do is staged," noted Roman Mars. "Quite frankly it's pretty hard to sound 'natural' in a studio with a mic in your face."⁴³

Moreover, some of the biases that remain central to conversations about qualitative work are magnified when adding audio to the mix. As Elizabeth Bird noted in her argument for alternative approaches to gaining the participant's point of view, many critics are skeptical about technology more generally. "The telephone is actually very personal, allowing confidences and secrets to be communicated in a uniquely intimate way," she argued; however, too many ethnographers "decri telephone interviews as impersonal and lacking in intimacy." This concern emerges from "classic social science assumptions" that "confronting the respondent" can weed out inaccurate responses or can push respondents who prefer not to answer particular questions.⁴⁴ Bird wants us to consider how the telephone can be considered as more than simply a "poor substitute" for face-to-face interactions but instead can create greater opportunities to understand others, in part, by eliminating some of the pressures that accompany face-to-face interviews. Given this important framing of technology as a tool for ethnographers, researchers need to consider how they use the telephone when recording audio. It is important to note that there is also much disagreement among audio documentarians about the tools and storytelling techniques one can use to engage listeners. "I know producers who will never do a phoner," said Mars about the use of recorded telephone interviews or actualities gained through telephone interviews, "but I think the sound of someone's voice over the phone is incredibly comforting and familiar." He added that interviewing people on the telephone

can increase the participant's comfort; people are used to talking into phones. "Mics have a way of freezing people up."⁴⁵

So, in addition to reflecting the sometimes problematic privileging of face-to-face interviews that also exists in literature about qualitative research methods, Mars's observations allow one to consider the important issue of technologies and their effects on the interviewing process. Again, researchers should not be naïve to the influence of the recorder on people's actions. Of course, as any ethnographer knows, the more time one spends with one's participants, including writing field notes, the more comfortable the participant becomes, provided the ethnographer can establish trust and rapport. The same is true when sound recording technologies are introduced to the study. If the recorder is constantly present, the participant will begin to forget about its presence.

A final challenge that needs to be considered is the relationship between recording technologies and mobility. It is difficult to write field notes if one is carrying a mic and a recorder. If an interview is recorded in a setting where the participant and researcher are sitting, this is less of a concern, but much fieldwork involves movement. Researchers should still record notes in the field and write reflective field notes each day in addition to transcribing notes. This can help create context via narration in a piece and can help if the plan is both to record an audio piece and to produce a written text.

NOTES

1. Rick Moody, "The Construction of Humanism in Documentary Radio," excerpted from www.transom.org.
2. Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2006), ix.
3. Roman Mars, "Invisible Ink," excerpted from www.transom.org.
4. R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994).
5. LaBelle, *Background Noise*, 197.
6. For example, see Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas* (New York: Routledge, 1985), and S. Elizabeth Bird, "Understanding the Ethnographic Encounter," *Women and Language* 18, no. 2 (1995): 22–26.
7. For instance, see Michael Lesy, *Time Frames: The Meaning of Family Pictures* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Howard S. Becker, *Exploring Society Photographically* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Douglas Harper, *Changing Work: Visions of a Lost Agriculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
8. For instance, see Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
9. See H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1995).

THE CITIZEN STORYTELLER

"Good morning. Day one. Walking to school. Leaving out the door," says LeAlan Jones at the start of *Ghetto Life 101*, a radio documentary made by two teenagers from Chicago's South Side. As the creaky door closes, Jones's dog, Ferocious, barks and the music fades up—hand claps and a funky bass. "I see the ghetto every day, walking to school" is the next thing Jones tells us, and listeners know that they are about to hear something different—gritty, funny, shocking—and unlike any other story on radio up to this point. Teenage boys from the ghetto are not typically a source of cultural affairs programming.

Thirteen-year-old Jones and 14-year-old Lloyd Newman collaborated with producer David Isay to create this documentary for WBEZ's *Chicago Matters* series. Neither Jones nor Newman had any previous experience with recording or documentary production. Isay spent a few hours showing the boys how to work with the tape recorder and microphone and then sent them off to record events from their daily lives in the Ida B. Wells housing projects and surrounding neighborhood for 10 days. As the documentary unfolds, listeners find that Jones and Newman embody and project a balance between streetwise worldliness and a hopeful innocence.

The boys interview their school principal, who claims that the students are affected by the negative publicity that surrounds the neighborhood. She says students internalize that publicity and believe that they are bad kids with no future. They interview some friends at school as well as some who have dropped out and are selling drugs on the street corners. One of these friends says that he expects to be dead within 10 years.

Most of the documentary blends dialogue from their everyday lives, which is often playful, boastful, and humorous. The teenagers interview family members who reflect on their sense of loss and pain, their struggle to make ends meet, and their hopes for the future. In 1937, LeAlan's grandmother moved into the house where they live. "There were no projects; it was all homes. There were also some nice hotels where different movie stars would come to stay," she says. "It happened gradually. Day by day and year by year people would move out." The audience learns that one of LeAlan's uncles was murdered and another is addicted to drugs. His aunt is an alcoholic and began drinking after his cousin, Jermaine, developed a mild form of mental retardation as a baby, brought on by drugs used to cure his leukemia. Jones's grandmother has custody of LeAlan and his younger

sister because his mother is mentally ill. "I have been on medication off and on since 1977," says Jones's mother, Toochie. "One time, I had went downstairs, and it's a long story, but I started seeing shadows on the back porch when I used to look out the window at night. And it looked like Ronald Reagan, and he was talking to my grandmother."

Although these stories represent autobiographical details of these two radio diarists and their families, the accounts ultimately ask listeners to consider the trials and tribulations of others and to gain some sense of the personal, cultural, and economic influences that shape people's lives. *Ghetto Life 101* is a narrative about contemporary public life, connecting to, and expanding on, a tradition of fieldwork that links the personal to the political.¹ "Every kid [...] has to grow up fast," says Newman about life in the Ida B. Wells projects and the nearby neighborhoods. "Like Vietnam sometimes you might hear *boogaboogabooga*," observes Jones, imitating the sound of gunfire. "And then Vietnam, them people came back crazy. I live in Vietnam, so what you think I'm gonna be if I live in it and they just went and visited. Living around here—it's depressing. Man, it's depressing."

After Jones and Newman finished collecting their tape, they sorted through the material with Isay, who helped them write a script and produce the final story. The documentary became one of the most acclaimed programs in public radio history, winning nearly every major radio award in U.S. broadcasting. Most community-based documentaries will not win broadcasting awards; however, we begin this chapter with this brief discussion of *Ghetto Life 101* because the process of creating the documentary and the documentary itself exemplify the important concept of the citizen storyteller. Neither of the teenagers who recorded and collaborated on the script for their program had previous training in audio recording and production. But with the proper equipment and assistance from an established producer, they were able to create a story that offered a profound and significant image of community life to a national radio audience.

This chapter explores citizen storytelling as a form of collective media production that links qualitative research and activism as a mode of participation in public life. Using audio documentary to conduct qualitative studies in cooperation with local residents can contribute to public dialogue and debate about important historical and contemporary issues and can ultimately function as an opportunity for qualitative researchers to share knowledge and skills in an effort to extend a vision of education to create a classroom without walls. We begin with an analysis of citizen storytelling as a way to tap into community assets and then move to a detailed discussion of the types of citizen-storytelling efforts that can be adopted by qualitative researchers. Ultimately, this chapter shows how citizen storytelling can be a powerful assets-based form of community activism and fieldwork while embodying a critical qualitative ethos.

ENLARGING THE NARRATIVE ARENA

A citizen storyteller can be anyone who wants to create a documentary about historical or contemporary life. The concept is based in the idea of democratizing the means of representing interests, issues, experiences, and the concerns of people who do not have access to media but have stories they want to tell. People who want to do such projects will not likely have recording equipment or experience with audio documentary production. Their desire to create an audio piece emerges from some combination of curiosity about an issue, an interest in using audio to tell that story, and a willingness to reach out or respond to someone who has the equipment and knowledge and can provide assistance with the production of the story. It would be naïve to think that citizen storytelling is a purely self-motivated effort. Instead, these storytellers receive guidance throughout the research, recording, and editing processes by an established producer (e.g., David Isay) or a group or an institution that is trying to promote and develop such projects. The idea, however, is that citizens are the driving force for the subject matter of their stories and that those stories will broaden people's understanding of public and private life. It is a process of offering guidance and mentoring, and it is most fulfilling for everyone involved if citizen storytelling begins from an assets-based model of community partnerships.

Of course, citizen storytelling is not unique to audio production, although audio provides unique storytelling opportunities. A variety of collective media efforts have appeared around the world as individuals with little (if any) technical training seek to use mass communication tools to tell local stories. Independent media centers, guerrilla video training sessions, blogs, and community art programs emerge from a cultural goal that is similar to citizen storytelling: to create opportunities and venues for citizens to learn about and develop projects that further public dialogue and debate while empowering those individuals who want to participate in cultural production. "The opportunity to be engaged in art appeared to evoke an intensely positive experience of community among participants," argued Seana Lowe in her ethnographic study of community art programs in Denver.² These positive experiences take shape at the individual and collective levels. "Self-esteem is enhanced because an expression of me, through art, is validated as a thing of value, therefore I feel more valued," one participant in a community art program told Lowe.³ Community art programs are similar in spirit to citizen storytelling efforts, and at times the two overlap. For instance, community arts centers can help facilitate grants from local, regional, state, or national arts or humanities agencies to help fund start-up costs for citizen storytelling efforts or ongoing programs.⁴ Additionally, this combination of individual self-worth and social connection, as well as an

assets-based model of community building, is at the heart of most citizen-storytelling efforts.

Up to this point, many community storytelling efforts have grown from the mentoring of people by independent radio producers. These efforts are facilitated by workshops offered by community radio stations or fostered by internships at national programming outlets such as Transom.org, Minnesota Public Radio, and National Public Radio (NPR). Mentoring opportunities are also offered in a variety of production-oriented university classes and programs. For example, a documentary photography professor might partner students with community members to create collaborative pieces, at times in the context of service learning. We believe that citizen storytelling can extend from these existing programs to easily fold into critical ethnographic projects. In addition to viewing the citizen storyteller from the standpoint of enriching discourse in community and public life, this approach to cultural reporting can also be considered a form of critical ethnography.

"Critical ethnographers attempt to identify and illustrate the processes by which cultural representation occurs. They then step back and reflect on its possible sources and suggest ways to resist it," wrote Jim Thomas.⁵ These modes of resistance vary depending on the context of a study. For example, some critical scholars help people understand problematic institutional policies in an effort to usher change.⁶ Others hope to affect public policy.⁷ Some raise awareness about race and identity in everyday life.⁸ In each of these cases, qualitative researchers use critical frameworks to help transform local, national, and international dialogue and debate about cultural, social, and political issues. Integrating citizen-storytelling efforts into a qualitative framework is an extension of these approaches in that qualitative researchers can use their knowledge, training, and skills to assist local residents with the planning, implementation, and execution of their own studies and storytelling. "We have a calling to mission and public service that exists outside the marketplace and squarely in the civic realm," claimed radio producer and Transom.org founder Jay Allison. "We can serve that mission through traditional reporting and documentary, but we also help citizens speak for themselves, to one another, directly."⁹

This desire to help citizens speak for themselves is crucial. Other efforts in mass media share similar goals relative to public life, but these efforts have not been enacted in the same way. For example, the community journalism movement emerged from a plan to incorporate local voices, stories, and issues into news reporting that had increasingly become more concerned with state, national, and international issues and affairs. David Kurpius noted in a study of community journalism for the Pew Charitable Trust and Radio and Television News Directors Foundation that the benefits of community reporting (which would include documentary work) are increased diversity, greater depth and context of coverage, and a stronger understanding of the various

groups that make up a particular listening area.¹⁰ The problem is that many community journalism efforts have morphed into stories *about* community members rather than stories *by* community members about issues that interest and concern them. Citizen storytelling is driven *by* community members, who create and tell the stories they think are important.

Stories created by citizen storytellers do not need to deal directly with issues of public and community life, but we connect this mode of cultural analysis to critical ethnography because the stories often raise awareness about social and political injustices and can critically examine relationships between the personal and the political. These kinds of connections are found in the *Prison Diaries* series, *Radio Rookies*, and the *OutLoud Queer Youth* radio project. In other words, some citizen-storytelling efforts mirror some of the same politically engaged issues of critical ethnographies published in books and journal articles in the humanities and social sciences as well as in documentaries. They seek to tackle bigger sociocultural problems and critically examine various dimensions of institutions and everyday life.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY ASSETS

A variety of activists involved with community building, and scholars who strive to blend qualitative research and activism (often in conjunction with service learning), have been developing and advancing new ways to understand community-based research and learning. The standard model for thinking about social change has been grounded in a needs-based rhetoric. That is, unemployment, gangs, crime, and slum housing are often foregrounded in public discourse about impoverished, or troubled, areas. People who live in these areas are represented as needy and the (often temporary) solution to their problems is for organizations outside their community to provide help. "Public, private, and non-profit human service systems, often supported by university research and foundation funding, translate these programs into local activities that teach people the nature and extent of their problems, and the value of services as the answer to their problems," argued John Kretzmann and John McKnight. The residents develop a sense that "their well-being depends upon being a client."¹¹ Kretzmann and McKnight proposed reframing how people view troubled neighborhoods and how to help residents by starting with their community's assets.

If one were to think about the story told by LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman from the perspective of this needs-based approach to community change, the documentary would not likely be funded. Instead, funding might be used for a variety of programs more directly related to drug and alcohol dependency, housing, and job training. Additionally, the difficulties

the teens and their families face would be the primary focus of these programs, disregarding the important positive influences in the teenagers' lives. That is not to say that social programs that can help people should be abandoned or that qualitative researchers should disregard addressing social, political, and economic problems. Instead, there are alternative models that one can consider when assessing service programs and developing, conducting, and representing qualitative research.

Starting one's research or community-building efforts from an asset-based model focuses one's energy on community and neighborhood strengths and distinctive qualities. For example, the youths who are all lumped together as gang members and truants in the needs-based model are reimagined in terms of their gifts and skills in an assets framework. These youths might be able to fix cars, use computer skills, or contribute physical strengths to community construction projects. Teens who are encouraged to develop their skills are more likely to see themselves as something beyond the needy and deviant constructions that often tend to prevail as stereotypes in political discourse and mass media. The principal at LeAlan's and Lloyd's school spoke to this very sentiment when she commented on the mediated representations of their neighborhood. Yet the boys' involvement with the research for and production of *Ghetto Life 101* clearly shows how teens can see themselves as something other than victims and clients. Rather than sending a cadre of experts into a neighborhood to tell people what they should do to improve their lives, researchers using an assets approach begin with the goal of developing partnerships. Researchers have expertise that can help, but that expertise is only one piece of the community-building puzzle.

Of course, the lingering issue for scholars who want to merge qualitative studies and activism is how to document community-building processes in ways that can maintain the partnerships that exist in the field. Historically, researchers have written journal articles or white papers that explain these processes or argue for policy changes. Too often the voices of the community participants become invisible in these documents, removed from the final product. And, as we discussed in Chapter 1, creating a venue for multiple voices is a central concern for critical ethnographers. Even though the crisis of representation pushed many qualitative researchers to reassess their work, and the critical examination of ethnography's textuality in prominent journals and books asked researchers to reconsider the representation of culture, scholars remain immersed in many of the same conventions for conducting and reporting qualitative research. The ongoing quest of qualitative researchers for an ethnographic alternative highlights that these researchers remain unsatisfied with the limitations of representing fieldwork, and critical scholars continue to be concerned about the overwhelming force of the researcher's voice in the final text. There is not an easy way to move beyond this dilemma; however, audio can function as a valuable tool

for individuals and community groups to tell their own stories about the issues that affect their lives. The reason for considering audio as an ethnographic alternative is that this medium "is seductive," noted Jacki Apple. "It strokes the senses, wraps itself around you, whispers in the dark, wakes you up in the morning."¹² In short, audio allows researchers to more fully engage the senses that are essential in fieldwork, to share those qualities with citizens and inspire a desire to understand the detailed social and cultural processes of the people in a community. Ultimately, the citizen storyteller emerges at the intersection of ongoing discussions about community and public life, activism, and research. Citizen storytelling is a way of building a stake in community interests by invigorating community dialogue.

BUILDING TRUST

In 2001, Robert Putnam published *Bowling Alone*,¹³ a book that received praise from academics, reporters, politicians, community activists, and ordinary citizens. Many of these readers, who had been troubled by an increasing sense of social disconnection, responded to Putnam's explanation of depleting social capital as the central reason why public life had begun to feel more isolated. "[S]ocial capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them," wrote Putnam. "In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue.' The difference is that 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital."¹⁴ Putnam argued that declining memberships in social organizations such as bowling leagues, PTA, and the local Red Cross, as well as the increase in "mailing list organizations" such as the AARP and National Rifle Association (NRA), have contributed to a decrease in social capital, which, in turn, has led to a broader feeling of social disconnection among U.S. citizens. Essentially, the ways of belonging to the groups and institutions that make public and social affiliation feel real are eroding or transforming into the abstractions of computer-generated mass mailings that speak to no one in particular but assume there are still benefits to "membership." Putnam considered a number of causes for this problem, including the increase in two-income families, which affects daily community service work because most adults are on the job during the day; greater mobility among people, which chips away at stability within neighborhoods and hence people's participation in public life; and the technological transformation of leisure, such as an increasing amount of time spent watching television.¹⁵

Although each of his suggested reasons for shifts in social networks and public trust deserves more investigation and analysis, the relationship between mass communication and public life is most important for our study of citizen storytelling. Putnam was certainly not the only critic to weigh in on the impact of technology on public life. "Indeed, few of us understand how vast technological-economic engines fueled by electronic communication networks replace local life with the image of local life," claimed Stephen Doheny-Farina.¹⁶ James Carey's analysis of mass communication in *Communication as Culture* highlighted that the leveling of local cultures through mass communication had occurred with the emergence of the telegraph and the onset of an urban imperialism.¹⁷ Such arguments about mass communication place communication technologies at odds with local culture and community formation.

While these critics warned us about the problems with technological communication, others problematically appealed to communication technologies as a source of communal connection. Peter Simonson noted that there has been a "recurring dream" throughout the past 60 years "that mass communication might overcome the finitude of local civil society and bring about national community."¹⁸ He called this dream "*communication hope* and suggest[ed] that it has the effect of occluding the vital importance of more mundane aspects of everyday civil society."¹⁹ Although Simonson offered an important warning to be careful about how much faith one places in mass communication to bring people together, we also believe that there is a difference between communication hope as occluding everyday life and communication hope as an inspiration for communal connection and opportunities to participate in public life. The difference is a matter of scale. The former emerges from a naive belief that mass communication on a mass scale can bring people together in an "imagined community."²⁰ We don't believe that a televised event such as the Tour de France, for example, can connect people across great distances and therefore create a shared understanding that will inspire greater sociopolitical alliances. People watching the Tour together in a pub or on a big screen set up in a public square may have that momentary sense of intense connection that Victor Turner called *communitas*,²¹ but this is not a sustained sense of community. Instead, our communication hope is that citizen-storytelling efforts provide a basis for increasing and enriching a sense of community through stories that express and characterize a sense of what people hold in common, as well as what distinguishes them from each other.

Ultimately, we want to reframe the criticism of media as a facilitator of isolation and instead examine how audio documentary, as a form of cultural reporting to record and represent cultural practices, can help shape dialogue and debate as well as increase opportunities for people to meet and learn about others. Again, we believe this emerges not from a sense of

global or national community but rather from openness among the qualitative researcher, the citizen storyteller, and the participants in the documentary. We are certainly not alone in our sense that the citizen storyteller uses audio documentary (often in partnership with a radio producer or a qualitative researcher) to create a story about an issue or host of issues that can also model what it means to be a participant in the public sphere. Jay Allison noted that public radio journalism reflects a utopian ideal, whereby citizens "use the airwaves to share our stories as we try to understand each other better, to not be afraid of each other, to come a little closer together."²² We want to push this sentiment because we see this goal as anything but utopian, given the successes of community reporting efforts. Instead, we share Joe Frank's vision of radio as a compelling sensorial medium that can be one of the most "powerful, intimate, and compelling" ways to hear other people.²³

ENACTING CITIZEN STORYTELLING

Depending on the size of the town or city where you live, there are a number of options for people interested in community storytelling. In Chicago, for example, WBEZ FM, a large public radio station, produces local, regional, and national programming. There are also community-based efforts, such as Radio Arte and Batey Urbano. Radio Arte is a low-power FM station in the Pilsen neighborhood, which is predominantly Mexican and Mexican American. Batey Urbano in Humboldt Park, a Puerto Rican neighborhood, runs an Internet station that features stories created by local high school students that address a range of issues about the neighborhood. Vocalo is a new station that started online as it awaited approval of tower placement. Vocalo bridges the professionalism of WBEZ with the community efforts of Radio Arte and Batey. The station features regular hosts, who produce their own shows and content for the station, such as documentaries, soundscape recordings, sonic art, interviews, and poetry, and the station is also involved in a range of pedagogical initiatives that help teach local residents, many of whom are in poorer sections of the city, to record and edit stories. The producers and hosts collectively reflect and embody an assets-based model of community building and help foster social capital in the city.

Obviously, a large city such as Chicago will feature more opportunities to record audio pieces and more media outlets to share those projects, but smaller towns also provide a range of exciting partnerships. For example, in Keams Canyon, Arizona, on the Hopi Reservation, community station KUYI Hopi Radio focuses primarily on Native American programming and produces stories that focus on Native American issues. The station broadcasts a program produced by teens at Hopi High School, for instance; the program allows them

time to discuss issues that affect them. In the small coastal town of East Orland, Maine, community station WERU-FM produces public affairs programming through volunteer efforts. The station provides training to residents from small towns in midcoast Maine, and they report on issues that are relevant to their communities. Although much of their programming is music, they also produce *Weekend Voices*, a magazine program that features local volunteers reporting on cultural and community events. "Unlike other public stations [most of which are either affiliated with NPR, the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, or college campuses], community radio stations in the U.S. have no affiliation," wrote Marc Raboy. "They are independent and see themselves as social animation tools of community development, serving a media-poor public of minorities and lower classes."²⁴

Perhaps the best example of citizen storytelling that bridges local, regional, and national hopes for and concerns about public life is StoryCorps. "StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit project whose mission is to honor and celebrate one another's lives through listening."²⁵ In short, a StoryCorps project consists of two people entering a soundproof booth where they ask one another questions, tell stories, and reflect on a range of personal, social, and cultural experiences. Many, but not all, of the recording sessions tend to be intergenerational. For example, when a grandchild wants to know about the life of a grandparent through the grandparent's stories, the grandson or granddaughter makes a recording in one of the StoryCorps facilities. The recording spaces are either installed in a public location, such as the StoryCorps' recording booth in New York City's Grand Central Station, or mobilized, as in the case of the StoryCorps' Airstream trailer that travels the country and serves as a recording studio. A StoryCorps session lasts 40 minutes. The conversation and stories are recorded on two CDs. One goes to the participants and the other is sent to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. Additionally, the stories that StoryCorps most wants to share with a larger listening audience are edited, usually to 2 minutes, and broadcast on NPR and streamed via the NPR and StoryCorps Web sites. "A country that is better at listening to one another is more compassionate and thoughtful," David Isay told ABC News, when explaining the project's rationale.²⁶

The StoryCorps project is one of "the largest oral history projects of its kind, creating a growing portrait of who we really are as Americans."²⁷ This project has been able to maintain momentum and grow because StoryCorps staff members travel the United States year-round. Its Web site lists dates when the mobile unit will appear in various cities and towns, and residents can sign up for recording sessions. Some longer-term recording booths are stationed in other places for a year at a time. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center on Age and Community, the Milwaukee Public Library, and WUWM 89.7 FM partnered with StoryCorps to place a booth at the public library from January 2007 to January 2008.

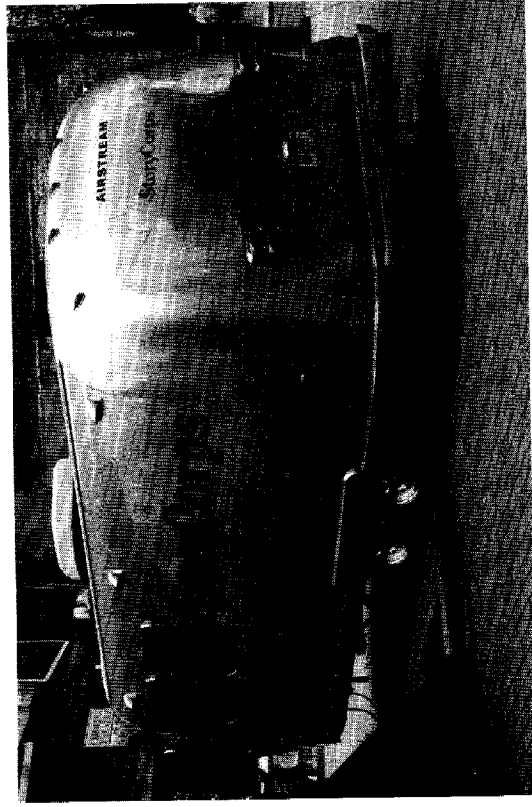


Photo 3.1 StoryCorps mobile studio

StoryCorps began in 2003 and since that time has recorded thousands of sessions. Some stories provide humorous anecdotes about everyday life. For example, in one story, 82-year-old Sigmund Stahl tells his granddaughter about his first date with Bonnie—his future wife and her future grandmother—and how Bonnie's choice to see the adult film *Deep Throat* simultaneously offended him but showed herchutzpa.²⁸ Other stories more directly relate to political conversations in the United States today and hence engage us as community members and public citizens. For example, in one story, Blanca Alvarez tells her daughter, Connie, about illegally crossing the border from Mexico to the United States and adjusting to life in the United States. Blanca describes having to remove her shoes so border patrol dogs wouldn't hear her feet on the rocks and then, when border control agents had a shift change, running without shoes across the uneven rocks that landscape the area around the border. Listeners hear about the work ethic of Blanca and her husband and their struggles to make a life in the United States. The story humanizes the faceless illegal immigrants through a firsthand account of their experience.

Hearing these stories and others on NPR or on the StoryCorps Web site is not likely going to be the sole motivation for community-building efforts, but these citizen storytellers contribute to a broader diversity of voices in the public sphere and do so in ways that allow audiences to consider issues big and small. These citizens' stories can foster greater sympathy and empathy for others because listeners might hear their own stories in these audio pieces.

This is the foundation for social capital and community building that emerges from an assets-based model of community where each individual is valued.

Of course, StoryCorps is one type of project that exists on a continuum of citizen-storytelling efforts. The content of a session is completely controlled by the storytellers; they decide which questions to ask one another, how long to discuss certain details, and what to leave out when telling the stories. On the other end of the spectrum are *Ghetto Life 101* and the DIY productions at Batey Urbano, where citizens research the story, record the interviews and sounds for the story, and then edit their stories. In each example, though, storytelling and recording are the avenues into an understanding of convergent and divergent experiences.

As we noted previously, documentary producers, not qualitative researchers, have been responsible for organizing most of the community-storytelling efforts. This disparity has to do with researchers' mistaken belief that documentary is a form of production and is therefore separate from qualitative work. Moreover, qualitative researchers tend to focus on writing about fieldwork rather than representing work through audio. However, there are a number of ways in which qualitative researchers can be more active in this arena of citizen storytelling, and the StoryCorps example brings us to some of these opportunities.

Mentoring citizen storytellers is the first and perhaps easiest method, given the amount of work many researchers already do on this front. That is, researchers are working with students enrolled in classes, working with students on independent studies, and often providing guidance for students who are interested in fieldwork. From our own experience, we offer two different examples that demonstrate the types of mentoring that can occur with citizen storytellers.

Daniel mentored Geoff Sheridan, a former student at DePaul University, as Geoff created a documentary about Hare Krishna monks based in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago. Geoff had experience with digital editing of music but had never conducted a fieldwork project. He was inspired by the stories he heard on WBEZ and NPR and wanted to learn how to create his own documentary about the monks. Parts of the initial meetings focused on recording techniques—microphone placement, which microphone to use in a specific context, and where to keep the MiniDisc recorder when conducting interviews in the streets. However, most of the conversations centered on the fieldwork itself, such as the ethics of recording, the need to contemplate what one feels in addition to what one hears and sees, and how storytelling is integrally a process and product. After Geoff recorded enough tape to get a feel for the kind of story he could tell, meetings focused on the actual story as well as editing, developing a narrative, and using the technologies to create cross-fades or layer ambient sounds. Finally, Daniel and Geoff met to listen to various drafts of the project and to discuss the best way to represent what he had learned about the urban monks

and their struggles. In the end, Geoff created an excellent documentary, which featured a wonderful array of ambient sounds recorded in the temple and on the streets. He included thoughtful interviews and narration to help situate tensions between spirituality and materialism in the city. Most important, he gained valuable experience doing fieldwork in an effort to understand what the monks thought was important about their work and cultural practices. Daniel's role as mentor functioned in a variety of ways, from discussing interviewing techniques to simply affirming Geoff's idea that spending the night in the temple would likely lead to a deeper understanding of the everyday life of a monk to more active advice about editing and reorganizing the story from the initial drafts to the final version.

At the University of South Florida in Tampa, Mark created a project called DocumentaryWorks, which allowed citizens to create radio stories about issues that were of interest to them. One notable example from the project was Michelle Zacks, who was active in a number of grassroots organizations and had a strong interest in investigating how a 1995 Florida constitutional amendment known as the "Net Ban" affected the lives of independent commercial fishermen in the Gulf Coast community of Pine Island, Florida. The Net Ban restricted net fishing in state waters and banned the use of particular types of mesh nets. The amendment had a lot of support, with more than 70% of Florida residents voting in favor of the ban. Michelle had never produced a radio story and came to DocumentaryWorks to investigate the effects of the ban on fishermen in Pine Island. After a few training sessions with the equipment, Michelle took several trips to Pine Island to meet with fishermen and their families. She interviewed them extensively and produced a story that told how the ban had nearly devastated the livelihood of many fishing folk who had been operating in the local waters for generations. Her story was not only about the community; it also pointed to broader contradictions and conflicts between conservationists, commercial developers, and the neighborhoods along the coast that were experiencing unbridled growth and transformation. In addition to gaining support for her project with a small grant from the Florida Humanities Council to fund some of her travel between Tampa and Pine Island, Michelle also provided recorded copies of her completed interviews to the Pine Island library, so they could be used by future researchers. Her completed story, "Net Gains and Losses," was broadcast on community radio station WMNF FM in Tampa and hosted on the Florida Humanities Council Web site.

Without any previous experience, Michelle produced a 20-minute radio documentary that offered a story that she felt needed to be told. Along the way, she did the kind of research that anyone conducting an ethnographic study of the fishing community would do. She built rapport and trust with the fishermen and their families, attended community meetings, went out on fishing boats, and conducted considerable research on the economics of

the fishing industry in Florida. In addition to completing a compelling story that no other media outlet in Florida had covered, Michelle's interest in making an audio documentary cultivated her interest in qualitative research to the point that she is currently pursuing a doctorate in American Studies at the University of Hawaii. She continues to work on audio documentary and has made considerable recordings of the residents of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

In both of these scenarios, we worked with individuals on projects in ways that allowed the storytellers to create audio documentaries about the places where they live and the people who are simultaneously visible and hidden. Although mentoring is a function of any type of citizen storytelling, we have identified mentoring as a unique category because it is a form of working with others that reflects what most qualitative researchers are already doing on some level: In their classes, researchers teach people how to do fieldwork, and, if people "give back" to those they study, then researchers often tend to teach those folks in some way as well.²⁹ Of course there is also a difference between the mentoring that most of us do as qualitative researchers and the mentoring that is a feature of citizen-storytelling efforts. Citizen storytelling may require greater degrees of involvement by the qualitative researcher, and the researcher needs to be prepared for the reality of diverse stories. The examples of Geoff Sheridan and Michelle Zacks involve people who studied other groups and the cultural practices that were important for those groups, but some forms of citizen storytelling begin with the self and grow to a broader cultural sphere; this is often what occurs when citizens record radio diaries.

The second way that qualitative researchers can participate in citizen-storytelling efforts is to work with existing programs to help provide models for the citizens in one's own city or town. For example, qualitative researchers can sponsor StoryCorps recording sessions at their universities. We have found that our colleagues and administrators at our universities are very excited about audio documentary and cultural reporting classes and partnerships. Funds for creative projects are often available at most universities, and many universities are seeking novel ways to participate in the life of the city or town in which the university is located (striving to overcome the town-gown split). A StoryCorps session could help meet a university's needs while inspiring local citizens to tell their own stories.

Additionally, qualitative researchers can organize public listening sessions. This is a somewhat recent trend in the world of audio documentary, where the historical focus has primarily been on radio and secondarily on Internet outlets.³⁰ Similar to gathering to watch a film, listening sessions provide an opportunity for people to get together to listen to audio pieces and discuss what they hear. These events only require that the qualitative scholar find audio pieces to play, secure a space with a good sound system,

and promote the listening session. The space does not need to be on a campus. Partnering with a community arts center or arts space makes the session more of a community event rather than a university event. The great thing about a listening session is that it allows people to talk about the pieces that they hear, unlike listening to the radio or Internet, which tends to happen individually and usually alone. These sessions are very inspiring and can help members of the audience hear the types of stories they might start to tell, encouraging them to move from members of an audience to fieldworkers who are producing their own stories.

Third Coast Festival has created a number of thematic listening events at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago. For example, one session in 2007 was part of the "One Book, One Chicago" program that occurs every year in the city, and featured audio pieces inspired by *The Crucible*. Another session consisted of short documentaries that were made by people responding to Third Coast's call for documentaries "inspired by one of three items purchased at a dollar store—a 4-pk of wooden mousetraps, a bicycle bell, and a ceramic mug bearing the sentence: 'Well-behaved women rarely make history.'"³¹ Both were successful in terms of drawing audiences, generating conversation and excitement, and providing a space for citizen interaction.

Another option for qualitative scholars is to build listening sessions into larger and ongoing programs created by the scholars and a variety of community partners. These projects will likely involve mentoring in ways that mirror our earlier examples, but will extend to include developing relationships with and coordinating efforts among local radio stations, art spaces, Web site hosts, community arts groups, and recording studios. The goal is going to be, at minimum, three-fold:

- First, teaching people how to do fieldwork so they can gather the information they need to tell an engaging, developed, and intelligent story is crucial.
- Second, these partnerships should provide outlets for people to hear the stories that have been created. Listening rooms are the most engaging outlet in terms of public life and social interaction, but the reality is that people want the affirmation that comes with having one's story played on the radio or featured on an Internet site dedicated to documentary work.
- Third, the partners should work hard to create an overall feeling of pride among people involved with the program, which helps develop a community's assets and strengthens social capital among residents.

Finally, qualitative researchers can use service learning classes to blend on-campus efforts to provide students with experiential learning opportunities with broader initiatives to build networks of interaction and trust. We

highlighted StoryCorps in this section because the program embodies many of the important and exciting features of citizen storytelling, including connecting the storytelling to more general outreach efforts. Again, this is not necessarily a new idea for many qualitative researchers, who either view their research and scholarship as a form of activism or strive to give back in some way to the people who participate in the research. Additionally, many qualitative scholars have begun to connect service learning coursework to larger curricular efforts in qualitative research. Although service learning courses are taught in a number of academic disciplines, which employ diverse methodological perspectives in their teaching and research, there is much overlap between this mode of teaching and this form of research in terms of curiosity about the lives of others. At the heart of ethnographic research is a belief that one of the best ways to understand people's lives is to interview them, observe them, and participate with them in cultural practices; a desire to participate in cultural life; and, in critically informed work, a desire to help others and give something back to the people researchers learn so much about and who give so much of their time for these studies.

Audio projects can be used in a number of different service learning classes or assigned as service learning projects in nonservice learning classes. First, a long-form documentary can take the place of a research paper. The documentary can be created about an organization where students are volunteering. This assignment should serve as a critical examination of the kinds of issues that are central to the organization's existence and practices. Or the documentary can emerge from an issue that the student learns about while doing service work. For example, a student who translates materials from English to Spanish for an organization that deals with cancer patients could create a documentary about efforts to translate materials for immigrant populations and how important such work is given the increasing Spanish-speaking population in the United States.

Second, radio diaries can be used in the classes. Many professors require weekly reflective journals from students when teaching service learning classes. Instead of writing in journals, the students can record audio entries about their service work, which might lead to more thoughtful engagements with the service work and might find a broader audience if presented as a podcast or if all of the entries from the term are edited to create a long-form piece. Similarly, students can work with their organizations to create diaries. A student who works in an alcohol education program with teens might ask the teens to record diaries about the struggles they face in their high schools when bucking the trends of teen drinking.

Third, students can work together on a larger project that yields a documentary about that project. For example, if students work with a neighborhood organization to plan and organize a major neighborhood event,

the students can create an audio piece that accompanies that event. For instance, they might create a soundtrack piece that leads residents through a public space where the event occurs, or they might create a documentary about the neighborhood that airs on community radio prior to the event. Additionally, students can work with qualitative researchers or citizens (or both) on public history projects. These audio pieces can "create spaces for dialogue about history and for the collection of memories, and to insure that various voices are heard in those spaces, [rather] than to provide a finished interpretation of events."³² Again, this approach reflects the spirit that inspired James Clifford's call for dialogical fieldwork and Judith Stacy's appeal for a feminist-inspired polyvocality.³³

We understand that some of these efforts require another level of work. That is, if documentary is included in a service learning class, the qualitative researcher must bear the workload of finding service sites, keeping track of students' volunteer work, training students to use equipment and edit a piece, and teaching students about fieldwork, in addition to managing the normal flow of assignments. So there is certainly more work involved with such efforts—but there is also more reward.

In the end, the motives of engaging people from everyday life in the projects and approaches we've discussed in this chapter are fueled by a desire to create more possibilities for learning and to understand the many dimensions of cultural life. Along the way, we imagine that we might enlarge the arenas of public discourse and hear about lives, concerns, and experiences that typically do not appear on the horizon of mainstream media. Michael Schudson noted that "democratic talk is talk amongst people of different values and different backgrounds; it is also profoundly uncomfortable."³⁴ Given this reality, not every audio piece is going to be received with great fanfare, and many citizens will want to tell stories that diverge from the kinds of stories a researcher might tell. However, it is crucial to remember that these stories are opportunities to engage in dialogue and debate and for qualitative researchers to share knowledge about and the skills of conducting qualitative studies beyond the walls of the classroom. The stories created by citizen storytellers simultaneously function as responses to an issue or host of issues and as invitations to reconsider such issues. "The most important thing about public conversation," argued James Carey, "is that we don't know what we think until we hear what we say."³⁵ Qualitative researchers can use their educational training, including their understanding of observation, interviewing, and participant observation, to mentor citizens as these citizens use audio to work out what they think and to help listeners do the same. Moreover, our understanding of dialogical fieldwork, alternative forms of representing fieldwork, and a desire to critically engage detailed social and cultural processes blend with the assets model of community building to make citizen storytelling an exciting form of critical ethnographic work.

Appendix: Getting Started

It is difficult to make quality audio recordings without good equipment. However, one does not need to purchase top-of-the-line gear to create a broadcast-quality recording. In this appendix, we provide a brief overview of the type of equipment needed to record and edit the variety of broadcast-quality audio pieces that we discuss in the book. Of course, technologies change and improve at a rapid rate. Given this reality, we focus on general features of recording equipment and editing programs rather than provide detailed comparisons between specific products, we recommend the “Tools” section on Transom.org, the tools board within the “Talk” section of Transom.org, and discussion forums used by people who record concerts (often referred to as *tapers*, even if cassette recordings and digital audiotape recordings are rapidly becoming outdated formats).

GETTING GOOD TAPE

The most important piece of the puzzle is *to get good tape*. That is, (a) a researcher should strive to eliminate noise when doing an interview, and (b) voices or ambient sounds should be recorded clearly. First, when we say that noise should be eliminated we are referring to background noise, such as the sounds of a computer humming, the buzzing of fluorescent lights, the gurgling of a window air conditioner, the chatter of people talking in a hallway, or the sounds of a radio playing in the background. There are situations when the ambient sounds of everyday life add depth to one’s recordings, but the inclusion of such ambient sounds should be strategic. Interviews recorded in places with needed background noise should be done in that setting because the ambient sounds will enhance the quality of the piece. For instance, a researcher who records a tour of stars on Hollywood Boulevard is aware of the street noise and decides that recording in such an environment won’t be detrimental to the quality of the recording but will actually provide the listener with a feeling of being there. In most instances, however, background noise exists on a recording because the researcher is not wearing headphones and is unable to detect it. Don’t be shy when trying to find ways to solve the problem of background interference. Ask participants to help you get the best recording you can. Ask them to turn off their computer, for example, or move to a more quiet location. It is necessary to wear headphones at all times during recording so noises can be heard and to explain to participants why the noise will hinder the recording. Additionally, even seemingly quiet rooms feature some type

of noise that will be picked up by a microphone, so it is a good idea to record 1 or 2 minutes of room sounds before and after an interview. These sounds can be layered underneath interviews to mask edits.

Finding a balance between getting good tape and recording sounds that help place the listener in the scene can be difficult, so it is important to record a lot and work hard to get good tape in each situation. As a general rule, record more than you think you will use so you have options when editing. Not everything needs to be recorded at one time and in a single take. As most experienced fieldworkers know, cultural practices do not occur in a linear fashion. Researchers witness and experience a wide variety of exciting, mundane, joyous, and painful situations when in the field, but rarely do these contexts converge in a single place at a particular time. Therefore, it is important to remember that chaotic and idiosyncratic features of everyday life are not going to change just because you are documenting them with an audio recorder rather than writing on a notepad. Just as one writes about fieldwork in a way that takes a variety of actions swirling around in any moment in time and makes those actions appear linear, one can record one thing at a time and then put the parts together into a coherent whole. Scholars tend to assess documentary with higher expectations when it comes to issues of representation, falsely assuming that documentary can reproduce reality when the reproduction of reality is impossible. Instead, one needs to understand that using audio recordings to represent fieldwork is similar to writing in that researchers work hard to truthfully represent what is learned during a study, but representations always involve some level of construction. As Clifford Geertz noted, all qualitative texts are "fictions: fiction, in the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned'—the original meaning of *factio*—not that they are false, unfactual, or merely 'as if' thought experiments."¹ Ultimately, the technologies allow for the combination of different recording elements. Most documentarians prefer to interview in a quiet environment and then record the ambient sounds later, layering the interview over an ambient soundbed.

Another type of noise that needs to be eliminated is buzzing caused by a bad connection between the microphone and the mic cable or the mic cable and the recorder. Always check the connections between the recorder and the microphone. Again, wearing headphones will help identify this problem when it occurs, and the noise can then be eliminated, usually by disconnecting and reconnecting the cable.

A second meaning of getting good tape has to do with making sure voices and ambient sounds are recorded clearly. The type of microphone you use dictates how close you need to be to the source. In general, the microphone should be located 4–6 inches beneath a participant's mouth. Placing the mic this close will help cut out background noise, and locating it below the participant's mouth will help reduce popping, heavy breaths, and other mouth sounds that are picked up if the mic is directly in front of

the participant's mouth. Although they live in a media-saturated society, most people are not used to having a microphone placed 4–6 inches beneath their mouth. Therefore, it is crucial that you are comfortable with your equipment as well as interviewing in general. You can then focus on making the participant(s) comfortable.²

We are not suggesting that there is one specific approach to documentary fieldwork: Either one enters the field with the idea that quality recordings are going to be made or one does not bring the equipment. There are obviously times when it is difficult to get quality recordings, and it is important to continue recording during those times. Perhaps the recordings will help with a written piece or perhaps you can summarize what occurred via narration. But the important point to remember is that broadcast-quality recordings require more than just turning the recorder on and seeing what happens. Broadcast-quality recording requires a lot of attention to (sonic) details and a willingness to be more forthright with participants, and it is worth trying to get broadcast-quality recordings at all times to provide you with the most options when creating a documentary and writing an article, creating an audio piece for radio and using that audio in an installation, creating a radio diary, and making a multimedia Web page.

MICROPHONES

The right preparation combined with a quest for good tape will go a long way toward getting quality recordings; however, without the proper equipment, the task becomes more difficult. The most important piece of equipment is the microphone because the microphone (in nontechnical terms) controls the quality of the sounds relative to crispness and fullness. There are a number of different microphones that serve a variety of purposes. If money is tight, and it almost always is, we recommend starting with an omnidirectional handheld microphone. This type of microphone works for interviews and is useful for recording ambient sounds. The industry standard for decades has been the Electro-Voice RE50. This is a relatively inexpensive microphone, and it is extremely durable. Additionally, it runs on phantom (or plug-in) power. That is, the recorder powers the microphone, so you do not need to worry about running out of batteries or adding extra weight to the overall recording package in the form of an additional power source. This microphone, like most high-quality microphones, requires a three-pin XLR connector cable for one end, but that cable can narrow to a 1/8-inch mini jack or to another XLR, depending on the recorder.³

The second microphone that can be very useful is a shotgun condenser microphone. We recommend using a shotgun because it is a few inches smaller (10 inches compared to the 15 inches of a standard shotgun), which makes it more portable and less obtrusive when working with participants

who might be unnerved by a 15-inch shotgun. Shotgun microphones are more unidirectional and can pick up sounds at greater distances. These are good microphones for interviewing because they cut out a lot of background noise, more than the omnidirectional mic, and they are excellent for recording ambient sounds because the mic can be aimed at the person or object responsible for generating the sounds at a close distance or farther away. For example, a researcher can aim the mic at a skateboarder across the street and pick up the sounds of the skateboard as it surfs the pavement or at a street musician while standing amid a crowd of spectators.

There are a number of quality shotgun microphones. We both use different models of Audio-Technica's short shotgun because this manufacturer has consistently produced high-quality mics. Shotgun microphones tend to run on a battery (AA battery for the Audio-Technica), although plug-in power sources might extend battery life. Shotgun microphones are often more expensive than omnidirectional microphones and, along with their size, initially lead more people to use a mic like the RE50. However, given the recording quality, the ability to cut out background noise, and the multiple uses of this mic, it might be worth spending the extra money. In fact, both of us tend to use the short shotgun for the bulk of our recording.

Finally, a stereo microphone can be very useful in certain recording situations. The two microphones discussed previously take a mono signal and split that signal to the left and right channel of the recorder. What this means in lay terms is that the exact same sounds come out of the right and left speakers or headphones. There are tremendous advantages to this in that sounds are almost completely balanced. You do not need to play with panning or fading when editing in an effort to balance sounds, and you do not need to worry about vocal tracers or echoes. The advantage of a stereo microphone is that it records sounds using audio in a manner that more closely approximates how those sounds would be heard naturally. For example, when a car passes on the street, one might hear it come from the right and then pass to the left. If the passing car is recorded with a mono microphone, one can hear what is nearby and what is farther away, but it is difficult to sense the movement across space and time. A stereo microphone, on the other hand, allows one to hear the car sound coming from the right channel and then crossing to the left channel, just as one hears the sounds with one's ears. This reproduces an image of spatial relationship in the audio recording. Similarly, if multiple people are interviewed at once with a stereo mic, one can hear the person on the left more in the left channel and the person on the right more in the right channel, replicating the way we would hear the conversation if in the room. Like the short shotgun, a quality stereo microphone is often more expensive than an omnidirectional mic, and the stereo mic may have limited use for many people, creating a situation where equipment funds are better used in other ways. There are also ways to purchase a high-quality mic

that will serve multiple purposes. For example, Mark sometimes uses a Shure VP 88 microphone that can switch from stereo to mono.

There is a range of low-cost microphones available from a variety of electronics shops, but the old adage that you get what you pay for is very much the case when it comes to purchasing a mic. A cheap microphone rarely captures the depth of a soundscape, typically does not filter background noise very well, and tends to feature increased distortion. As we already noted, this is the most important piece of recording technology, so it's worth spending some money up front for a microphone that will last for a long time and will function as an important tool for creating audio pieces. Similarly, if you have funds to purchase equipment for a class, it's best to go with a better mic, even if that means purchasing fewer mics. Ideally, funds can be stretched to purchase a recording package (headphones, mic, mic cable, and recorder) for each person in the class, but sending students into the field with better equipment, even if they have to share that equipment, results in better recordings.

RECORDERS

Documentarians use a variety of recorders to do fieldwork, but there is clearly a shift toward solid-state digital recorders because these recorders encode sounds to a variety of small SD and CompactFlash® cards that continue to decrease in cost and size while increasing in storage capacity. These cards can then be read with card readers, or the recorders can connect directly to computers with USB cables. Connecting to your computer in this way allows you to drag and drop sound files into your computer or an editing program. Although some companies sell portable CD recorders, which can allow for a similar drag and drop function, the size and weight of these recorders make them less than ideal for fieldwork. Other recorders, such as MiniDisc, DAT, or cassette require real-time importing of sound. That means if you have 20 minutes of recordings, it will take 20 minutes to import the recording into a computer. The benefit of real-time importing is that you hear your recordings again as the sounds are imported and ideally can begin to think about what to edit in the software program. Additionally, if hard drive space is an issue, then dragging and dropping large sound files that need to be edited could present a challenge, whereas sounds that are imported in real time can be sounds that you expect to fit into a finished piece.

Again, given the rate at which technologies change, we do not want to recommend a particular recorder; however, we can make general recommendations about media and features. Although there is much debate about the sonic virtues of digital recordings versus analog recordings, most documentarians seem to agree that the format used to record doesn't differ greatly in

terms of quality (only in terms of cost and the time it takes to import the sounds into a computer). Therefore, the type of media should be a determining factor when selecting a recorder, especially storage capacity, reliability, and availability of that media. Blank cassettes are harder to find and more expensive than other blank media now that CD- and DVD-burning technologies have become standard and the quality of such recordings is very high. DAT has always been more expensive and usually sold through specialty shops. We are also finding that blank MiniDiscs are carried by fewer retailers with each passing year. A solid-state recorder is probably the best choice given the increasing obsolescence of other formats. With that said, the most important features of any recorder are jacks for a microphone input and an input for headphones. An opportunity to adjust levels while recording, though a less prevalent feature of most new recorders, can also be very useful.

Never rely on a built-in microphone for broadcast-quality recordings. If a recorder has a built-in microphone, it may also have another microphone input. Plug in your good microphone to get a high-quality recording. Historically, professional recorders have not featured built-in microphones, and consumer recorders (the kind of recorders most students use to record lectures) have not contained inputs for another microphone. High-quality electronics that can create broadcast-quality work without the costs and all of the advanced features of professional electronics are becoming increasingly available. This means that many recorders feature a mic input and an onboard microphone. The input will override the built-in microphone or the input can be selected from an on-screen menu on the recorder. Ultimately, you want to make sure the recorder is designed for professional audio recording. Many new recorders are designed for newspaper reporters to tape interviews or for students to record class lectures. You have probably seen these recorders in electronics shops, in large corporate multipurpose stores, or on TV when the reporters grab their recorders from the podium after a press conference. Although these recorders have many of the same features as professional solid-state recorders, the quality of the recordings tends to be flatter and the recordings feature too much static hiss compared to a professional recorder.

A headphone jack is important because you need to hear what is being recorded at all times. Additionally, being able to assess increases or decreases in volume relative to rising and falling recording levels can help you set the appropriate levels if the recorder has adjustable levels. If the recorder has a feature that allows for levels to be adjusted during the recording, it is a good idea to use this feature. However, this feature is becoming rarer as companies look to decrease the size and weight of their gear and cut costs. Instead, the ability to adjust levels at any point has been replaced with two options: (1) auto level settings that are controlled by the recorder or (2) manual level settings that can only be applied before the recording

begins. The auto setting usually works well in terms of picking up the fluctuating volumes of people's voices, whereas the manual settings are less useful because the settings can't be changed without stopping the recording.

Many new recorders no longer feature a line-out jack and instead use the headphone jack to output recordings into a computer. Although this allows for some control of export volume (turning up the volume on the recorder increases the sound levels), many people find the sound is not as clear. Again, this will not be an issue if you are using a solid-state recorder because those recorders can export with USB, but most other recorders will need to be connected to a computer via a cable with an $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch miniadapter on one end and RCA adapters on the other end—the kind of cable used to hook a DVD player to a TV set—or $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch adapters.

Because many laptops come with basic recording software, you might be tempted to connect a microphone to the input jack on the laptop and record straight into the audio program (or you might even think that you can rely on the computer's built-in microphone), rather than using a recorder. This is a bad idea. The laptop jack cannot power the mic and tends to produce a noisy recording. The exception would be if the recording software comes with a hardware system that is built to handle a microphone, for instance, the DigiDesign Pro Tools MBox. After reading our discussion of microphones, we hope that you will know better than to rely on the laptop's built-in microphone, which flattens the sound and picks up way too much noise. Additionally, if you are recording while conducting participant observation, a laptop will be difficult to use because of its size. Conversely, most portable recorders are built for field recordings.

HEADPHONES

Headphones that completely cover your ears are ideal for fieldwork. These headphones will cut out background noise, so you can distinguish between the sounds coming through the microphone and ambient sounds in the recording environment. As with other recording equipment, the higher priced headphones tend to be of higher quality, in this case providing a more accurate sense of the recording and blocking out more external sounds.

Any pair of headphones is better than no headphones. So an inexpensive pair of headphones or earbuds will work in a pinch. There are certainly times when you might strive to blend in with others while doing participant observation. It will be hard to do this with a mic and recorder, but earbuds combined with a small recorder (which could be placed in your pocket) and a smaller microphone will call less attention to your presence. Of course, you should not record without letting your participants know about the recording, so we aren't advocating undercover recording, but if one goal of

qualitative researchers is to study natural behaviors, then it is important to work in ways that won't undermine this goal.

EDITING SOFTWARE

There are a number of quality editing programs available that range in price (from freeware software to expensive audio-video editing combinations). Many of the programs are similar in look and feel, but the freeware programs tend to feature fewer editing and mixing options. This can be good for people who consider themselves inexperienced. Freeware programs with fewer features are less intimidating and initially may be easier to learn. However, people can develop their skills in more productive ways with more advanced programs. Additionally, more advanced programs are less likely to crash, which is probably the greatest advantage for people who aren't confident in their technological skills. If one goal is to have people with wonderful ideas and little experience begin to develop confidence in themselves and excitement about qualitative work, having them deal with the nightmare of crashing programs and lost work is not the way to go about achieving this goal. Finally, more advanced programs feature more information on the screen, but most word-processing programs clutter the screen with formatting palettes, for example, and that mess doesn't seem to be cause for concern for most users. In short, we often tell people to just ignore most of what is on the screen and instead focus on the needed features.

Given all of this, the industry standard for documentarians, Pro Tools, is our program of choice for our own work and in the classes we teach. The program works across computing platforms, features multiple tracks, and can display those tracks on a single screen, which makes it easier to see and manage different recordings. This means that different sounds can be placed on different tracks and labeled according to their type. An interview will be on one track, narration on another track, and general ambient sounds on another track. Also, Pro Tools has a mixer on the screen that is somewhat intuitive in that raising a fader increases volume and lowering a fader decreases volume. This method of mixing is wonderful for people who are new to sound editing.

We want to stress the importance of working with a program that feels comfortable but to not give up too easily. If a program seems frustrating, continue to explore it. As long as the original recordings remain on a card, minidisc, DAT, or cassette, the materials can't be destroyed. So play with the programs to find a fit. But no matter what program seems to work best, one thing remains true for all of them: Don't import everything. Many people are tempted to dump 75 minutes of recordings into a program and then edit. This is a lot of information, which will bog down the program and the computer. It is better to listen for the most important and engaging

pieces of tape and make note of when those parts appear, then import only the sections that are most useful to help construct a story.

PRESS "PLAY" ON TAPE

With each passing week, there seem to be more Internet resources for beginning, intermediate, and experienced documentarians. We encourage you to explore these before, during, and after you begin recording and editing. There is always something new to learn, and one of the most exciting and enjoyable parts about doing this kind of work is that experimentation is the pathway to a greater understanding of the recording and editing process. There will be frustrations and crises, but these problems are minor compared to the thrills of putting together an exciting and engaging piece.

NOTES

1. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 15.
2. For good tips about helping participants become comfortable with the recording process, see Ira Glass and Jessica Abel, *Radio: An Illustrated Guide* (Chicago: WBEZ, DATE), and Robert Siegel, "Interviewing," in *Sound Reporting* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1992), 35-45.
3. The XLR acronym emerges from a combination of pieces of the original manufacturer's "Cannon X" series, which later featured a latch ("Cannon XL") and then a rubber compound surrounding the contacts: so X for Cannon X, L for the latch, and R for the rubber compound (see <http://www.rane.com/par-c.html#XLR>).