



Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture

ARTS-L0130

Methods of gathering data

Eeva Berglund – 16 January 2017 – Interviewing 1

- Interviewing
- Online research (and interviewing)
- Exercise and readings
- On ethics

Typical motivations for doing interviews as part of human / qualitative study

- Soliciting views, experiences, motivations.
- Getting close to "lived experience".
- Establishing sequences of events or significant elements of life trajectories.
- Encouraging openness to share sensitive issues that are difficult to articulate in brief or in public.
- Even to achieve an "authentic gaze into the soul of another" (Paul Atkinson & David Silverman 1997).

⇒ Makes assumptions about SOCIETY, CULTURE, PERSON/SELF

Qualitative interviewing

- Structured – are like verbally administered questionnaires
- Semi-structured – based around key questions
- Unstructured – open-ended
- Individual, group, focus group, life-history and biographical. Informal or formal, by telephone, skype or even email.
- For follow up, triangulate, complement, previously generated materials and ideas.

Creativity in interview techniques

The convention is to try to break convention...

- Practice-based, walking (go-along), video-recorded, self-administered, text or image-based interviews are all being developed in different directions.
- Most often the interview is a side-product, part of or follow-up of some other practice (workshop, charrette, art project, design intervention).
- For all their shape-shifting, interviews must be DIALOGIC to be recognised as interviews.

The practice of interviewing



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Standardized survey interviews and questionnaires

- Representative samples are important – qualitative meets quantitative
- Snowballing samples create different kinds of *research populations*
- Anonymity takes different forms

- Is often sequential with open-ended or semi-structured enquiry

- Ethics is important here too!

Making the best of the chance to interview

Things to consider in a typical *semi-structured interview situation*:

- Access – how will you recruit and invite interviewees?
- Thematizing – what the interviewer/researcher wants
- Openness – what the interviewee wants
- To record or not to record?
- Main questions
- *Probes* and follow-up questions
- Equipment, place and time!

Some things to include in an interview

Making sure the interviewee:

- Is thanked
- Understands the purpose of the interview
- Knows the approximate time needed in advance

Making sure the interviewer:

- Has prepared the questions appropriately and done the pre-research required
- Understands the responses and if not, asks for clarification
- Establishes whether follow-up is possible

Learning from others' mistakes

- Everything is potential data, not just the speech (let alone words alone).
- Place, who are present & around, i.e. context, what everyone does, what artefacts or tools come into play.
- Often respondents have continued to speak after the tape recorders have been turned off.
- Interview fieldnotes should include lots of things that are not speech or words!

Learning from others' mistakes / successes

- Time can be crucial – a leisurely conversation that generates new insight can be rewarding for everyone
- Many people like talking about themselves
- Good background research
- A nose for a good interviewee – E.g. Berglund (2009) 'Making space in Finland's new economy', in *Boundless Worlds: An Anthropological Approach to Movement*, Peter W. Kirby (ed.).
- Copious, clear notes, make it possible to benefit from them 25 years later.

Standard qualitative interviewing also involves

- Establishing trust – negotiating
- Possibly making transcripts available to interviewees
- An audit-trail of the rights and responsibilities of those involved. E.g. release-notes, consent forms, ethics release forms etc, usually based on the requirements of funding bodies and research institutions.
- Increasingly it may involve considering who your data belongs to! Open science will affect how all data is generated, managed and made use of.

Sample interview release form

In order to assist the Author in the preparation of the Work, I have agreed to be interviewed and to provide information and other materials to be used in connection with the Work, including my personal experiences, remarks, and recollections as well as any photographs and documents that I may choose to give to the Author (the Interview Materials).

I hereby grant and assign to the Author and his/her licensees, successors, and assigns the following rights in connection with the Interview Materials for use as part of the Work or any advertising, packaging, or promotional materials for the Work, in any and all editions, versions, and media, in perpetuity and throughout the world.

1. The right to quote or paraphrase all or any portion of the Interview Materials, and to generally use and publish the Interview Materials, including my experiences, recollections, incidents, remarks, dialogue, actions, and information, as well as any photographs and documents that I may give to the Author.
2. The right to use my name, image, and biographical data.
3. The right to develop, produce, distribute, advertise, promote, or otherwise exploit the Work as a book or any other Work in any manner that the Author or his/her assigns deems appropriate. I understand and acknowledge that the Author or his/her assigns will be the sole owner of all copyright and other rights in and to the Work.

https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/Downloads/DUP_SampleInterviewRelease.pdf



Some things to include in *records* of interviews

- The Date, time and location and other relevant details for retrieval later
- Information needed about the interviewee (and the interviewer)
- Any notes on release forms
- **Before** you head out to do your interview, check that recording equipment works.
- Allow for time for messing up.
- **After** Label records, make duplicates, and store them safely!
- Go through your notes and add interpretive commentary and expand on mnemonics.
- Transcribe what you need to (or get it done by someone else) quickly, and check the transcription against the original.

The philosophy of interviewing?



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Thick and thin description

- See C. Geertz 1973, drawing on Gilbert Ryle
- Thickness requires:
 - What is said
 - How it is said and how people act
 - What artefacts are used and what impacts they have
 - UNDERSTANDING cultural nuances

David Silverman, 2017, 'How was it for you?'

"... quantitative researchers [...] argue that, if you want to understand perceptions and motives, pre-tested, multiple choice interview questions are more likely to provide reliable data than apparently 'open-ended' questions administered to small, non-random samples. A recognition of such shaky foundations is seen in the way that many PhD students doing open-ended interviews regularly ask their supervisors: 'what are the right questions to ask?' and 'how many interviews do I need?'. Rather than study how people behave (something inaccessible to quantitative researchers except through laboratory studies or crude counts of actions on the internet), *most qualitative researchers choose to study perceptions* and then inexorably find themselves in a losing battle with the real strengths of quantitative research."

Interviews as self-presentation

- Interviews are interesting for many reasons, but they do contain considerable potential for manipulation and over-interpreting
- Context matters but it changes, and so repeat interviews are often the most enriching

Social science and psychology are not separate from the rest of society!

- Much of the world has lived for 100 years or more being self-conscious of social identities – social 'norms'
- Ethnic minorities may check their ritual practices against ethnographic accounts from the 1930s
- To make something explicit is often to make a critique of it: this can lead to postmodern anxieties about how to fashion the Self – with help from psychology, sociology and the 'interview society'
- At the same time the planet is having to be *redesigned*

For some social theorists the crisis of neoliberalism is crisis of epistemology

Information as a byproduct of everyday clicks... Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Amazon, search engines...

From analysis to analytics?

Harvesting?

Mining?

- See Evelyn Ruppert, John Law and Mike Savage, 'Reassembling social science methods: the challenge of digital devices' in *Theory, Culture & Society* (2013) 30(4): pp. 22-46
- *SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods* Edited by Nigel Fielding, Raymond M. Lee & Grant Blank 2011, also online via Aalto.

What does it achieve to use a major search engine as a starting point for research!?

⇒ can the interpretive richness and cultural sensibility of interview methods bring back the nuance and complexity that big data appears to have made obsolete or under-valued?

Research philosophies and interviewing

Broadly speaking interviews can be done on the basis of any philosophy of research, including:

- Positivist (interviewer is non-partisan)
- Hermeneutic – interpretive (conversational)
- Phenomenological (seeks unmediated experience)
- Post-normal, constructivist (guided by interest and social power on both sides)

Interviewing and the digital life



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Conversational methods and the digital life

- Digital devices can appear in social research as
 - Research focus – how do people use devices
 - Research tools – inscription or measuring devices
 - Socio-technical assemblages – where EVERYBODY potentially uses digital devices (a kind of research tool):
 - quantified self and other learning / self-improvement technologies
 - surveillance (of self and others) for commercial and government uses
 - Everyday life at home, at play, at work...

Two examples of using digital tools

- Internet discussion forums

E.g. diffusion of small-scale renewable energy technologies (heat-pumps, pellet burning, solar) Sampsa Hyysalo et al.

- Expert interviews, snowballing and online forums
- Find patterns of behaviour among user-innovators (advice on technical aspects & commercialisation, adoption & self-building of new devices)
- Establish paths of transformation and motives
- Statistical analysis but also descriptive content and narrative analysis

- Online mapping

E.g. PPGIS public participation GIS SoftGIS Methodology - 1/02/2011 Building Bridges in Urban Planning by Marketta Kyttä & Maarit Kahila

- Internet based surveys that combine location data with subjective evaluations of specific locations
- Complement participatory planning workshops and meetings
- After ten years, planners still find it hard to use the data effectively

One-off or consecutive interviews?

- Is all conversation interviewing?
- 'Thin' information can still be 'rich' information
 - With top-ranking, articulate people who are not worried about their status or issues of confidentiality
- Interviewing is often costly

When and how can academic or scholarly interviewing 'give voice'?

- Rarely and with difficulty
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the subaltern speak?." *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea* (1988): 21-78. [Also in C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (1988) 'Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture']

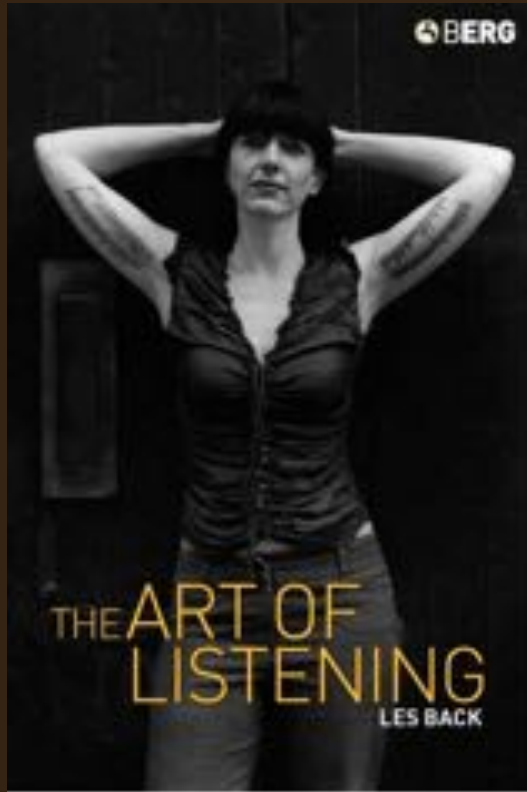
⇒ Politics of representation

When and how can academic or scholarly interviewing 'give voice'?

- With sensitivity and creativity
- Finding a Way Home – digital sociology project on racism and multiculturalism in London in the late 1990s
- Self-representation by young people of their lives
 - Videos, photos, mapping, story-telling, art
 - As PART of an ETHNOGRAPHY

⇒ Politics of representation

When and how do young people make a postcolonial global city a home?



- SE London's youth reframed not as a problem but as a complex set of struggles over belonging
- Comparison of two neighbourhoods, Isle of Dogs and Deptford
- Participant-observers of their own complex lives
- Contextual voice breaks down mainstream's 'clunky' coding of space based on correlations and statistics

Interviewing in the age of the interview. Tips from David Silverman 2017

1. Improve the transparency of the interview set-up (for example, explaining what interviewees are told about the purposes of the study).
2. Attend fully to the actions of the interviewer (including sequences of talk involving both interviewer and interviewee; improved transcription detail)
4. Improve analysis of interview data by attending to how interviews are flooded with social science categories, assumptions and research agendas.
7. Do not presuppose cognitive, individualist assumptions about human actors.

Brief discussion on the exercises so far

In groups, discuss from the readings and your exercise

- How, as an interviewer, can you deal with the fact of having an identity?
- Consider the pros and cons of doing inventories versus engaging people in reflecting on their experiences (interviewing them).
- Think about whether or not you need a normative set of questions to carry out a meaningful inventory or audit (do you need to have a sense of what is a better or worse wardrobe or public space?)
- Note: From Lehtonen, Turo-Kimmo & Pasi Mäenpää (1997) 'Shopping in the East Centre Mall', in Falk, Pasi and Colin B. Cambell (eds), *The Shopping Experience* you can find inspiration for how to think about shopping, clothing, urban space, social change, all through a relatively focussed set of observational data.

Ethics of data gathering



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Do no harm!

Exploitation of volunteer research subjects? Or significant insights?

Public Announcement

**WE WILL PAY YOU \$4.00 FOR
ONE HOUR OF YOUR TIME**

Persons Needed for a Study of Memory

*We will pay five hundred New Haven men to help us complete a scientific study of memory and learning. The study is being done at Yale University.

*Each person who participates will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50c carfare) for approximately 1 hour's time. We need you for only one hour; there are no further obligations. You may choose the time you would like to come (evenings, weekdays, or weekends).

*No special training, education, or experience is needed. We want:

Factory workers	Businessmen	Construction workers
City employees	Clerks	Salespeople
Laborers	Professional people	White-collar workers
Barbers	Telephone workers	Others

All persons must be between the ages of 20 and 50. High school and college students cannot be used.

*If you meet these qualifications, fill out the coupon below and mail it now to Professor Stanley Milgram, Department of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven. You will be notified later of the specific time and place of the study. We reserve the right to decline any application.

*You will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50c carfare) as soon as you arrive at the laboratory.

TO:
PROF. STANLEY MILGRAM, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY,
YALE UNIVERSITY, NEW HAVEN, CONN. I want to take part in
this study of memory and learning. I am between the ages of 20 and
50. I will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50c carfare) if I participate.

NAME (Please Print)

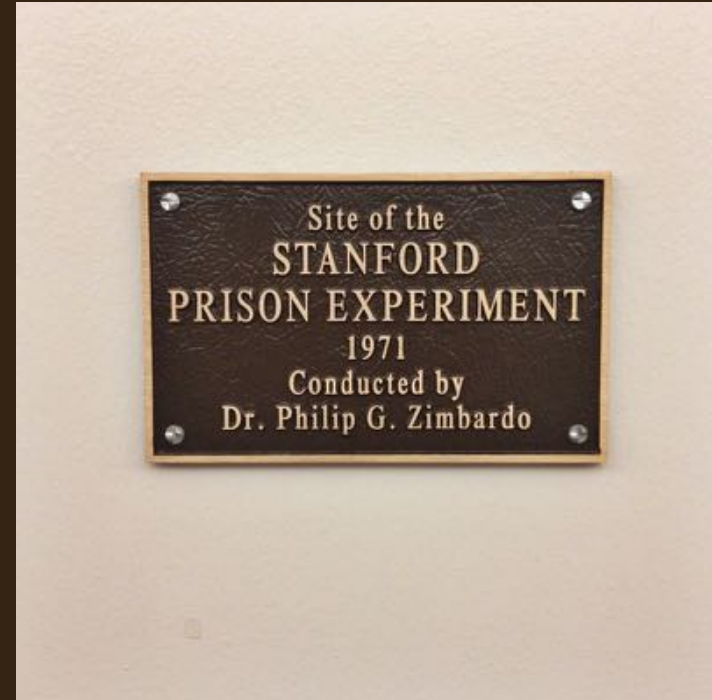
ADDRESS

TELEPHONE NO. Best time to call you

AGE OCCUPATION SEX

CAN YOU COME:

WEEKDAYS EVENINGS WEEKENDS



Anonymity

"The WP acknowledges the potential value of anonymisation in particular as a strategy to reap the benefits of 'open data' for individuals and society at large whilst mitigating the risks for the individuals concerned. However, case studies and research publications have shown how difficult it is to create a truly anonymous dataset whilst retaining as much of the underlying information as required for the task."

THE WORKING PARTY ON THE PROTECTION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH REGARD TO
THE PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA

set up by Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council

Sameness and difference

On agreeing with respondents

- What does it add to knowledge, does it just confirm our own biases?
- Can it be dishonest, encouraging people to keep talking.

On respondents we don't like

- E.g. in Social Movement research, too little research is done on groups researchers don't like
- Access is a problem, as is

Thinking about your final assignment



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- Start thinking about what would be an interesting set of research questions for you to have in mind as you approach the task of gathering data either on clothes/ wardrobes or urban space.
- If you want to switch from urban space to at this point, you're totally welcome! **wardrobe studies**
- And yet, the point is to learn how to elicit information and then how to document it so you can retrieve it later.