

Appendix

A Statement on Method

... I am convinced that the actual evolution of research ideas does not take place in accord with the formal statements we read on research methods. The ideas grow up in part out of our immersion in the data and out of the whole process of living ...

WILLIAM FOOTE WHYTE, *Street Corner Society* (1943, 1993)

I am only going to report on what I conclude from studies of this kind that I've done. And I can only begin by repeating ... that what you get in all of this [attempt to articulate techniques] is rationalizations, and we're in the precarious position of providing them.

ERVING GOFFMAN, "On Fieldwork" (March 1974)¹

On the Evolution of Sidewalk

On my shelf is a manuscript about the everyday life of one street vendor and the people who come to his table to buy and talk about books. I wrote the manuscript after observing at Hakim Hasan's table for two years. In 1996, the manuscript was accepted for publication by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, which intended to bring it out the next year.

But I was uneasy, and ultimately I told the firm's editor in chief that I wanted to start the research all over again and write a new book. To explain why, I have to say more about how the research developed. In the process, I hope to give a sense of some of the most important methodological issues I faced.

Co-teaching a Seminar with Hakim

After completing the draft of the original bookselling manuscript, I gave it to Hakim and asked him for his comments. He read it and brought to my attention a major limitation. As he saw it, my study focused too closely on him and not enough on the vendors who occupied other spaces on Sixth Avenue. As I listened to what he had to say, I realized that we needed to have a sustained conversation about the material in the manuscript. I proposed that we teach a course together at the University of California-Santa Barbara, where I was that year. Hakim was clearly well read, and I had admired his pedagogical relationships with young men like Jerome. Surely my students in Santa Barbara could benefit from working closely with him. I told my idea to Bill Bielby, the chair of my department, who arranged for Hakim to receive a lecturer's salary for the ten-week quarter.

Hakim and I taught a seminar for undergraduates called "The Life of the Street and the Life of the Mind in Black America." In it, we discussed a number of books which Hakim

had sold at his table and spoke in detail from the draft manuscript, showing the students how "black books" entered into the lives and discussions of people who came to Hakim's table. As a teacher, Hakim was organized, insightful, and patient with students on subjects of race, class, and gender, although the discussions were sometimes quite heated.

In the class, Hakim felt that the focus on him did not give a wide-angle view of the sidewalk that he knew. (Some colleagues, too, suggested that I study the vendors who sell scavenged magazines.) Hakim thought we should invite his partner, Alice Morin, and Marvin Martin to participate in the seminar. The next month they joined us in Santa Barbara, and they participated in two weeks of classes.

My research focus was evolving as I came to get a sense of what might be gained if the book included a more comprehensive view of the street. I asked Marvin if he thought it would be possible for me to do interviews with the men he knew on Sixth Avenue, and he said that would not be a problem.

On Marvin's last night in Santa Barbara, we walked down Cabrillo Boulevard, by the ocean, reflecting on how much ground we had covered in this setting so different from Sixth Avenue. As he thought about going back to New York, he lamented that his business partner, Ron, was going through a stage of being unreliable. Every time Marvin left the table to place bets at Off-Track Betting, he had to depend on Ron to remain by the table; if Ron was drunk or high, he might abandon the table, and it would be taken by the police.

A thought occurred to me. I could work for Marvin during the coming summer. I would learn a lot more about the sidewalk, if I worked as a vendor myself, than I would by merely observing or doing interviews, and he would have his table covered. So I proposed that I work at his table for three months and give him the money I made. "What will the fellows think when I have a white guy working for me all summer?" he asked. We decided he should just tell them the truth—I was there to do research on a book about the block—and he said he would think about it.

When I told Hakim, he had reservations. Would I be safe on the streets? Could Marvin look after me? Would the toughest and most violent men on Sixth Avenue accept what I was doing as worthy of respect? Meanwhile, Marvin called from a pay phone in New York to accept my offer. I would begin in June. My summer internship, so to speak, had been arranged.

Getting In

On June 8, 1996, I appeared on Sixth Avenue at about 6:00 a.m. Ron, whom I recognized from the time I had spent on the block (but whom I had never met), was already there. I had heard enough about his violent episodes to think that I had better wait until Marvin arrived before I approached.

Marvin appeared half an hour later. He greeted me and introduced me to Ron, who, it turned out, had been expecting me. As the two men began unpacking magazines from crates which a "mover" named Rock had transported from Marvin's storage locker, Marvin told me to watch how the magazines are displayed, with the foreign fashion titles placed at the top of the table where they will catch the eyes of passersby.

As I joined in the work, I removed a tape recorder from my bag. Ron looked down at



the machine and scowled. He hardly spoke that day. I put the tape recorder back in my bag, never having turned it on.

I was wearing the same clothes I had been wearing in the classroom a few days earlier: a blue button-down shirt, beige pants, and black shoes. Even if I had dressed differently, I would have stood out. My speech and diction alone would have made me seem different. Had I tried to downplay these differences, though, Ron would have seen through such a move immediately.

So right away on the block I was being a person not unlike the person I am with my friends in casual settings, my family at home, and my colleagues at work. Of course, in each of these settings, I adapt somewhat, accentuating some traits and downplaying others. In small ways I am not aware of, I doubtless did the same as I began my work.

Using myself as a participant observer, I was there to notice by taking part, trying to observe and retain information that others in the setting often thought unimportant or took for granted. I had research questions vaguely in mind, and I was already making mental comparisons between what I was seeing and what the sociology literature had to say. I had only approximate notions about what I would do with the data I collected and what I sought to learn. In some participant-observation studies, fieldworkers let the specific research questions emerge while they are in the field. For example, I couldn't have told Marvin and Ron that I was interested in studying the way a few men on the street talk to passing women, because I didn't know that could be an issue. Nor was I fully aware that I would be interested in comparing present-day sidewalk life to sidewalk life in the period when Jane Jacobs was writing about the Village. I was there simply to observe and record, and I was asking the people working the sidewalk to let me be there.

One of the most difficult situations I faced as I tried to make an entry into these blocks was avoiding the conflicts which already existed. Hakim, with whom I had become closely associated, got along well with everyone on Sixth Avenue except Muhammad. (See the chapter on the space wars.) But if I was to get to know all the men on the block, it was essential that I not be viewed as especially associated with Hakim.

The act of "getting in," then, sometimes led me to be less than sincere about my connection to Hakim. Fieldwork can be a morally ambiguous enterprise. I say this even though I have never lied to any of the persons I write about. The question for me is how to show respect for the people I write about, given the impossibility of complete sincerity at every moment (in research as in life).

The gulf between the other vendors and myself was much greater than it was with Hakim. How could I expect these men to trust me? The vendors were wondering the same thing. One conversation captured on my tape recorder illustrates this. I had been interviewing one of them, who had been holding my tape recorder, when I got called away. While listening to the tapes a few months later, I came across the conversation that ensued after I left. (The participants, who forgot the tape was running, have asked me to conceal their identities in this instance.)

"What you think he's doing to benefit you?" X asked.

"A regular black person who's got something on the ball should do this, I would think," said Y.

"He's not doing anything to benefit us, Y."

"I'm not saying it's to benefit us," said Y. "It's for focus."

"No. It's more for them, the white people."

"You think so?" said Y.

"Yeah. My conversations with him just now, I already figured it out. It's mostly for them. They want to know why there's so much homeless people into selling books . . . I told him because Giuliani came in and he said nobody could panhandle no more. Then the recycling law came in. People voted on it."

"Case in point," said Y. "You see, I knew he had to talk to you. I can't tell him a lot of things 'cause I'm not a talker."

"I told him in California there's people doing the same thing that we're doing. They doing it on a much more higher level. They are white people. You understand?"

"Yeah."

"They have yard sales."

"Yeah."

"They put the shit right out there in their yard. He knows. Some of them make a million dollars a year. But what they put in their yard, these are people that put sculptures. They put expensive vases. These are peoples that drives in their cars. All week long, all they do is shop."

"Looking for stuff," said Y. "Like we go hunting, they go shopping."

"Right. Very expensive stuff. They bring it and they put it in their yard and sell it. And they do it every weekend. Every Saturday. Every Sunday. So they making thousands. He's not questioning them: How come they can do it? He's questioning us! He want to know how did the homeless people get to do it. That's his whole main concern. Not really trying to help us. He's trying to figure out how did the homeless people get a lock on something that he consider *lucrative*."

"Good point," said Y.

"You gotta remember, he's a Jew, you know. They used to taking over. They used to taking over no matter where they go. When they went to Israel. When they went to Germany. Why do you think in World War II they got punished so much? Because they owned the whole of Germany. So when the regular white people took over, came to power, they said, 'We tired of these Jews running everything.'"

"But throughout time the Jewish people have always been business people."

"But they love to take over."

Y laughed.

"Of course," X said, laughing hysterically. "That's what he's doing his research on now. He's trying to figure out how did these guys got it. How come we didn't get it?"

Y laughed.

X continued laughing hysterically, unable to finish his next sentence.

"I don't think so," said Y.

"But he's not interested in trying to help us out."

"I'm not saying that, X. I'm saying he's trying to focus on the point."

"I told him that, too," said X. "Everyone he talk to, they're gonna talk to him on the level like he's gonna help them against the police or something like that. They're gonna look to him to advocate their rights."

"No. I don't think that, either. I think it's more or less to state the truth about what's going on. So people can understand that people like you and I are not criminals. We're not horrible people. Just like what you said, what happens if we couldn't do this? What would you do if you couldn't sell books right now?"

Hearing those stereotypes invoked against me made me realize that—conventional wisdom to the contrary—participant observers need not be fully trusted in order to have their presence at least accepted. I learned how to do fieldwork from Howard S. Becker, and one of the things he taught me—I call it the Becker principle—is that most social processes have a structure that comes close to insuring that a certain set of situations will arise over time. These situations practically require people to do or say certain things because there are other things going on that require them to do that, things that are more influential than the social condition of a fieldworker being present.² For example, most of the things in a vendor's day—from setting up his magazines to going on hunts for magazines to urinating—are structured. This is why investigators like myself sometimes can learn about a social world despite not having had the rapport we thought we had, and despite the fact that we occupy social positions quite distinct from the persons we write about. (More about social position later.)

It was hard for me to know what to make of that discussion between X and Y. Maybe they were "just" having fun, but I don't think so. Though I was not astonished by what I heard, I had no idea that X harbored those suspicions toward me as I had gone about my work on the blocks throughout the summer. In this sense, fieldwork is very much like life itself. We may *feel* fully trusted and accepted by colleagues and "friends," but full acceptance is difficult to measure by objective standards and a rarity in any case. If we cannot expect such acceptance in our everyday lives, it is probably unrealistic to make it the standard for successful fieldwork.

At the same time, participant observers like myself who do cross-race fieldwork must, I think, be aware that there are many things members of the different races will not say in one another's presence. For blacks in the United States, it has been necessary to "wear the mask," to quote the black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, who wrote:

*We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our
eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.*³

Dunbar's words are no less relevant today, for, as a survival mechanism, many blacks still feel that they cannot afford to speak honestly to whites. Surely, it would have been a methodological error for me to believe that apparent rapport is real trust, or that the poor blacks I was writing about would feel comfortable taking off the mask in my presence.

I believe that some of the vendors may have let me work out on Sixth Avenue with them because they eventually saw what I was doing nearly the way I did; others merely wanted to have me around as a source of small change and loans (something I discuss

later); and a few others may have decided to put up with me so that there would be a book about them and the blocks. But it would be naïve for me to say that I knew what they were thinking, or that they trusted or accepted me fully, whatever that might mean.

Using the Tape Recorder

To write my first draft, I had collected many quotations by jotting things down when I could—sometimes minutes after they were said, sometimes that night, sometimes a day later. Where I learned to do fieldwork—university sociology departments—this was the convention. I had never seen any discussion of the meaning of quotation marks in any research-methods textbook.

I decided that if I was interested in getting meanings right, I had to strive to my utmost to get exact words right, too. The meanings of a culture are embodied, in part, in its language, which cannot be grasped by an outsider without attention to the choice and order of the words and sentences. Reversing the order in which words are spoken, or getting the words wrong, allows the reader to come away with a meaning different from what was intended. I began to think that, for a discipline in search of meanings, it was well-nigh indefensible that so little attention was paid to exact quotes and quotation marks.⁴

For participant observers, it is perhaps especially crucial to be aware of this when people of one race and class rely on casual records of words to depict people of another race and class. If the observer is not careful, the different meanings found among people of divergent social positions can be easily misunderstood and misrepresented.

With this in mind, I brought a digital tape recorder to Sixth Avenue. One might think that to use such a device on the street, a researcher would need to have a great deal of trust from his or her subjects. As we know from the recorded conversation between X and Y, this is not altogether the case. But I believe it is overwhelmingly true. The fact that I was sponsored by Hakim, and that Marvin and Alice had been to see me in Santa Barbara, meant that these people knew a great deal about me. Although X states in the tape that what I was doing was for the "white people," it is notable that he did not go so far as to speculate that I might be a plainclothes detective or an informant for the police. They believed that I was a researcher and a professor and it appears that their trust in me on this point led them to let me run the tape recorder on the pavement.

Because I had a tape recorder running all the time, I didn't have to make a special effort to remember verbatim what people said or make written notes right away. The field notes I did write were based on what the tapes prompted me to remember, not on memory alone. This was a great advantage, since I find it difficult to take notes when I am actively involved in the daily routine of a group of people.

I wanted everyone I was planning to identify to develop an awareness of the machine. Sometimes one of the vendors, scavengers, or panhandlers would pick it up, beginning a performance for the microphone that might last a few minutes. The tape recorder was discussed at one time or another with every man out there, and after a few days such awareness of the machine ceased. With passing pedestrians (such as the dog walker) who could not be efficiently notified it was on at the time, such discussions occurred if and when I needed to identify them in the text. With the police officers whose voices were captured on

tape, I decided not even to try to find out their names. Not only was I reasonably sure they would not consent, but I did not wish to demonize those police officers, and to create an inaccurate sense that the problems were personal rather than systemic.

It was my responsibility to know which behavior was not for the tape and which behavior was, and I was able to discern this before introducing the machine. A good example is the account of the interactions with customers in the section on magazine scavengers. In the moments leading up to the interaction, the men were bantering with one another for the benefit of the tape. When the customer came near the table, however, Ron turned to her, and the ensuing interaction was typical of hundreds of vendor-customer exchanges I had witnessed.

The tape recorder may have distorted certain things. But the machine did not hide the things I was interested in as a sociologist: the ongoing life of the sidewalk. Once again the Becker principle comes into play: most social processes are so organized that the presence of a tape recorder (or white male) is not as influential as all the other pressures, obligations, and possible sanctions in the setting.

It was through the tapes that I came to realize that the topic of talking to women who don't want to was important. On one occasion, with the machine running, I asked Mudrick a few questions about his drug use. While telling me that he never used drugs, he interrupted himself with loud calls to passing women, as I had seen him do many times. He didn't want to talk about drugs, but he felt no reserve in letting my microphone pick up his banter, which he seemed to engage in with little awareness that it might interest me. This was true about much of significance that I learned on Sixth Avenue. Here the researcher trades on the difference between what a subject thinks is significant to the sociologist and what turns out, in fact, from the dense stream of utterances and activity, to be of analytic use. These were things that showed up over and over again on my tape. They were typical and/or incidental to the people of the sidewalk. (Of course, it is possible that I have made a great deal out of things that people were not completely aware they were doing, or were not aware that I thought were noteworthy.)

My collaboration with a photojournalist has taught me the importance of getting an incident or conversation on tape when I can. To use the tape recorder effectively, the sociologist can mimic the photojournalist, who often has no choice but to make his or her picture in a given moment, because he or she has another assignment, or because the light is waning, or because the event is singular and may not be repeated. A good example of this is Ishmael's encounter with the police on Christmas Day. When I went to the block that morning, only Ishmael was set up and it was dark and cloudy. I had made plans to go to see a film with Hakim and Alice later in the day, and approached Ishmael's corner to meet them. I had expected to do no fieldwork that day, so I might have left my tape recorder at home. But to use a tape recorder effectively, it is good to get used to having it along all the time. I had it that day, and the tapes I made enabled me to study the episode far more carefully than I might have without it.

Diagnostic Ethnography

When I went back to Sixth Avenue to work as a magazine vendor, I hadn't yet formulated a precise research question. I had no theories that I wanted to test or reconstruct, and

I didn't have any particular scholarly literature to which I knew I wanted to contribute.

During my first summer working for Marvin and Ron, I began with a loose but useful sense to guide my data collection. I would take note of the collective activity between and among the vendors and others they worked with. I watched the relations between them and their customers; I went on hunts with the men to see how they acquired magazines; I watched them interact with police officers, trying to get a sense of *how* those encounters unfolded. I also talked to men in depth about their lives. At this stage of my research, I sought mainly to diagnose the processes at work in this setting and to explain the observed patterns of interactions of people. I also have a general theme that guides me in collecting data in all of my work; whether and how the persons I am with are or are not struggling to live in accordance with standards of "moral" worth.

The fact that I did not know my specific research question at the start may seem counter to the way sociologists are supposed to operate. I take a different view, however. In much of social science, especially much of quantitative research using large data sets, a research design often emerges *after* data has been collected. Of course, survey instruments themselves require design, which requires some sort of theoretical agenda or conceptual foundation to begin with. (My focus on "moral" struggles provides that framework for my data collection.) But a well-designed survey allows the researcher to raise a variety of questions and topics later on, some of them unanticipated. This is essentially what happened there to me. Like quantitative researchers who get an idea of what to look at from mulling over existing data, I began to get ideas from the things I was seeing and hearing on the street.

In Madison, Wisconsin, the following fall, at some distance from Sixth Avenue, I realized that I might make use of Jane Jacobs's study to do a loose comparison of today's sidewalks and those of a few decades ago. Something had changed in this neighborhood, and my recognition of this change was the beginning of a research design. At the same time, I began the process of listening to the many tapes I had made on the street, as well as looking at all my notes. And I began to write down various topics that seemed important.

While I was in Madison, Ovie Carter made his first trip from Chicago to New York to photograph the scene on Sixth Avenue. During my summer as a vendor, I had called Ovie weekly to tell him what I had been seeing. Now it was his turn to show me how things looked to him.

As Ovie showed me the first batch of his photographs, I began to get a better sense of how things worked on the blocks, for he is committed to capturing relations among people and their environments and not mere individual acts.⁵ For example, Ovie's photograph of a man sleeping in the doorway of Urban Outfitters is not a picture of just the man; it shows the man in the context of a table where he does business. This photograph led me to think about the relation between sleeping outside and saving a space, which led me to focus on how "habitat" is formed and works through contextual connections.

Ovie's photos also helped me make a more complete description. I recovered details, such as where goods were kept and how space mattered. With some of his photographs tacked on my office walls, I continued to listen to tapes and to look at my notes to try to figure out what could be said about life on Sixth Avenue. Many of the topics I realized were important back in Madison had not stood out as important when I was in New York. For example (as discussed in more detail later), while I was listening to a tape in my office, I

heard Marvin talk about being kept out of a restaurant's bathroom. I also heard on the tapes constant references to the "Fuck it!" mentality, which was far more pervasive on the tapes than I had realized.

After fall classes ended, I returned to New York to work with Marvin and Ron until New Year's Eve. On the blocks then and on subsequent occasions, I began researching some of the above issues, now with clearer research questions in mind. During this period, I witnessed the incident between Ishmael and Officer X that is discussed in the chapter called "A Christmas on Sixth Avenue." This incident (and my account of it) demonstrates the necessity of being there. Had I been in Madison or Santa Barbara that December, or had I tried to do a study based on interviews instead of participant observation, I could never have gotten such a perspective on police-vendor relations.⁸

In the end, I had many separate research questions, each of which might have served as the basis for a monograph or article but which were fitting together into a book. I spent more time thinking about how these chapters would fit together than I did about any other research topic.

The structure of the book ultimately resulted from considering alternative interpretations. I wanted to be open to new information and counter-evidence in regard to my theme, and this led me to follow three chapters on informal social control with four chapters on the limits of such control. The desire to look carefully at counter-evidence and explore alternative interpretations was certainly helpful as I organized the book. But as Karl Popper has argued, "there is no such thing as a logical method for having new ideas."⁷

A colleague of mine who teaches courses in the philosophy of science, Erik Olin Wright, calls my approach "diagnostic ethnography," and I agree with that characterization. I begin observation by gaining an appreciation of the "symptoms" that characterize my "patient." Once I have gained a knowledge of these symptoms, I return to the field, aided by new diagnostic tools—such as photographs—and try to "understand" these symptoms (which is some amalgam of "explain" and "interpret" and "render meaningful"). I also read in more general literature, seeking ideas that will illuminate my case.

It was much later in the process that I began to understand that some of the things I was observing had relevance to "broken windows"—style social control, and that the principles of urban life articulated by Jane Jacobs might actually be seen to require a certain kind of sidewalk life, which was not in evidence here. It was also much later that I began to use as a sort of tool kit the scholarly literature of, say, "work and personality," Conversation Analysis, feminist theory, urban poverty formation, the sociology of emotion, or the sociology of law, among others, to make sense of what was taking place on the sidewalk.

This approach might usefully be compared with the influential "extended case method" elaborated by Michael Burawoy in *Ethnography Unbound*.⁸ The contrast is with research that begins with theory reconstruction as its pivotal agenda and seeks cases that cause trouble for received wisdom. Burawoy advocates an approach that begins by looking for theories that "highlight some aspect of the situation under study as being anomalous," and then proceeding to rebuild (rather than reject that theory) by reference to wider forces at work.

Burawoy is a scholar known for his theoretical agility, and such an approach understandably appeals to ethnographers of that ilk. I, by contrast, don't set out with theories that

I know I want to reconstruct. So I observe patterns of interactions that I wish to explain, and move from diagnostics to theory reconstruction, almost in spite of myself.

The Ethnographic Fallacy

In a paper given to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Herbert Gans's *The Urban Villagers*, Stephen Steinberg warned participant observers against what he calls "the ethnographic fallacy."⁹ He argues that, unlike Gans, people who do firsthand studies often become too enmeshed in cultural details. Steinberg warns against "an epistemology that relies exclusively on observation—in other words, that defines reality by what you see." He explains: the ethnographic fallacy "begins when observation is taken at face value. Too often—not always—ethnography suffers from a myopia that sharply delineates the behavior at close range but obscures the less visible structures and processes that engender and sustain the behavior."

Steinberg's ethnographic fallacy emerges from his desire to avoid inappropriate concreteness. In researching this book, I was aware that the people I wrote about sometimes took complete responsibility for their own failures, unable to comprehend the obstacles and opportunities in their lives, the pressures and constraints they may have faced, and thus the probabilities of particular outcomes independent of their own actions. Sometimes the men inadvertently referred to such obstacles, as when Mudrick told me he was homeless by choice in the same sentence that he talked of being unable to find a job when he came to New York. But in general, if I had simply taken the men's accounts at face value, I would have concluded that their lives and problems were wholly of their own making.

A common way for a fieldworker to avoid the ethnographic fallacy is to suggest that economic or political forces all but guarantee that a particular person will act in a certain way. Such analysts avoid the ethnographic fallacy, but in doing so invoke determinism rather than tendencies, dispositions, and constraints. Another common way fieldworkers try to avoid the ethnographic fallacy is to discuss political and economic forces in distinct chapters, without providing evidence for the links between those conditions and the lives and behaviors they write about elsewhere in the book.

In short, the reader is asked to believe that the researcher who knows his or her subjects can also be trusted to be the guide to understanding which conditions are engendering and sustaining their behavior. But the details of everyday life on the sidewalk are much easier to account for with clear evidence than are the connections between those lives and the constraints and opportunities that shaped them. It is easy to learn that Ron dropped out of high school, but it is much more difficult to show that his choices in ninth grade were limited because of an interaction between his family's structure and its residence in a neighborhood with racial and class segregation, violence, and joblessness.

The scholar who wishes to avoid the ethnographic fallacy must sometimes ask the reader to make a leap of faith. On the one hand, the ethnographer makes a great effort to document and verify vast numbers of details, and in the process to tell how a social world works in everyday life. On the other hand, when it comes to the connection between these details and constraints and opportunities, his or her claims can seem quite skimpy by contrast.

My approach to this problem was to try not to get so caught up in the details of Sixth Avenue as to lose sight of their connections to constraints and opportunities. I read and reread the writings of contemporary analysts of such conditions as various as William Julius Wilson, Douglas Massey, Christopher Jencks, Andrew Hacker, Saskia Sassen, Reynolds Farley, Melvin Oliver, Orlando Patterson, and Roger Waldinger, as well as Stephen Steinberg, in an effort to be sensitive to these connections.

I certainly want the reader to know that the lives of the people on Sixth Avenue are engendered, sustained, and/or complicated by social forces. But I do not believe there is any easy way to avoid the ethnographic fallacy. If ethnographers shy away from analysis of constraints and opportunities because they cannot be substantiated with hard evidence, they will leave the inaccurate impression that the manifest behaviors are self-generating. But the ethnographer who allows theory to dominate data and who twists perception by invoking it to cover the "facts" makes a farce of otherwise careful work.

There is a middle ground: to try to grasp the connections between individual lives and the macroforces at every turn, while acknowledging one's uncertainty when one cannot be sure how those forces come to bear on individual lives. That, I think, is the best a committed scholar can do, and I hope my own uncertainty rings out loud and clear when appropriate in these pages.

Further Issues in Linking Micro and Macro: An Extended Place Method

Constraints on individual lives such as residential segregation were much more difficult for me to monitor than conditions of a more medium range. Much of my effort was spent doing more middle-range work: focusing on how institutions of various sorts, especially institutions that organize power, affect the microsettings I studied. This entailed looking for proximate linkages and visible traces of organizational structure on the sidewalk. I call my strategy an extended place method.

This approach, too, is usefully explicated through comparison with Burawoy's extended case method.¹⁹ Burawoy, too, is interested in understanding the connection between the macro and the micro, and he collapses two distinct concerns—the importance of (1) reconstructing theory and (2) making the micro-macro link. My view is that theory reconstruction, while a fine objective on its own, was not the most efficient or rigorous way for me to make links between micro and macro.

What, then, was the most efficient way, and how was my approach an extended place method? For me to understand the sidewalk, that place could only be a starting point. Later, I needed to move my fieldwork on out, across spaces, to some of the other places where things had happened that had a role in making Sixth Avenue what it is. For example, having listened to unhoused men describe their day-to-day problems using public bathrooms, I paid visits to local restaurant owners, to learn more about the structural links between the sidewalk scene and the surrounding commercial reality. I also walked with Mudrick to Washington Square Park, to see an available public toilet and why it was unacceptable to him, which led to an interview with the park manager. In all these cases, the process of interviewing off the blocks grew out of participant observation on the blocks, out

of seeing and hearing evidence of these problems in the day-to-day lives of people. It would have been difficult to understand the public urination I witnessed on the sidewalk without extending my fieldwork outward from the sidewalk itself.

Sometimes my effort to understand connections between micro and macro involved going farther from the blocks. I visited Pennsylvania Station with Mudrick, who showed me the specific places where he had slept before the authorities had rid the station of unhoused persons. It was impossible to understand the migration to Sixth Avenue without understanding Amtrak's decision, so I spent a good deal of time interviewing Penn Station officials, and traveling to Washington, D.C., to interview attorneys who understood the lawsuit which had been filed against Amtrak. It was not enough to ask the men on the sidewalk about their movements. I needed a more rounded picture. In order to understand how the sale of written matter came about on New York's streets, I tracked down Edward Wallace, the former city councilman who had worked to pass a local law protecting a poet's rights. In order to understand how space had been cut in half on the blocks, leading to space wars between the vendors, I spent a great deal of time doing fieldwork at the Grand Central Partnership, a Business Improvement District that had used its influence to cut down on space for vendors throughout the city. In order to contextualize the occasional sale of stolen goods on Sixth Avenue, I undertook to examine the underside of the sale of written matter throughout New York City.

The most efficient way for me to understand these connections between micro and macro was through what the anthropologist George E. Marcus calls "multi-sited ethnography."²¹ The key to what eventually became my extended place method was my own eventual recognition that the sidewalk was also "in" Pennsylvania Station, the City Council, the Farrar, Straus and Giroux lawsuit against the Strand, and the Business Improvement District, among many other places.

Checking Stuff

One of the ideas basic to my method was simply following my nose, going to great lengths to check stuff out and make sure there is a warrant for believing what I've been told. Here I was simply doing what any competent reporter would do, but something which ethnographers have not taken as seriously in their work. After all, the people I was writing about were not under oath. (And, as we know, even people under oath sometimes lie.) On points that were significant to developing the understandings that formed the basis of my book, I adopted the stance of the skeptic, often not accepting accounts at face value. Sometimes, as in the case of establishing the migration from Pennsylvania Station to Sixth Avenue, this involved asking many men to tell me their life stories. When the same events were told to me over and over again in the context of different individual lives, the stories were more convincing.

A number of vendors told me that, prior to living on Sixth Avenue, they had taken over a single train car of the Metropolitan Transit Authority. In order to find out whether this was possible, I ended up going on what seemed like a wild-goose chase until I met a Penn Station official who knew enough about this practice to tell me why this account was plausible. When Ron told me that he had given up his apartment voluntarily, I went with him

to New Jersey to see if I could learn more about this story, which I knew some of my readers would find implausible. What I learned from the building's maintenance man on that day was highly illuminating, as shown in the chapter on book vendors.

When telling me part of his life story (see "The Men without Accounts"), Mudrick related his inability to read and write to the fact that he saw lynchings when he was a child. When I tried to get more information about lynchings in South Carolina during the time he was growing up, the story turned out to be implausible. Here was a case in which a story needed to be understood as a representation which told me something useful about the kind of man Mudrick is and the kind of life he has lived.¹²

In conducting this research, I benefited from developments in the humanities which emphasize the importance of stories and narrative, while not being so bound by those developments as to think that it is not legitimate and useful to look at stories for their factual value, depending on my purpose. I tried not to take people's accounts as history without doing some checking. Few people (housed or unhoused) are going to be completely honest with a researcher about the intimate details in their lives. And it's not always a matter of honesty. Poor memory, wishful thinking, and misinterpretation of the questions can lead to accounts I might characterize as less than useful.

There were some things which could be checked only gradually, and only after people had developed a great deal of trust in the researcher. Issues such as HIV status are private. Some people are also sensitive about their status as welfare dependents, and like to keep this information to themselves so far as is possible. Over time, different men showed me their welfare cards, or letters from the State indicating that their benefits had been or would be cut off. Other persons asked me for help in dealing with the welfare system. These incidents occurred gradually over the years, and were chiefly a consequence of my being there over time. Over time, I knew enough about each man's status with the welfare system to construct note 2 in the chapter on the magazine vendors.

At times, checking simply meant trying to track down people involved in passing interactions on the street to find out how they felt about them. It was one thing, for example, to see and hear Jerome's interactions with Hakim, another thing altogether to set up an interview off the blocks to find out what he thought about them.

The most difficult kind of checking occurred when I tried to speak with Carrie, the dog walker whose interactions form a basis of "Talking to Women." When Carrie's interaction with Keith occurred, my tape recorder was running. As I analyzed the tapes and determined that the recording of Carrie's interaction with Keith was technically good enough to produce a transcript, I realized that an interview with her might be illuminating.

By the following summer, I had completed a draft of that chapter (as well as a more technical paper with my colleague Harvey Molotch—who conveyed the Conversation Analysis technique), so I went back to New York with the idea of tracking Carrie down to ask what she thought of her social situation as a pedestrian.¹³ On my first day back, I asked Keith if he had seen Daisy's owner (the woman's name was not on the tape) and he said she came by every morning at around 8:30. I asked him to let her know that I was hoping to interview her for the book, that one of his interactions with her and her dog had been of interest to me. "You gonna interview the dog, Mitch?" he asked. "That's deep."

During the next week, I arrived on the block every morning by 8:30. Keith Johnson had checked into a detox program, so I was there in his space by myself. I didn't remember

what Carrie or the dog looked like, so every woman who passed by with a small dog got asked the same question day after day: Is your dog named Daisy? This was the only way I could locate the woman. After a few days, people must have thought the whole thing a bit strange. I certainly felt embarrassed asking strange women this question, and I couldn't figure out why Carrie, who supposedly had the same routine every morning, never walked by.

After a week of failed effort, I saw Keith and told him I had not found Carrie. He said he would keep his eye out, and the next day he informed me that I had just missed her when I left him. It turned out that she had been on vacation the week I had been there. Keith told her that she was going to be in a book. It was clear from his account that she was a bit skeptical, but she said she would be by the next day. When we met, Carrie was very pleasant. She took my phone number and said she would call me that day, which she did. When we finally got together, she provided illuminating information about her experience as a pedestrian and told me what she thought of my interpretations of what had gone on between her and Keith, as well as correcting my estimates of her monthly rent and her age.

In some cases, "checking stuff out" meant talking to family members, who were happy to cooperate, if surprised that their loved one was going to be the subject of a book. I spoke with Ron's brother-in-law and sister, Mudrick's daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter, Grady's ex-wife, and Conrad, who was married to Butteroll's second cousin and had known Butteroll since he was a teenager. The stories the men had told me were consistent with what their relatives knew to have happened, and the relatives filled in striking details.

During the summer of 1998, Ishmael arranged for his mother, Joan Howard, to visit us on the block so that I could interview her. She lived a subway ride away in the Bronx, but she had never seen him working on Sixth Avenue. After she arrived, Ishmael introduced her to some of the other men, and proudly showed her how his business works. When we went to lunch, she asked me about the book, saying, "Who would buy a book about Ishmael? He's not Michael Jackson or Madonna!" She said that she had always wanted to tell her story and that it was worth telling. The next day, Ishmael told me that his mother's visit was an important moment in his life. He had hurt her a great deal before he went to jail, and he knew that it comforted her to see him turning his life around and making "an honest living."

Publishing Ethnography

The genre of books based on sociological fieldwork can be distinguished from many firsthand works by journalists by the way each genre deals with anonymity. Since the 1920s, American sociologists have generally used fictitious names for people and places they have written about, whereas most journalists make it a practice to identify their subjects by name. Sociologists say that they use pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the people they write about; journalists insist that they must name their subjects to give truthfulness to the accounts and assure the reader that these are not composite characters or made-up characters.

I have decided to follow the practice of the journalists rather than the sociologists. I have not found that the people I write about ask to have their identities disguised. Some seem to enjoy the prospect of being in a book, and they are already known to hundreds of New Yorkers anyway. Moreover, it seems to me that to disclose the place and names of the

people I have written about holds me up to a higher standard of evidence. Scholars and journalists may speak with these people, visit the site I have studied, or replicate aspects of my study. So my professional reputation depends on competent description—which I define as description that others who were there or who go there recognize as plausibly accurate, even if it is not the way they would have done it.

Disclosing place names increases accountability. The pressure to “publish or perish” is a significant motivation for quick production in the academic world, and if a researcher does not make himself or herself accountable by disclosing a site, there is increased likelihood of misrepresentation. (Why should we informally assume that the academic world is immune from the kinds of problems that have been disclosed at many newspapers, where well-known journalists have lost their jobs for fabricating quotations?) At the same time, I recognize that there are sometimes good reasons for keeping a site or a person’s name anonymous, especially when the account would be humiliating or embarrassing, or when people will speak only on condition of anonymity (as did some people from the book industry in this book). But in my own work, when I have asked myself whom I am protecting by refusing to disclose the names, the answer has always been me.

I did not believe that anyone could make an informed judgment about whether they would like their name and image to be in the book without knowing how they have been depicted. With this in mind, I brought the completed manuscript to a hotel room and tried to read it to every person whose life was mentioned. I gave each man a written release which described the arrangement whereby royalties of the book are shared with the persons who are in it. But I did not tell them that I would do so until the book was nearing completion.

It was not always easy to get people to sit and listen to the larger argument of the book and to pay attention to all the places where they were discussed. Most people were much more interested in how they looked in the photographs than in how they sounded or were depicted. I practically had to beg people to concentrate on what I was saying. It also did not help that they now knew they would share in the profits, a factor that sometimes made them feel less motivation to listen carefully, on the assumption that I could be trusted. The following conversation, while somewhat extreme, illustrates (among other things) that the effort to be respectful by showing the text to the person in it sometimes turns out not to seem very respectful at all. In this case, I end up insisting that the individual listen to me, and imposing my agenda on someone who seemed annoyed by my efforts. What follows is a transcription of a tape I made one Christmas Day, told in the third person:

Keith: Get on this. We got to talk about what life is about out here.

Mitch starts to read the release to Keith. When he gets to the end of the first line, Keith says, “Yo! It’s all good, man. Far as I’m concerned, you’re family. You came out here. You walked the walk with us, you talked the talk. It’s all good. And you brought something to the attention of the people and let them know that it ain’t easy. We not individuals lacksidassical. No way! For the simple fact that we work hard and we fight harder than your Wall Street executives. Okay? I’m keeping it real. You came out here. You bringing it to the attention of the world that we are the backbone of society because we work. We *actually* work. The rest of them people don’t work. Sit and answer the phone? That’s work? Go out and dig through the garbage and try to find some books to sell and take a chance of getting bit by a rat. They ain’t working.

Mitch continues to read. He says, “As a scholar, my purpose has been to . . .”

Keith interrupts: “I hate this kind of shit. Put this in the movie. This is real.”

Mitch: “. . . and the difficult urban problems our society must confront in the years to come.”

Keith: Well, I’m gonna tell you like this. I don’t think it’s just in suburbia. It’s a worldwide situation. And in New York there is no reason why anyone should have to suffer. You don’t know how deep your book is, do you?

At this point, Keith has still not heard any of the book.

Mitch: “I hope that this study will . . .”

Keith: Talking to a friend on the corner. Crack the beer, Reg.

Mitch: Keith, listen.

Keith: I’m listening.

Mitch: “Though there is no way to anticipate the consequences of any work . . .”

Keith: It’s cool!

Mitch: “I don’t expect the book to make a lot of money.”

Keith: Just give me the contract, Mitch. I told you. I’m signing. I’m just proud to be in the book. All this reading and everything is completely unnecessary ‘cause I’m just proud to be in the book. Something to make my family proud:

Mitch: [Continues to read] “And I would like you to share in the profits.”

Keith: Thank you very much and I’m gonna accept whatever’s given to me ‘cause it’s paper. I love this!

Mitch continues reading.

Keith: Man, do me a favor. Open the beer.

Hakim: Let’s do this. Let him just finish this for one second, then you can get on with your business.

Keith: I’m celebrating Christmas, man. Kwanza. It’s a done deal.

Mitch: [Continues reading] “. . . of a biographical nature.” Do you understand what that means?

Keith: Yes. Now, can you tell me how I sound in the book?

Mitch: I’m gonna show you every part you’re in.

Keith: It’s all good with me. After this book, I intend to get like Montel. Get my own show. We gonna call it “Keeping It Real.” Me and brother Hakim are gonna be like Johnny Carson and Ed McMahon. Yo! Don King? Cut your hair and step aside because there’s some new big dogs in town. Understand this here, Mitch. There’s something you don’t understand. To me this is not a money thing. It’s something good that I did. I had to suffer to prove to my family that I could make it out here. And I don’t need that. When they kick you to the curb and when they help you, it’s a bunch of fucking bullshit. Because once you up on your feet, they turn their nose up at you. Hello you all. Kiss my ass. I got something good out of something bad.

Mitch: “If you do not receive payment, and you do not contact me, the money for you will be put in an escrow bank account for two years.”

Keith: That sounds okay, too. I’d rather not know about it. That way, in the two years I got something I can go pick up. That’s better than welfare!

Mitch: “If I still have not heard from you at the end of two years, you will forfeit the money.”

Keith: I ain't forfeiting nothing.

Mitch: If I don't hear from you in two years, that money becomes mine.

Keith: Well, you'll hear from me. As long as I'm breathing, you'll hear from me. Mitch, give me the damn paper and the damn pen and let me sign.

Mitch: First, you gotta hear what the book says.

Keith: Oh, my God. Open the beer, please. This is getting on my nerves.

Mitch: First we gotta finish our work.

Keith: Damn that! I'm not signing nothing without no beer.

Mitch: "I want you to know how honored I am to have worked on this project. Thank you for your cooperation."

Keith: It was a pleasure, man. Like I said, my grandma can go to her grave and say, "That's my baby in that book."

Mitch: Okay, now we gotta go through the book.

Keith: I just wanna hear what's said about me. Yo, Reg, get the beer, please.

Mitch: Reads Keith's entry on the map to him. It says, "Keith is a panhandler. He loves babies and dogs."

Keith: That sounds crazy.

Mitch: Does that sound crazy in a bad way?

Keith: No. It's like this here, man. A dog will stick by you one hundred percent. Family, your girl, everybody turn their back on you, a dog is still by your side. Children, they not only need to be taught by their family, with all the wickedness going on, they need to be protected.

Mitch continues to go through the pictures.

Keith: Where am I at? Damn with everybody else. I'm looking for me. [Laughing] I'll see all of them, too. But I want to see me. I see all of them every day. Shit!

Mitch: I'm getting to you.

Keith: I want to know about me. I hope this shit becomes a movie. You all have to excuse me on this tape because I am somewhat inebriated right now. It's Christmas. Merry Christmas to whoever listens to this tape. And what's up?

Mitch: Keith, if you're inebriated, we should do this at a time when you are not inebriated.

Keith: Put it like this. I ain't drunk. I just feel all right. I'm fully competent and aware of everything you said. And I know it's Christmas and that there's a lot of people who ain't got no Christmas.

Mitch: Here's a picture of Ron taking care of his aunt.

Keith: Oh, that's deep, man. Let me see what she looks like. God bless her. You got all deep and in-depth.

Mitch: Yeah. Now, this is you, standing by the door of the bank here and the lady is giving you some money.

Keith: I like this. This is funny.

Mitch reads Keith's statement on panhandling.

Keith: I remember that. True words.

Mitch reads more.

Keith: Yo! Those are my words! Verbatim. You got me good, Mitch. You got the realness out. Does it say "Fuck" in the book?

Mitch: Yes.

Keith: I like it.

Mitch reads more.

Keith: [Laughter] Oh my God! Oh my God. I've never been quoted before. My words is in print. That means it's law.

Mitch: The next chapter here is called "Talking to Women."

Keith laughs.

Mitch: Here's a section called "Keith and the Dog Walker." There are some pictures of you.

Keith: I want to see the pictures. Yo, I might just go buy me a dog today. Oh, that's my baby, Daisy.

Mitch: [Reading from manuscript] "Sometimes a man's efforts to gain conversation . . . In ordinary conversation, participants not only respond to cues."

Keith: Damn, I'm deep! I didn't know I was a philosopher until now. This is damn good.

Mitch: ". . . Entanglement is accompanied through a dog."

Keith: I'm deep! I'm in my own zone now. I gotta get into my zone to comprehend what is going on.

Mitch: "As evidenced in the following interaction. She is a graduate of college. She straightens her back. 'Hold on, I gotta go talk to my baby.'"

Keith: Yo, man. You make me sound like some kind of freak in this article. "Come on, kiss me." You make me sound like some kind of pervert or some shit. No! I just love dogs!

Mitch continues going through the dialogue.

Keith: [Laughs] This is funny shit.

Mitch: [Reading] "'Drop the leash.' As events unfold, Keith uses the dog to bring the woman over to him."

Keith: [Laughter, hysterical laughter] The dog is leading the woman!

Mitch: [Reading] "Keith has the woman by the leash."

Keith: Oh, women are gonna hate me for shit like that, man. I'm ready to get on my tail and chill out. All the player haters out there. It's all good by me. I like this. You don't got to read no more, Mitch. I'd rather read the book when it comes out. It's cool. It's reality. Hardcore reality.

Keith signs the release. He picks up the microphone. "I'm in a book. I'm in a book. Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Stan, I love you, man. Thank you for teaching me to be a man. That's my old uncle, the one in Denver. Mickey, thanks. And Nana, I love you. And I miss Papa. Merry Christmas."

Because Keith might have been drunk on this occasion, I had to go back and see him to go through the relevant parts of the manuscript a second and third time.

One of the most difficult aspects of reading people the sections they are in is the fear or nervousness I feel as I approach passages in the manuscript that they might interpret as negative or disrespectful. This might be one of the best arguments for making the people one writes about completely anonymous. Some observers may feel a greater license to tell the truth as they see it, even when it might be hurtful, if they never have to face the people they write about. But I have developed a rather thick skin when it comes to reading people passages they may not like. Ultimately, I believe I should never publish some-

thing about an identifiable person which I cannot look him or her in the eye and read.

As I read the book to the people depicted in it, I was often asked to correct specific dates or facts of a person's life. These changes would be noticeable only to the person and his/her family. In a few cases, the corrections would make a difference to people who knew the blocks or neighborhood. Yet it was absolutely essential that these aspects of the book be correct if the work was to have integrity to the persons in it.

As I went about representing others, I was aware of programmatic efforts in cultural anthropology¹⁴ and feminist methods within sociology¹⁵ to be more conscious of power relations between the author and the persons being written about. One approach is to ask the people in the book to respond in the footnotes, as did Elliot Liebow in his excellent last book, *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*.¹⁶ But I found that this particular experiment in Liebow's book made for tedious reading, so I thought it would be worthwhile to experiment with an alternative: asking Hakim to write an afterword. He and I knew that he couldn't speak for the other men on Sixth Avenue, and that some might object to the idea that he could represent them. There might have been good reasons for choosing to ask other men as well. But as the one person on these blocks who had read Jane Jacobs and knew Sixth Avenue, it seemed fitting that Hakim should have the last word. Yet Hakim and I both knew that, in the end, I was the author. Our experiment does not alter that fact and the responsibility it implies.

A Final Note on Social Position

For the past decade and a half I have been engaged in research on intergroup relations, race, and poverty in American cities. I regard myself as an urban sociologist working in the traditions of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology of the 1920s, as informed by contemporary developments in the social sciences and the humanities. The Chicago School was devoted mainly to studying local communities and social worlds at firsthand. My intellectual forebears include W.E.B. Du Bois, Robert E. Park, W. I. Thomas, Carolyn Ware, Charles Johnson, Everett Hughes, St. Clair Drake, William Foote Whyte, Horace Clayton, Robert and Helen Lynd, Howard S. Becker, Erving Goffman, Elliot Liebow, Gerald Suttles, Herbert Gans, and Elijah Anderson. My primary goal as a scholar is to carry on some of their traditions in order to illuminate issues of race and/or poverty as found in American cities in the current era.

As an upper-middle-class white male academic writing about poor black men and women, who are some of the most disadvantaged and stigmatized members of my own society, I have documented lives very different from my own.

How might this social position influence my work? I have already noted that in the United States, blacks and whites often speak differently when they are among people of their own race than when they are in the presence of members of another race. As a white person, it would be naïve for me to believe that the things blacks will say to me are the same as they would say to a black researcher. For this reason, I have relied upon the method of participant observation, rather than interviewing, to obtain the bulk of my data. Vendors would have urinated against the sides of buildings, for example, whether I was black or white, and whether I was there or not. I asked many questions, but rarely ones that

assumed an honest dialogue about race. Sometimes, of course, as when Jerome told me about his experience buying black books, such discussions flowed from the context.

A second way that my social position can influence my work comes from the heightened sense on the part of the people I write about that I am "exploiting" them by appropriating their words and images for my own purposes and personal gain. I believe that this occurs intensely in some relations between white researchers and poor blacks because of the long history of whites' exploitation of blacks. I am always sensitive to this issue as I deal with the people I hope to write about, and I try to encourage discussion about it with them, which is sometimes a losing battle, given that it is difficult for us to always have honest dialogues, and some people simply don't want to offend me. Once the book was completed, I expressed my intention to the people in it that I would share my royalties with them. But even this cannot always eliminate the sense of exploitation, which grows out of the way a researcher's actions are interpreted in the context of a complex history.

A third way that my social position (or in this case the standpoint that emerges from my social position) can influence my work comes from the blindness I might have to the circumstances of people who are very different from me. During my first summer working as a magazine vendor with Marvin and Ron, for example, I routinely entered restaurants on the block to urinate and defecate. I would sometimes see vendors doing their bodily functions in public places, but I never thought twice about why they did so. I think the reason the issue didn't register on my radar is that my privileges made it a non-issue for me personally. Had the researcher been a poor black, he or she might have been excluded from local bathrooms enough times to say, "This is a process that needs to be understood."

Ultimately, I came to understand that such stigmatization and exclusion needed to be addressed. When I listened to tapes made on Sixth Avenue, I heard references to men's problems gaining access to rest rooms. I listened to these tapes while reviewing notes of interviews with local residents who complained about the tendency of some vendors to urinate in public. As a white male who took his bathroom privileges for granted, I might have looked at the people working the street as persons not unlike friends of mine who are white and rich and who urinate on the golf course because they don't want to bother going back to the clubhouse. But because I listened carefully to my tapes, I noted that the situation was more complex, and this led me to research it in some depth. Though I constantly obsess about the ways that my upper-middle-class whiteness influences what I see, I must emphasize my uncertainty about what I do not see and what I do not know I missed.

I have endeavored to trade on the disadvantage of being from a different social position from the people I write about by maximizing the advantages that come from being in that position. I try to use myself as a kind of control group, comparing the way I am treated in particular situations with the way people on the street are treated. When the dog walker responded immediately to me while delaying her reaction to Keith, I could see that our social positions and behavior led to the dog walker's differing response. When the police treated an educated white male professor differently from an unhoused vendor on Christmas Day, I was in a better position to speculate on the underlying dynamics. And when I realized how effortlessly I walked into public bathrooms, I could make a useful comparison in my chapter on that topic. In none of these cases are the inferences made from the comparisons clear-cut, but they are comparisons that I am able to make *because* of my privileged position.

In addition to benefiting from some of the advantages of my upper-middle-class whiteness, I try to overcome my disadvantages by consulting with black scholars and intellectuals, some of whom grew up in poor families themselves. Sometimes their suggestions led me back to the field with new ideas and questions I had not thought to ask. In trying to understand why black women don't get entangled to the same extent as white women by street harassment in encounters with poor black men, for example, I was helped by the suggestion of a black sociologist, Franklin D. Wilson. He thinks that because the black women share a racial history with the men on the street, they do not feel responsible or guilty for the men's plight and so are less willing to excuse the men's behavior toward them. Surely a white scholar could have had that insight, but none of those who read my chapter did. I suspect it comes out of Wilson's particular life experience, from situations and people he has known.

Another thing that has helped me has been my collaboration with the African-American photographer Ovie Carter, whose professional and life experiences enable him to give me good advice. Ovie is fifty-two years old, was born in Mississippi, and grew up in Chicago and St. Louis, before serving in the Air Force. He joined the *Chicago Tribune* at the age of twenty-three. He has worked in Africa as a photojournalist, but has spent most of his career covering poor neighborhoods in Chicago. Shortly before our work began on this book, his brother moved in with him from the streets as he made his way off crack. Consequently, Ovie has a deep appreciation for the anguish and problems associated with addiction. Ovie read and commented on all the chapters in *Sidewalk* as I wrote them, and the long hours we have spent together have helped me to understand aspects of life on Sixth Avenue that I would otherwise have been blind to.

All these circumstances have worked for me at times, but there is no simple way to overcome ingrained racial bias, inexperience, or others' suspicions. Perhaps the best starting point is to be aware that a different social position can have a serious effect on one's work, and these differences must be taken seriously.

Interventions

One of the most difficult issues faced by social scientists and journalists who do sociological fieldwork is the question of when it is appropriate to intervene in the lives of the people they write about. This is especially true when such persons are living in states of deprivation. Some journalists have given assistance back to the people they have written about, and they have found a way to do so that is consistent with their goals as researchers.¹⁷ Positivistic social scientists, who remain obsessed with securing unobtrusive measures of social phenomena which are not of their own creation, tend to be more uneasy about such involvements.

In my early weeks working as a magazine vendor, I found it very hard to say no to requests for money, usually small change, which came from a certain group of panhandlers and table watchers. In the methodological appendix to *Tally's Corner*, Elliot Liebow (who, like me, was thirty-seven years old when he completed his book) recalls being confronted with a similar problem. Liebow says that some people "exploited" him, not as an outsider but rather as one who, as a rule, had more resources than they did. When one of them came up with the resources—money or a car, for example—he, too, was "exploited" in the same

way.¹⁸ Liebow "usually tried to limit money or other favors to what . . . each would have gotten from another friend had he the same resources" as the researcher.¹⁹

I tried to maintain a similar stance. But as time went on, panhandlers and a few magazine vendors asked me, more and more often. Nobody expected me to give any more money than they might get from another vendor who had a good day, but a number of panhandlers came to expect me to give something on a regular basis.

Hakim and Marvin said these men asked me for money on a regular basis because they thought that as a college professor, and a Jew, I was "rich" enough to afford the donations. The questions for me were: Could I show my deep appreciation for their struggles and gain their appreciation for my purposes as a sociologist without paying for some simulacrum of it? How could I communicate my purposes as a researcher without dollar bills and small change in my hand? Did the constant requests for money suggest that I had not shown or earned proper "respect" and was being paid back accordingly?

In the end, out of practical necessity, I needed to find a way to tell certain persons that I could hardly afford the tapes I was using to record the street life, and that as a professor I could afford to be in New York City only due to the goodwill of friends who were allowing me to sleep in their spare bedrooms or on their couches. Yet I could never bring myself to say even this. I knew that my salary (while not very high) was quite high compared to the going rate on the sidewalk. Furthermore, the spare bedroom I was sleeping in (on the Upper East Side) was more hospitable than the places many of them would stay in that night. But with time I did learn to say no, and to communicate the anguish I felt in giving such an answer.

The question of how to avoid intervening when one cannot or should not do so is different from the question of whether and how to help when one can and should. At times, I was asked to do things as simple as telling what I knew about the law, serving as a reference for a person on the sidewalk as he or she dealt with a landlord or potential landlord, helping someone with rent when he was about to be evicted, and on one occasion finding and paying for a lawyer. In these situations, I did everything I could to be helpful, but I never gave advice, opinions, or help beyond what was asked for.

At other times, the question was whether and how to make larger efforts to intervene. One such situation occurred at the close of the summer of 1997. After I had worked as a magazine vendor during two summers, I began having discussions about my research with Nolan Zail, an architect from Australia on the frontiers of designing innovative housing alternatives for unhoused persons in New York City. One of the issues we discussed concerned the difficulty some unhoused men like Ishmael had in moving their magazines and personal belongings around, as well as the complaint made by Business Improvement Districts and police officers that the presence of these vendors was unsightly and frustrating because their merchandise and belongings were strewn on the pavement under their tables. I asked Zail whether he could design a vending cart which might address some of these concerns.

Here was an opportunity for us to use what we knew to make a small but practical contribution to improving conditions on Sixth Avenue. Surely this was not the same as helping to transform the larger structural conditions which brought about these problems, but it might make a difference in Ishmael's day-to-day life. First, though, it was necessary to find out if Ishmael wanted such a cart, and how he would feel about such an effort on his behalf.

I could not ignore the fact that both Zail and I are white, and that Ishmael had described being treated in patronizing ways by many whites throughout his life.

Zail suggested that we meet with Ishmael to try to establish what kind of functional characteristics he was looking for in a vending cart. There on the sidewalk, Zail spent time with Ishmael trying to understand how his table functions within his business and life routine as an unhoused vendor.

Ishmael described his need for sufficient storage space to hold his merchandise and personal belongings safely. He also said that it would be useful if the design made provision for a separate lightweight carriage which he would use for his hunts and which could be attached to the vending cart.

After two weeks, Zail had designed a cart and presented drawings to Ishmael to get his input and reaction. Then he modified the designs to incorporate Ishmael's suggestions. In one meeting, Ishmael expressed his wish to pay back, in installments, the costs of manufacturing the cart. The cost had not yet come up (I knew it would, in due time), and we agreed that this would be a good way to do it. In the meantime, I received permission from Ishmael to try to raise the money to pay for the manufacture of the cart through donations.

When Ishmael felt satisfied with the cart's design, Zail and I scheduled an appointment with one of the large manufacturers of steel-and-aluminum food carts. He was already manufacturing a food cart which was pretty similar to the one we would ask him to make for us. His reaction to our ideas, and the difficulty we had in getting the cart built, became another kind of data for me, showing the nature of prejudice against the destitute and unhoused. It was yet another occasion when I was able to trade on the advantage of being white. Had I been black, I would likely never have heard the following:

"Okay, let's see what you got," he said as we began the meeting, which he gave me permission to record.

"This is what we have in mind," I said as Zail placed the architectural drawings in front of him.

"Did you show this to the head of Business Improvement District A?" (The head of BID A was a powerful man in New York real estate who, the manufacturer asserted, was an enemy of sidewalk vending.)

"No," I replied.

"Well, then, forget about it," he said.

"He doesn't have any say about what goes on in Greenwich Village," I said.

"Mitch, please! They own everything that's happening. The real-estate board controls New York City. They *are* the real-estate board. You're gonna show them this? Are you kidding? They want to get rid of these people!"

"Part of their argument for getting rid of these guys is that it looks so bad," I responded.

"It's not a question that we can't make something," he said. "It's the opposition. If we go out there with one of these carts, they would crucify us. They would nail me to the cross."

"Nail you?"

"Look! You know what started all this? Really simple. They want to get all the niggers off the street. They told me: 'We want them off. They're bad for business!' You want to put them on, *Mitch*! Why you making so much trouble, *Mitch*? You're spitting in their face with this!"

"What we are saying," Zail interjected, "is that this is what you can do to improve the image . . . It's actually not too dissimilar from the cart you have there."

"So how does this help?"

"Well, for several reasons," Zail continued. "One, it allows storage. Two is display. It can be displayed in a professional manner, rather than strawn all over."

"All we're asking is for you to make *one* of these for us on an experimental basis," I said. If it worked for Ishmael, we would likely order more.

"I'll make anything you want," the manufacturer replied. "If that's what you're telling me to do. But there is nothing that will change their appearance!"

"It will increase the aesthetic of this type of vending," I said.

"What about him, the homeless person?" he asked.

We seemed destined to go around in circles.

A few weeks later, Zail called to confirm a subsequent meeting with the manufacturer, but he said he had changed his mind. He wouldn't have any part of our project. He didn't want to do anything to make the "homeless" vendors look more like the food vendors, who constituted the real market for his carts. He said he was also concerned that he might antagonize the real-estate interests of the city, who he said were already trying to eliminate food vendors on sidewalks. (In fact, one year later, Mayor Giuliani tried to eliminate food vendors from hundreds of locations in lower Manhattan and midtown, but changed his mind in response to a public outpouring of support for the food vendors.)

When we told Ishmael of our trouble in getting the cart made, he was not surprised. After all, he had been dealing with such responses ever since he began working as a magazine vendor, seven years earlier.

In the end, despite my having given small change on some occasions and despite efforts to do more than that on others, the quality of my regard must be in the research work itself. To this day, I cannot say how much "acceptance," or "rapport," or "respect" I have on the sidewalk, or how much respect I have shown these men in our personal relations. But I would like to think that whatever respect I ultimately get will be based not on what I did or didn't give in the way of resources but on whether the people working and/or living on Sixth Avenue think the work I did has integrity, by whatever yardstick they use to take that measure.