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STS

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STS-working paper 3/00

ISSN 0802-3573-165

arbeidsnotat
working paper

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Getting Connected:
How sociologists can access the high tech élite

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STS Working Paper 03/00
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ABSTRACT

Current textbooks on interview methods in the social sciences have major shortcomings (Breakwell et al, 1995; Brenner et al., 1985; Crabree & Miller, 1992; Fog, 1994; Fowler & Mangione, 1990; McCracken, 1988; Steward & Cash, 1997; Sudman & Branburn, 1983; Weiss, 1994). In short, they teach the interviewer must be passive, understanding, open and caring – so that communication can occur. But although this is important in some settings, it is devastating in other, for instance when facing the corporate élite. Their voice is always heard only when they want to. We need to learn how to challenge their control over the situation. In the Network society (Castells, 1996), the most serious flaw of research design literature is not to include gatekeeper relations, that is, getting access to the interview setting you want. The treatment of how to get the right information during the interview also is misleading in the literature. Traditionally, of course, the interviewer is not supposed to interfere at all with the free flow of data (Brenner et al., 1985:151). Although this "positivist" approach is claimed to be dead, it refuses to lie down, and reappears under the cover of "hearing the voice of the other". The "empowering respondents" approach advocated by feminists have given valuable insight on how to grasp what is going on "under the surface", but this is far from enough. Instead, we need to address the threefold challenge of the Network society, namely network awareness (analysis), network flexibility (interdisciplinary creativity) and networking ability (performance). Correspondingly, three strategic perspectives are outlined: the journalistic, the therapeutic, and the investigative. Combining these intelligently gives the repertoire needed for the empowered researcher doing élite interviews in the new knowledge economy. This article draws on interview experience with experts, CEOs and policy makers in Norway and Great Britain, and uses an interdisciplinary perspective.

INTRODUCTION

The interview is the paramount research situation. We have immediate access to a living witness to a social event. We can ask questions and watch the reactions they provoke. We can restate our questions, follow up on details, or pursue interesting points brought up underway. The best interviews are like that, even the publicized ones, like when Oprah Winfrey interviews Hillary Clinton, or when Larry King talks with Bill Clinton. Good interviews are engaging, stimulating and fun. They reveal something important about where both actors are coming from, whether it be Larry King and Bill Clinton or your interview with a CEO. In short, the interview has the possibility of a real interactive, social encounter.

There are two main reasons why interviews not always are real interactive encounters. You might be dealing with so-called "difficult people" or you might not be able to deal with them at all, because you are denied access to them, as we will address in great detail later). Or, you might be a "difficult interviewer", that is so set in your ways that you are unable to improvise, change around on the questions, adapt to the situation, or use the opportunities you get to ask sensitive, tricky or unwanted questions.

Traditionally, the distinction is made between unstructured and structured interviews, possibly adding a third one - the semi-structured interview (Crabtree & Miller, 1992:16). This categorization falls short of describing the variation of interview types for one reason - it is too simple. In the following, we will propose a new framework, viewing interviews as what they are - strategic encounters in many different contexts and for many different purposes. This way, interviews part of the basic fieldwork, and should be used in virtually every sociological inquiry.

The interview starts with getting access, a problem that has been left out of much discussion in the literature. Once in an actual interview setting the main problem is getting the right information – not too much data, not irrelevant data, not only "surface information", and not misinformation. Contrary to what some textbooks claim, the amount of pages with raw data should be kept at a minimum. If we use the right interview techniques, this is possible without loosing relevant data.

When it comes to the actual process of asking questions, theory spells out we should be careful not to be ourselves and talk like we normally do. Leading questions are allowed by what we could label reformed Methodists like Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:153-156), but doomed by most (McCracken, 1988). The Commandment is: "To avoid bias, the interviewing must be done nondirectively", and "questions must never be asked in a leading or directive manner as this exerts pressure on informants to answer in particular ways (Brenner, 1985:151). As Kvale (1984) has pointed out, it is neutrality as a scientific norm that leads to a non-directive interview form. Doing it that way, you loose valuable insight. The interview could provide more.

Under the heading "interviewing difficult people", a mainstream book on research methods states the following: "there are some categories of people who are particularly difficult to interview effectively. These include children and the very elderly" (Breakwell, Hammond & Fife-Schaw, 1995:236).[i] As if this accounts for all the types of difficult people one comes across in research. In another article, depth interviewing is seen as a means of giving "vulnerable subjects" voice in the making of their own history. Their sample is people with learning difficulties (Booth & Booth, 1994:415). Or, again, in an article called "Learning to listen" the author finds her background gave her a "fear of forcing or manipulating individuals into discussing topics they did not want to talk about" (Anderson & Jack, 1990:13).

For some reason, interviewing "normal" adults has come to be considered the "standard" form. Virtually all descriptions of the interview in general take this for granted. But why would adults be easier to interview? Or is it that they seem easy to interview but really are not? Maybe they are cooperative, match the interviewer in age and background, and thus are easier? Who are normal adults, anyway? Male, suburban professionals of the middle class? Of course, adults come in many varieties, and strong adults (experts, élites) could be equally difficult as weak adults (widows, alone mothers, dyslectics). No one is contesting that the elderly need their own type of approach. You need to be tolerant of their experience, and it is wise to appear like an interested listener. On the other hand, you risk using a terrible amount of time on the interview, and might end up with the feared 1000-page transcript (Kvale, 1988:133). But the research interview is much too important to be classified once and for all. Categories are fluid, and changing. In the following I will propose a framework fit for coping with another type of difficult people as well, the rising social category of networkers and switchers – the digerati.

The Networked Interview

Network society is here defined as the advanced form of capitalist civilization, mediated by the informational mode of economic, social and cultural development (McGuigan, 1999:153). In the Network society the unit is the network (Castells, 1996:198). The rulers of the Network society are the Networkers, or the Switchers, as I will call them – they are the leaders in the new knowledge economy. Also called the digerati (Brochmann, 1995). They include the traditional elite like politicians, experts of all sorts, scientists, businessmen, famous people, musicians, and artists, but even more so they are connected to the new, growing businesses in information and communication technology. But they do not have to be global visionaries like Bill Gates or MIT Media Lab's Nicholas Negroponte, famous for his best-selling book Being Digital, they might also be seemingly unimportant in some circles, but incredibly powerful in others. The Networkers are initiators of networks, and have an incredible amount of what Granovetter (1973) labeled "weak ties", that is potential social relationships that extend your networks exponentially in an important direction. In the words of Malcolm Gladwell of the New Yorker, switchers 'stand at the intersection of different worlds, connecting people, creating opportunities, and spreading ideas' (Gladwell, 1999:52). So, these are the people we are looking for in élite studies. The question is how to approach them. How to make them give us a timeslot in their incredibly busy schedule. Especially in America, where the expressed 'lack of time' is a cultural illness, we have to be apt to present ourselves, knowing our assets.

Society is not what it used to be. The network society (Castells, 1997) both calls for and facilitates a more active approach. This is a time where controlling the space of flows is more important than controlling the flows of space, or a particular space itself. In reality, the whole notion of space as a definite domain, a place, is under attack. This is a space where the Net is the measure, and where technology is a centerpiece in most communication flows. In this situation it is even more important than before that sociologists get in touch with the real movers and shakers in society. They control then knowledge flows, not the knowledge itself. They are the channels through which knowledge is formed, mediated, and maintained. But in themselves, they are less important than before. That is, their specialist knowledge is less dominant, and their decision-making is increasingly based upon outside advice. People who control networks are switchers. They stand "at the intersection of different worlds", without having the control over these worlds, only the connection control. But they are nevertheless the new elite, and they need to be the focus of attention of critical sociology.

Sociology is not what it used to be. This is especially relevant for data collection methodology. From the textbooks out on the market, like McCracken (1988), it is immediately clear that the traditional interview methodology is derived from the days when social science mainly was the study of marginal, weaker groups in society, like children and the elderly. There is great concern with protection, with ethics and with sensitivity. Although this is still a defining feature of sociology, those methods should not necessarily be applied when we apply ourselves in interdisciplinary studies of the elite. Practical tools and additional training is needed if we are to conduct meaningful elite interviews.

This article gives advice on how to handle difficult interview settings, in order to perform sociological inquiry into the elite. Even though it seems difficult when you do not have 'connections', I want to show that making these necessary connections is about focused strategy and changing your attitude - thus it can be learned. Trying to view the research agenda as a continuing strife to get focused, we view interviews as necessary tools for our reflection through the whole research process - from getting access to getting information.

METHOD

This article accounts for a practice familiar to all social scientists - interviewing. It differs from most accounts in its sharp outline of professional secrets from other fields. It is also a personal account. These two features set the tone and texture, together with theoretical perspectives from the methods literature.

Drawing upon my experience from about 100 interviews with CEOs, scientists and policy-makers in Norway and Great Britain, this article is also an attempt to get inspiration from other professions who interview people (like journalists, consultants, therapists, and investigators). Some journalists do more than 10 000 interviews in their career, a number very few social scientists aspire to. You could make the case there are reasons why. That journalistic interviews have a different purpose, go after different things. Or, that research interviews go deeper. Yet the best interviews of social scientists never get mass attention. And few reveal as much about people as talk show host Oprah Winfrey. I take the perspective that getting ideas from other interview traditions is fundamental.

The role of the interviewer is vital. As a white, urban male in my mid- twenties, my position clearly conditions what I can do in interview settings. The bluntness of the Generation X ethic gives me the advantage of talking straight, seldom afraid to intrude – and I never take no for an answer. On the other hand, I am at distance from the established Norwegian industrial moguls who grew up in the 1950s and say they have "built the country". Generational difference can both bridge and separate people from gaining your trust, but it always has an impact. As does your attitude, your personality, your temper, your patience level, and your mood. In the following, these aspects will blend in with the story – telling of behind-the-scene action, front stage improvisation and ongoing interpretation. A process of presencing, of making present tense out of past experience. And of retelling it, bringing it up in new ways, recombining it. Hoping it will connect somehow, and show the play that is going on. A play where you become the actor. Where you are often used to portray other people, you become a voice for your interviewee. You are used as a channel to "get something out" (in the media, in the public ear, or simply to get it out of the system). The interviewer has many roles.

The basis of the article include an interview with a Norwegian journalist, as well as an interpretation of existing literature on interview methods, ranging from traditional to post-structural method.

THEORY

Little has been written about interviewing the elite. In one of the few books on the subjects, Hertz & Imber (1995) mostly turn to autobiographical writings of social scientists. The problem with this compilation of articles is that it really is a collection of anecdotal notes on "how we got where we are now, safely through our trouble with gaining access". Only one of the articles, by Richard Thomas, provides substantial advice. His focus on getting ready, getting access, and getting data, is pragmatic and gives practical advice on how to phrase yourself, avoiding "scientific" terminology, and on trying to get referrals from friends or contacts in your field (Thomas, 1995: 13). But the article is short, and not well supported by evidence. Clearly there is a lack of conceptual schemes to understand elite interviews. In the following we will look at this issue, and suggest a theoretical framework. The first distinction we would like to make is between traditional and post-structural methodology.

From traditional to post-structural methodology

There are considerable differences between a traditional and a post-structural methodology, especially when focusing on the collective insights to be gained from what we call network methodology.

Most prominently, there is the standard tradition of what we would label hygienic research where everything is supposed to be objective, standardized, and the interviewer is completely detached. So as not to influence the flow of events, or put any pressure upon the respondent. This ideal comes from the 1950s' Lazarsfeld-school,[1] who really did not like interviews at all.

Mishler (1986) claims the essence of interviewing is two people speaking to each other and views interviews as social discourse. This has consequences for the interpretation of what is going on. When we conduct interviews we are pattern makers more than we are pattern finders. This might well be true, but a narrative approach is necessarily passive. It helps us in the analysis, but not in the important first phases: getting access and conducting a successful interview. In other words, we need to look to other sources to grasp the important essentials. But we will keep on to the notion of the interviewer as therapist.

Then there is the tradition of "empowering respondents". They are concerned that the terrible researcher takes the control, and they do not believe in the interview as a means of gathering data already "out there". In this vein, Oakley (1981, 1982:55) states that a feminist approach is needed, especially when interviewing women. In her account, interviewing women is a cozy, friendly and sisterly exchange of information. Kaul (1999) advocates what she calls

[1] Paul Lazarsfeld, professor at Colombia University, New York, and an influential empiricist advocating quantitative methods.

identificatory knowledge, claiming the interview really aims at understanding through empathy and intuition. Ball (1994:113) on the other hand, who has experience from interviewing women MP's, claims such interviews are: "events of struggle [...] a complex interplay of dominance/resistance and chaos/freedom". In any case, there is the need to 'learn to listen' (Anderson & Jack, 1991:11).

Table 1.1 summarizes some differences between traditional and post-structural approaches to data collection, with specific reference to the elite interview.

Table 1.1 Traditional and Post-structural Interview strategy

	Traditional	**Post-structural[2]**	
Episte-mology	Positivist (hygienic)	Feminist (empathic)	Network (pragmatist)
Major concern	Collect data already 'out there'	Give voice to 'the silenced'	Explore a new social category, 'the switchers'
Strong points	validity	Vulnerable subjects	adaptation
Interviewer role	Passive (pattern finders)	Active (pattern makers)	Active (pattern finders and -makers)
Interviewee role	Passive	Active	Active
Interviewer status	No concern	Problematic	Useful
Interviewee status	No concern	Empowered	Useful

Now what does it mean that the traditional strategy says the role of the interviewee is to be passive? Actually, he is not supposed to do that much, only "answer" directly the way they are, assuming they know it, and have a perfect self-conception. Feminists on the other hand believe the interviewee actually creates the answer in the situation, when confronted with the question. Finally, the network researcher believes the interviewee suggests webs of interconnections rather than single-dimensional answers.

[2] This category really has three important divisions, the third being the 'confessional literature' strategy which consists in detailed description of why the prescribed rules from traditional methodology were not followed, and what happened. Mostly, however, this strategy becomes purely 'laizzez-faire', or even postmodern in its epistemology, advocating 'anything goes'. We will not focus on this perspective here, because we do not believe it has fundamental insights, only mention it exists.

Where feminist approaches question how status relations inhibit vulnerable voices, Network epistemology goes one step further. Focusing on stronger subjects, such a perspective allows them to use these status relations productively in the research process. Network epistemology shares the explorative attitude of feminism, but studies a social category that silences itself rather than is silenced by the surroundings in some sort of dominant power structure.

The Network approach to interviewing

Getting access to power has always been a problematic dear to politics and politicians. The same can not be said for the study of politics. Maybe this is not true for the Ivy-league political science professors who have direct access to the Capitol, but it is certainly true for the average researcher. Qualitative elite studies are a relatively recent research topic (Herz & Imber, 1995; Walford, 1984). The issues are difficult, because élites protect themselves, and generally are not too sympathetic towards research. But it might be that this mainly is the researchers' fault. A lot depends on how you approach them. A more confident approach can bring great results. A poor approach can be corrected with a few strategic moves. Most of which derive from traditions far from the traditional academic researcher.

Table 1.2 summarizes the various aspects of the network approach, based on three metaphorical "mindsets" – that of the journalist, the therapist and the investigator. These mindsets help the sociologist doing elite interviews because they are more "tuned on" to network strategies. Other domains might also have things to contribute, and this only serves as a framework to think out from.

Table 1.2 Interview strategies for the Network society

	Journalistic	**Therapeutic**	**Investigative**
Episte-mology	Network pragmatism	Network analysis	Network awareness
Strong points	Improvisation Professional pride	Manipulation Interview relationship	Curiosity Skepticism
Characte-ristics	Effective, Direct, Timing, Intuition,	Listening skills, Symbolic violence, Understanding,	Defictionalize confronting, focused on facts & details
Method	Adaptive	Emphatic/mani pulative	Reconstructiv e
Sense of 'story'	Storyfinder & Storyteller	Storyfinder	Storyfinder
Focus	What's the good story?	What is she thinking? How can we communicate?	What happened? Who did what?
Networki ng skill	Getting access	Create 'ambiance' of 'we know each other', 'it's ok'	Getting information
Interview types	Informant interviews	In-depth interviews	Cognitive interviews
When to apply?	*before* and *during* the interview	*during* the interview	*During and after* the interview

These are performance-based strategies. They deliver results, not only theories. As such they must be used with caution in research.

One important reason why we should be able to switch strategies with the situation, is the difference between interviews. We might come to the interview with the expectation that this is an informant interview, only to realize we could use this for an in-depth interrogation, or a cognitive interview, setting all the facts straight. The following distinctions could be made.

In the literature, there is some talk about pilot, informant and in-depth interviews, as if these were different stages in the research process. This is incredibly misleading, as these types, while for sure interesting to note, must occur at different times, really where you need them, and where the opportunity arises.

Pilot interviews are done to test out whether your questions "work", whatever that might mean. Maybe to find out whether your questions trig the imagination of your subjects. However, unless you are 'using up' an important source, you should get to the real work right away, not to lose time. The first interviews will be explorative anyway.
Informant interviews (used to scan situations, problem fields, topics, gain ideas, to help in a brainstorm process or as substitute to interviewing the actors in the field directly) are very important in all stages of a research project. This will be explained further in the section on the journalistic strategy. Cognitive interviews (aiming to reconstruct situations) will be discussed in the section on the investigative strategy. Emphatic interviews (using "women's way of knowing", aiming for identificatory knowledge) were described in the introduction, and this point will be elaborated in the section for the Therapeutic strategy.

The category of blind, or "novice" interviews was added to illustrate the point that we not always want to reveal the real purpose of the interview. We might not even be interested in doing so, or we might feel that our subject would not understand. This gives an advantage because you can freely play with the situation. On the other hand, the other person will most likely not be helping you in the right direction. Novice interviews can also be situations where you want to make sure, or check, whether the public is unaware of an important event. Maybe you want to document the weakness of a certain type of political communication, trying to make people restate party programs of one's own political party, or something of that sort. This will be described better in the section on the therapeutic strategy.

Another way of categorizing interviews, as we pointed out in the introduction, is to focus on the type of people we are interviewing, either based on age (children, adolescent, adult, elderly), or social status (marginal, middlebrow, élite). Or, based on the type of knowledge they possess, or rather 'switch' (domain-specific, general).

In each case the involved researchers seem to claim that their particular group has the most particular challenges, and that these have not been addressed. Thus, in the introduction to this article we made fun of the textbook who claimed 'children and the elderly' were the only 'difficult people'. Our endeavor could, of course, be seen as equally narrow-minded. We want to address the challenges of interviewing élites, especially the new networking professionals. On the other hand, it seems this way of putting the problematic could yield ideas and techniques on research methodology as such.

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

A third grouping of interviews, advocated by some, focuses on situational characteristics. Thus, the professional context the interview occurs within becomes important (whether it be consulting, research, police interrogation, military briefing). A strict application of this view is what we see in academic departments across the US, entrenched in the logic of departmental segregation, and institutional separation from other spheres of influence, or professions. While much of this is by choice, and is necessary if academic freedom is to be preserved, it certainly has some side effects. In contrast to this, a network strategy would use interdisciplinary imput, also outside of academia, as an important asset, and would encourage the exchange of experience across these domains.

Now, these strategies could be combined with network technology. The opportunities of the Network society in getting access to interviews could be summed up as:

- improved communication tools
- use of new media, Internet (e-mail, web)
- easy to get in touch with the elite
- physical presence is higher valued (the interview thus becomes a very real situation in the midst of mediated or virtual communication)

On the other hand, there are also some challenges:

- challenges of the network society
- mobility (difficult to find people in their office, in the country, or even on which e-mail address you can reach them)
- diffusion of technology (everyone can do what you do to reach these people)
- mobility (difficult to find people in their office)

The hype swirling around about this brave new world of information, networks, e-commerce and World Wide Web cannot take away the very fact that the nature of work is undergoing fundamental changes. Navigating in this terrain is not easy, but there are some of the more consistent trends:

- work is becoming more flexible, decentralized and organic
- work is becoming more personalized, but the importance of networks is growing

- work is becoming more knowledge-based (innovation[3], creativity and design)
- a larger part of the workforce is moving or working across territorial boundaries
- boundaries between work and leisure are blurred
- workers are expected to be always available (mobile phones, e-mail)
- home office is becoming an option, but has legal problems associated with it[4]

> If we add up the self-employed, the independent contractors, the temps – a working definition of the population of Free Agent Nation – we end up with more than 16% of the American workforce: roughly 25 million free agents in the United States, people who move from project to project and who work on their own, sometimes for months, sometimes for days (Pink, 1998:132).

These trends should affect the way we think about ourselves as researchers (because these trends to a lesser degree apply to us). To what extent can we become more innovative and flexible, as the nature of work elsewhere changes? On the other hand, how can we cope with the fact that the workers we want to interview seem to be 'all over the place'?

Advances in information and communication technology have created a new social category, the switcher. The informed sociologist should try to use the switcher's methods, and become as like him as possible, without becoming a switcher in its own right. Maintaining this balance is crucial, and is, of course, similar to all other participant observation rules so familiar in sociology and social anthropology.

Within science and technology studies (STS), most researchers have field-experience from working with, and trying to understand issues that deal with experts, mostly physicists or other natural scientists. Out of this, however, few general reflections have emerged. A notable exception is Traweek (1995), and her useful observations on what happens when "Eliza Doolittle studies Doctor Higgins", as she paraphrases *Pygmalion* by George Bernhard Shaw (1951). Traweek, a researcher herself, becomes Eliza against the American and Japanese particle physicists. Clearly, there are subtle distinctions at work, which influence her access to data.

[3] According to the Xerox Parc, Palo Alto Research Center, successful companies are becoming knowledge ecologies - continuous learning environments in which innovation thrives. The dictionary definition of innovation is invention implemented http://www.parc.xerox.com/letter2.html, 21.07.99.

[4] "IT and home working in a labour-law perspective", by Hilde Sannes Middelthon, Statoil, in Statoil Forum, at http://www.statoil.com/STATOILCOM/SVG00990.nsf/design/eframeset?OpenDocument&/STATOILCOM/SVG00990.nsf/forumforsider/Engelsk, 21.07.99.

What does it mean to interview "upwards"?

Disclosing all of these possible contexts and purposes of interviews makes it relevant to ask the question: why do interviews? The question might appear simple, but it contains several problems. First of all, we might not be sure of what we are looking for. This is where grounded theory says we should be inventive, always looking out for possible "data". If this is the situation, blending interview techniques is absolutely necessary. Secondly, we might know what we are after, but we might not get it. This, in turn, calls for aggressive interview technique. We might want to borrow techniques from the journalist, the therapist or the detective.

If we want to disclose important knowledge about power relations and construction of meaning in a field of power, we need to bypass some of the traditional boundaries imposed upon the interviewer. Under the label "ethical conduct" principles like right of privacy, informed consent and confidentiality rule (Sudman & Bradburn, 1991:7). Asking questions is viewed as imposing on the privacy of respondents. But in the case of powerful people, these rules must be somewhat different. Whether or not some would call my view intellectual imposture, it is my profound belief that élites can not demand the same type of protection as "normal" people can. In a way, the same rules apply to research as to critical journalism - not a word more. This means we have to re-evaluate much of our innocent research practice. Our task is important, and our methods can be more severe when we go for élite studies. In fact, they need to be, if we are to understand what is going on. Interviews are not only, but primarily, power games.

Of course, many have pointed out that the research situation necessarily involves an aspect of power (Alasuutari, 1995). Mostly, however, the angle has been wrong. We need to focus upon how we can *use* these power relations, not only contemplate the sadness of this fact. It entails opportunity for action, for using pressure, for reflecting upon the agenda. This is especially true if we are entering the mindset of what Castells (1996) calls the Network society. Here "information is the key ingredient of our social organization and flows of messages and images between networks constitute the basic thread of our social structure" (Castells, 1996:476). In such a society, switchers like the media, but also powerful individuals who are connecting such networks are the major power holders. They control the ability of information to spread almost infinitely if they "let go" of it (Castells, 1996:471). The task of elite studies in the social sciences would be to grasp the principles guiding the decisions of such switchers and switches, questioning the quality of their decisions (Undheim, 1998).

Aggressive interview technique as the network strategy for interviewing is a third way in the current methodological debate about soft and hard methods. We claim qualitative method can, and should be hard, in order to be an effective tool for the study of power relations. The reasons for this are many. Principally, hard because of the new challenging paradigm of society - the network society

(Castells, 1997). There is, of course, no such thing as a soft method. All methods are ways of conducting symbolic violence (Bourdieu) upon the persons whom we ask questions some of them subtler than others.

Journalistic strategy

There are several reasons for being aware of how the journalist operates. One is that you can learn from them. This is not to say that all of us could be a Larry King (CNN), Barbara Walters (CNN) or John Snow (BBC). But the journalistic attitude, the skills they employ could be useful to keep in mind. The journalistic approach is intuitive, quick, active, and the journalist is not afraid to ask, even to ask twice, and thinks his work is important to convey to others, much more than researchers do. He often takes keynotes during the interview, instead of, or in addition to listening to the tape-recorded version. This is both quicker and more apt for catching the core issues. Then you might not need to write out the entire text, and you only have to listen to parts of it - and you save a lot of time.

The journalist is used to working through acquaintances, contacts, friends, and the secretary – using both *direct* and *indirect* methods. Those methods we need to catch on to, otherwise we loose. Secondly, they are out there doing interviews, affecting the ways political or other élites understand the interview situation (Puwar, 1997: par 1.1; Williams, 1980:310). Often you are expected to deal with these people as if you were a journalist; fire away questions, be ready to jot down a few lines, be happy with a few comments, do interviews on the spot, in elevators, on the move. Some would resist this, trying to explain that the research interview is totally different. But sometimes you do not have a choice. In short - you either have to adapt, or try to convince them that there is a need to do it differently. Adapting is more fun and more fruitful.

We have said that using informants is a key, both to acquire an interview (get access), and to know what to look for once you have got it. Key informants are people with special knowledge about your subject, or access to data you can not get to, or that you need to familiarize yourself with.[5] These types of people should not be estimated. They have numerous advantages that could be exploited in elite studies. In many cases they can be nominated in the article. You do not have to "protect" a key informant the way an interviewee is protected. You can call him up many times. After all, you are only going to ask one quick question. You show him respect, but you are not devoted to him, like to the person you have consciously found, called-up, arranged for an interview, written out and analyzed the transcript.

In short, the key informant approach is the treatment you get from journalists. They do not care you are a researcher. They want the facts now. If not now, then later. That is in five minutes. And in many ways we need to learn from journalists. They have the type of active knowledge seeking that characterizes

[5] Goetz og Le Compte, 1984 in Crabtree og Miller, 1992:75.

the network economy, where information flows freely, quickly and through the virtual grapevine. If you want to get something out of your empirical attitude, you can not wait for people to call you. The empirical reality calls for an active approach.

But how I chose these particular key informants is another question. In my project on the telecommunications industry, one informant came as a result of a phone call to the Regional Information Director of Telenor Trøndelag, Gro Eide. On my questions about the Telenor Nomade® campaign, she directed me to several different people working at Telenor Mobile, who were responsible for the general marketing campaigns. The people I searched for were not there, but the secretary told me that a person who now had left the firm really was the guy responsible for the idea itself. I asked for his number, and called him repeatedly, with no luck. But after a few days he suddenly called me back, and I could hear by his voice that he was ready for a phone interview here and now, not a planned encounter next week that would take him even more energy. I then dropped everything and improvised an interview, still in the middle of constructing an interview guide, and somewhat unprepared. After 20 minutes, however, he had given me several interesting reflections as well as several good hints about new informants. This is the real sense of the term "snowball sample". It is also the journalistic approach. As a researcher I would be crippled and would have asked him to call me back when I was prepared. The sociological imagination, then, is a creative venture not to be controlled by rational planning alone. If you can't improvise, most data is lost anyway. It's about challenging existing positions, points of view, traditional methods etc. You want fresh perspectives? You need to be fresh…

Therapeutic strategy

The therapeutic strategy should not be underestimated. "It is lonely at the top". The interview is a rare occasion to open up, share thoughts and profit from the human touch and undivided attention that the interviewer provides. Even a leader might not have room for such self-exploration in his daily life. Often they find a creative interview quite fulfilling. Feminists like Oakley (1981), Fog (1985) and Kaul (1999) share such a perspective. Especially women interviewing women focus on "learning to listen", since "women often mute their own thoughts and feelings when they try to describe their lives in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions" (Anderson & Jack, 1990:11).

This type of inquiry is more than accessing the "muted channel of woman's subjectivity", and it might also apply to men, of course. However, the aims of the kind of therapeutic strategy we are talking about could be very different from that of a therapist. We may share the urge to understand how the actor has experienced important life-events. We do not share the interest in resolving those problems, if they can not be remedied by that particular encounter. That is to say, unless we really have a lot of time, and want to enter a fieldwork informant relationship to this person, in the way that Whyte (1943) was able to relate to his main informant Doc in his classic Street Corner Society. On the other hand, what we want to do, sometimes, is to grasp the situation. We want to react by intuition, discover by uncovering layers, much like the psychotherapist. We need to be observant. Maybe we even need to experience, in order to understand, as would be the phenomenological claim at this point.

Psychoanalyst Haydee Faimberg (1996:668) recommends listening to how the patient has listened to the interpretation. She then assigns new meaning to what he said, beyond what he thought he was saying. This approach, she calls "listening to listening".

The network version of therapeutic strategy can be manipulative, smart, and cynical, but also calm and empathetic. The strong point of therapeutic strategy is the way it makes you understand the interview relationship.

Investigative strategy

The detective is an investigative, methodic and curious type who dedicates himself to solve mysteries and problems, supposedly for other people, but really because he is fascinated by solving them. Most significantly, however, the detective wants to find out "what really happened". Although discredited as a possible philosophy of science, it is enlightening and helpful as an interview strategy. Sociologists need to learn from historians, journalists and detectives how to tell a story, how to give an account of the turn of events. It is what people want to hear, anyway, and it is what they will remember. Giving a believable account of the turn of events is important. Especially when interviewing politicians who have their own political agenda, even in interviews: "one never knows if one has managed to access how things really are...one might receive filtered, quick sound bites, that are cliched responses" (Puwar, 1997, par 8.4). This is an occasion where the best detective novels can teach sociology a lesson. In the introduction to Dashiell Hammet's detective novel The Continental Op, Steven Marcus reveals the essentials of this powerful method:

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

We need to learn to use investigative strategy to find out what exactly is going on in our field. We need to find the 'story line', the exact turn of events. What is the real agenda here? Who is hiding what from whom? Am I getting the right information? Who is holding something back? What is going on backstage?

For instance, in my project with the Norwegian and Italian telecom carriers, I had one employee tell me 'it seems you are some sort of industrial spy'. This person was some sort of a social scientist, but worked for Telecom Italia. So, they do not want me to run to their competitor.

A little later, when presenting the same problem to a Norwegian telecom employee, I know that they were giving me the tourist explanation. So he does not think I am interested, or capable of grasping the real issues at hand. The result is that they do not come up in the interview. I have to read it out from the context, or I have to come back. But many times, these things never catch my attention, I am not critical enough, I take everything at face value.

What the investigative strategy consists of, is to do a detailed inquiry. Without resorting to extreme Sherlock Holmesesian methods, this means doing what otherwise is known as a cognitive interview. We will sketch the implications of this later. But first some background on the cognitive interview as such, which we also take to include the diagnostic or medical interview.

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

Although the police generally receives too little training, and should be informed by both laboratory and field methods from psychology in assessing and documenting eyewitness accounts (Fisher, 1995:732), a lot can be learned from the police approach as such. Directness, authoritative behavior, and clear, short questions are all characteristics that could be applied with luck in other interview contexts. One study of cognitive interview techniques surveying 96 trained and 65 untrained police officers found trained officers were significantly more likely to use instructions to mentally reinstate context, use different orders, change perspectives and imagery. Frequently used techniques were to establish rapport, report everything, encourage concentration, witness compatible questioning, and mental reinstatement of context (Kebbell, Milne & Wagstaff, 1999).

In this article, we adopt a more general usage of the term. Cognitive interviews covers police interrogations, military briefs, lawyer interviews with clients, testimonials, in short, all type of interrogatives. This can, of course be done to children, adolescents, adults, elderly, celebrities, élites or novices. The same goes for the other three categories. Cognitive interview is a powerful perspective because it points to the fact that events are very soon 'forgotten', or hidden behind the many layers of imaginative reconstruction, so familiar to anyone who has tried to get the 'truth' out of someone.

A bundle of strategies – the networking interviewer

Looking at the interviewer as a journalist, a therapist or a detective could be done all at once. We need to be able to switch perspectives during the interview. Adding these techniques to the existing repertoire would make us empowered researchers. They serve as complimentary strategies.

Knowing why you will not get hold of a person, is part of the research agenda. There has to be a reason why you are not deemed important, or why a certain source will not speak. STS has been concerned with this, but has not spelled it out as a methodology.

DATA

How to talk to the busy, rich and famous

Access is the main problem when studying power élites. Yet, the literature on research methods says little about the topic. When mentioned, authors mostly supply anecdotal evidence, like "I once did this, and it might work for you", sort of suggesting that this topic is not worthy a lengthy investigation. Steward & Cash (1997:86) think they are wise when they point out that you should always assume that the interviewee is available, rather than unavailable. It only becomes slightly better when they suggest to "go where a person works, lives or plays rather than expect the person to come to you".

In his book *Learning from Strangers* from 1994, Weiss spends only a couple of pages on what he calls recruiting respondents. He points to the importance of referrals and sponsorship by key insiders. I have found that titles and institutional affiliation has a big influence, too. My likelihood of interviews changed drastically as I went from Ph.D. student in Norway to Visiting Researcher at UC Berkeley.

Weiss also points out the importance of distance. Transatlantic interview calls receive more attention. This is important also with email. Failure to point to where you are at, for instance when using the generic Hotmail accounts, will lead to little response. Another thing is that commercial email providers often are filtered away automatically by your IT settings. These things are not details when every interview pitch (email, cold call, or elevator speech) costs time, energy and money.

Lee (1993) warns us of the lure of conditional access. We promise to give something in return - modifications of our project, updates, consultant advice or outright censorship. Hammersley & Atkinson (1995:66) speak in terms of "shepherding the fieldworker". This is especially relevant to accessing large corporations, a favored topic in business and organization studies, science and technology studies (STS), and is increasingly a part of social sciences at large. However, most companies have manuals regulating the employees' obligation to retain company information from journalists and researchers. This has lead some researchers to claim the primacy of the so-called front-door approach (Grønning, 1997). This implies trying to get access through formal channels, using the hierarchy. As we will illustrate, this is a futile and ill-suited approach to corporate elite studies, and should only be used in combination with, or rather in-lack of other possibilities. It might also lead to a sense among the workers that you are "management's spy", since the manager has blessed your access (Maaløe, 1996:143). Especially in knowledge-based organizations, such formal hierarchies make little sense. And leaders do not control their employees' time, anyway. The problem you run into is their *policy* on letting out corporate information. But this policy, like any policy, can be stretched in many directions.

Instead, we would advocate a completely independent approach - that of circumventing corporate gatekeepers altogether. This does not, as Grønning (1997) states, mean that one cannot at the same time get general information from the corporate gatekeepers "on the side". Whatever you do, you cannot avoid that the people you interview question your own motivation. Generally the important thing to do is not to create the impression that your work is going to be important. That way they will soon forget you, or remember you as a guy who made nice conversation.

On the other hand, such information could be presented implicitly. There are many ways of demonstrating a certain familiarity with the issues at hand. You can ask specific questions that only insiders would know. You can use names they know. You can refer to insider's talk. All of these elements bring you closer to the situation.

Who you get access to, and also whom you think you might get access to, of course, will set limits to your research agenda. It limits you in significant ways, and it puts discursive frames to your thinking. Sometimes this is a threat to the treatment of the topic. Often, this is the case in qualitative studies in political science. It is not like every professor who is interested in US foreign policy to talk to the President.

In a project studying regional development in the summer of 1998 (Thorvik & Undheim, 1998) we interviewed around 80 people from the power elite in the region of Trøndelag, Norway, as well as national actors. Our sample included mayors, politicians, cabinet members, business leaders, bankers, industrialists and professors at the University. Clearly, we had an elite sample, and had to proceed accordingly. Getting an interview took from one to five weeks at most. We phoned up several times, faxed interview proposals, followed up, and did so several times, if necessary. Our proposals was a brief description of our project, of ourselves, but most of all we always made sure to point out why it would be so important to us that this particular person took the time to talk with us. To each person we had a different strategy. We always worked the two of us, so I had to synchronize what I said to what my partner had said earlier. Sometimes we did not take "no" for an answer, saying we needed to speak with this person. We could also play "good guy", "bad guy" - I would try to express how thankful we would be if we could get a confirmation now, he would call the day after, saying we had no more time, and needed to speak with our guy in person - now! Only one person refused to talk to us, and this was the Minister of Industry, whose aggressive and some would say ill-informed comments formed the background of our research agenda - the public view of our region's potential for growth and prosperity. His secretary said it was appropriate to talk to someone on a subsidiary level. We did not think so, but even persistent efforts to convince his secretary did not produce results. It is very likely that he was not prepared to defend his comments, and did not want more fuzz about the whole affair.

Thinking like a journalist again, there are no limits as to where knowledge can be found. Less strict boundaries between disciplines stimulate creativity. The real way a project gets off is often more a result of total exposure to all available possibilities, a sensitivity that transcends contexts and boundaries. As C.W. Mills reminded us in his seminal work The Sociological Imagination from 1959, intellectual craftsmanship is a lifestyle, an attitude towards your intellectual projects that has no off-hours: "the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community you have chosen to join do not split their work from their lives". This, of course, has implications for the content as well as the quality and very intentions behind your work. And it means you don't have to struggle to learn new things relevant to your projects. Getting access also means allowing yourself to get exposed to the problem, getting inspiration, getting into it.

"You do not really have to study a topic you are working on; for as I have said, once you are into it, it's everywhere. Your are sensible to its themes; you see and hear them everywhere in your experience, especially, it always seems to me, in apparently unrelated areas. Even the mass media, especially bad movies and cheap novels and picture magazines and night radio, are disclosed in fresh importance to you" (Mills, 1959:211). Working in this way, as journalists or entrepreneurs, we get new ideas frequently, and are able to act upon them.

Of course, one needs to be sensitive, professional, and kind, but in a different way. It's about knowing "how to win friends & influence people", as the best-selling book by Dale Carnegie told us years ago (Carnegie, 1936). In this game - because it is a game, really - persuasion, not objectivity, is the norm.

One way of studying successful interview technique is looking at how the experts do it. Hans-Wilhelm Steinfeld, 48, is a Norwegian journalist who has lived 12 years in Moscow. Respected for his accomplishments as a reporter, but also for his temper and powerful presence, he has done hundreds of interviews, both for TV and for radio. A former correspondent to Russia, he explains his approach in this way: "In the Secret Services there is the principle of the Pilot fish, you attach yourself to somebody you think can become something. In the case of Gorbatchev [whom he has interviewed ca. 40 times] and Jeltsin it was this principle that counted, in combination with the old axiom from Russian plan economy: "Good planning can not compete with pure luck".[6] His luck was to live 12 of the most turbulent years of Eastern Europe in Russia. His dissertation brought him to Northern Caucasus, where he met the local party leader Mikhail Sergejevitz Gorbatchev: "I had no idea, then, how strategic my acquaintance would become", Steinfeld states.

Apart from a talent in meeting the right people, networking skills also include some down-to-earth methods that could be used by anyone. These need to be used, in order to get an appointment, in order to get access to the interviewee.

[6] Mail-interview with Hans-Wilhelm Steinfeld, 15.03.99.

It is always important to remember who and what you represent, and use that in different ways that suits the occasion. Big is not always beautiful, as the following story will point out. Steinfeld, the Norwegian reporter, says this: "I always had the privilege of representing the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. It is small, but respected. In the middle of May of 1980 there was a meeting between the American and Soviet foreign ministers in Vienna. Kevin o'Ryan from BBC and I went against the current, ignored the announced American press conference and placed ourselves outside of Hofburg castle to try for Andrej Gromyko. I approached Gromyko by pointing to my colleague, asking whether BBC and Norwegian TV could get a question. Gromyko looked aggressively at my BBC-colleague and said in English: 'Oh yes? BBC - the organization that knows everything in the world and maybe a bit more than everything?' I quickly pointed to myself and asked whether not little, innocent NRK from Oslo then could ask instead, and we got a 6 minute interview".

Now, what can we learn from this story? Possibly that your position, although you are not the most respected professor in the world, can be used in a constructive way. Many who refuse an interview are in reality afraid of not having enough interesting things to say to you. If you are famous, or have a privileged position, you might never get them on the hook. And when you do, what they say will be colored by who you are. Although they may well be professionals senior researchers can not be used for all types of interviews.

Secondly, Steinfeld cleverly uses the authority of the other person, then twists it to his advantage when he finds out this does not work. This is a move that could be described as re-translation of a discourse (Latour, 1987). The discourse was about big broadcasting having high thoughts about its own role. It became a discourse of how that logic applies to other facts in the same situation, like the fact that he who uttered the comment himself was powerful. Let us study a variation of this theme that only contains using another person's authority as a benchmark of your own importance. The following is an accurate account of a phone conversation I had in March 1999:

- I am writing a Ph.D. on ICT-based companies and their view on societal development. In this context I would much like an interview with Morten Lundal"...
- I think I can tell you immediately that he has no time for that...we get a lot of these inquiries, you understand!" (secretary to CEO Morten Lundal in Telenor Nextel)
- But I think he will look at it differently...I have chosen Nextel, Mobile and Corporate communication, and I am having an interview with Vice CEO Ole Petter Håkonsen on Friday" (me)
- Yes...[that is something else]...where did you say you called from? I will notify you, so if you don't hear anything, call back around 3".

See how the secretary changed opinion of me when I mentioned some powerful people? What I really did was to transform the discussion by claiming allies. Of course, they did not have to know. It was a power exercise. But it was true. In Latour's terminology from Science in Action (1987), I was going from weaker to stronger rhetoric. To students, graduate students, younger researchers and the like, these methods are vital, in order to bypass the important corporate veil of secretaries and other gatekeepers.

Summing up, then, we could try to make a typology of the different possibilities. First, some answers to the problem: Why won't people speak with you? A variety of reasons might be given, the most prevalent ones are:

- "I am sorry, but he has not got time at this moment" (ask when he will get time)
- "He is not in at the moment" (ask when he will be back)
- "We normally don't respond to such inquiries (explain that this is not "such an inquiry")
- "Do you know how many inquiries of this sort we get every day?" (claim you are different, without saying this explicitly)
- "Maybe later, please call back in August" (tell them this means they/their boss will not get the chance to comment on this important issue. This way you make it seem he would miss an opportunity, and that it is their responsibility)

These reasons, of course, are often far from the real reasons, like:

- I don't know who you are (therefore it is important to present yourself using the right "code", whatever that might be)
- I don't have anything to say (to us this is never true. To them, make sure you are not posing a threat)
- I don't see what's in it for me (change approach, give out different types of candy)

Mostly, secretaries are the ones who mediate the rejection. They have screening as part of their job. What are the appropriate techniques for getting through this filter?

- referring to a common context, like "we met at..."
- using his first name, so as to make it sound like you know him
- your presentation needs to be brief and "self-important"
- creative use of e-mail: (1) proposals can be sent directly to powerful people (2) easy, cheap and quick follow-ups (3) quick response time
- be nonchalant
- tell the secretary that you are currently talking to a lot of important people, and that you thought it would be fair to give your man a chance to voice his opinion on this, as well.
- flirting with the secretary (be polite, smile, compliment her, make a joke so she remembers you the next time
- be persistent, and don't give up. They will give in if you take the time.

All of these elements are essential if we are to conduct qualitative élite research. But they only provide the beginning. The interview itself is another challenge.

How to conduct a successful interview

Getting the information you want is not easy. You need to know what you are looking for, on the other hand the reason why you do the interview is to find things, discover circumstances, types of knowledge, conceptions you did not know about. So as much as the literature tells you to prepare questions on beforehand, you might need to adjust. Or it tells you to prepare the interviewee by sending the questions on beforehand (which many CEOs prefer). But beware of sending the real questions. They are probably too cumbersome, too tiring, or just too many. You need to squeeze in this time once you get on the spot. Just send the major topics you want to cover.

The interview itself could be seen as a process with three elements: the opening, the grand tour, and the follow-up. The opening mainly calls for the therapeutic approach, because of the sensitivity and social intelligence necessary to understand the situation and what type of approach it calls for. The grand tour, where you want to get your guy going on a theme calls for all three (journalistic, therapeutic, and investigative). The follow-up, in turn, is the task suited for the detective, who wants to make sure all the facts are on the table.

The literature rightfully claims the opening of the interview is important. You have to establish the right atmosphere. While some advocate "admitting you are nervous" (Maaløe, 1996:191), I would consider that fruitless and destructive. Rather, the situation calls for making a joke, talking about the weather, hobbies, commenting the office you are in, or something of that sort. In an interview with a CEO in a large industrial corporation, as I was walking into the room I caught the CEO and his secretary were discussing whether the weather was good for repairing his sailing boat. I quickly hooked on to this conversation as I passed through the secretary's room and into his office, talking about the joy of sailing, and of how relaxing it must be to work outdoors, getting away from the hectic life in the office. This completely won his appeal, naturally, and I was totally at ease with the situation from then on. We, in fact, ended up the interview getting really personal, talking about some major events in each other's lives in which we had common experiences. I provided my spirits, my personality, my "sympathetic ear", and got a nice, interesting interview in return. Great exchange, great start of the day. During the interview, I took the role of the journalist, the therapist, and the detective. Each role had its merits, and can easily be combined.

This is not to say there is no need to focus upon specific questions in your interview guide. Jorgensen (1989:86) rightfully says you should try to ask at least five types of questions. (1) grand-tour questions that give an overview, and gets the interviewee going, hopefully for half an hour, (2) mini-tour questions that go in more detail, (3) example questions for illustration, (4) experience questions (what actually happened), and (5) native-language-questions to clarify insider terms.

The interview situation calls for confidence, calmness and control - but also for improvisation. Steinfeld explains: "If I improvise during an interview, it is the rule rather than the exception". Of course, the way you improvise depends upon your personality, and your experience and your current state of mind - are you confident, are you rested and calm? McCracken (1988) points out that you need to use yourself as an instrument in the research process. As Oakley (1981:41) states: "...the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when...the interviewer is prepared to invest her own personal identity in the relationship".

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

Another move is to establish links between your and his worlds. In her interviews with women MP's in Engand, Puwar (1997, par. 10.2) found it useful to use her background from Coventry. The MP had her first constituency there, and had taught her nephew. Mentioning this created a powerful bond that lasted long after the interview.

It is, again, very important to realize that there are many different types of interviews, with their distinct approaches. Many of these can be used interchangeably. The important thing is to stay on top of the game, being able to sort out which is which. Essentially, the interview is a social encounter in which all the things that normally happen in the social world could, and should be allowed to occur. The researcher must be able to play different roles within the interview setting, carefully balancing the need to establish trust and a positive environment with the need to cut-to-the-chase - get the facts and provoke new types of reflection almost by threat.

The interview gives a double challenge. It challenges you, and it challenges the person you are interviewing. You need to be on the edge, risking something, risking to be asking naive questions, to be passive since you are mostly listening, putting not only him but also yourself on the line. Secondly, every good interview is a challenge. You need to be provocative, to inspire to open up, to stimulate discussion, reflection and interest. You need to show you find his thoughts on this issue important.

If you interview a scientist, the interview is not at all a nice "conversation with a purpose", as Kahn & Kannel (1957) claimed long ago.[7] It is about challenging status quo. It is about discovering structures of thinking, by opening up new layers in people's thinking, opening black boxes. In light of this, there is little sense in the traditional careful approach. Sensitizing concepts could be used, but structured symbolical violence is not to be rejected.

Now to the question of being naive. Traditionally, the literature claims the ideal position is that of an "accepted novice" (Maaløe, 1996:146). Most interview textbooks claim you should pretend you do not know anything about the issue in case. You should open up, allowing the other to use the words of his own. That is, according to *doxa*, the inscribed truth derived from tradition. Actually, the opposite is true. The elite resists interviewers with little or no knowledge about what they're doing. In fact, it is better to "show off" some of your knowledge, and then discover that you've got some respect.

While it might be true that a foreigner has certain advantages when it comes to fieldwork because he is not viewed as a threat (Maaløe, 1996:146), the general advice of appearing like a novice is of questionable value. You risk loosing respect, getting little or no time to talk, and you are unable to steer the interview in the direction you want.

The interview is a reflective process where your informant might learn as much as you. A good interviewer participates in the reflection, and leads your informants further when they feel they do not have more to say (Lie, 1998:53).

In the actual interview, all what has aptly been described under the label "listening skills" is relevant. The therapeutic strategy rules the ground. A good interviewer uses his social intelligence (Gardner, 1993), his intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, his emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Most of all, what matters, is to give exclusive attention. Nothing else is as flattering as that. Nothing else will make the other person open up to you, like careful but active listening. Listening, then, becomes a form of activity.

In our previous experience with interviewing CEOs (Undheim & Thorvik, 1998), we often found ourselves being totally fascinated and immersed in the world of the other. Sometimes this is necessary in order to "get the whole story". Instead of the promised 10 minutes, we often got an hour's interview, just by showing up two people, and giving exclusive attention. One example is our interview with an industrialist in Leksvika, an industrial township quite far off of Trondheim, Norway. We were impressed with what this person and his father had built up through the years, and made no secret about it. We overtly expressed our fascination with this "industrial adventure". As a result, he took the time to give us anecdotes, and detailed insights that went way out of his prepared schedule. He felt flattered, and gave us the interview in appreciation. The interview became the backbone of our reflection from then on.

[7] quoted in Marshall & Rossman, 1995:80.

Another time, I drove for two-and-a-half hours each way to interview the Fylkesmann of Nord-Trøndelag county. In an otherwise busy schedule, we had three hours together. As she said: "If you come such a long way, you must think this is important. Then I do, too".

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

In sum, my experience is that you have to treat élites like normal people. If you make no point out of their being famous, they certainly do not make a point of it. Try to do the things you do in a normal encounter, in order to establish the atmosphere. Relaxed, safe, at ease. Use humor to release tension, and to make the experience pleasurable for you, too. Remember to take care of yourself. When I have to do hundreds of interviews, I can not get stressed out every time, tirelessly trying to be something I am not. Be natural, be happy; smile. All the usual advice that applies when meeting new people applies in the interview situation. Normalize the situation. This works when interviewing artists, musicians and other famous people. Celebrity interviews can in turn teach you something about other interviews when "studying up".

Summing up, getting the information you want (the relevant, interesting, new and surprising items), you need to:

- know what to look for
- be open to new insight
- not get lost in details
- take notes during the interview
- use psychological insight

CONCLUSION

It should be clear by now that there are other difficult interviewees than "children and the very elderly", as the traditional literature spells out. We have proposed that élites neither need, nor deserve the same type of protection as the former categories, but that they require equal caution on the part of the interviewer. Such a methodology has been lacking until now. If methodology sometimes is reflexive, it nevertheless falls short. Resorting to quasi-psychology, it becomes what we label confessional literature.

When facing the additional challenge of interviewing élites, celebrities or other famous people, so called "studying up", some new rules apply. We need to master these rules in order to conduct powerful research on the powerful. With recent societal developments it has at once become both easier and more difficult. Easier because new access-points like e-mail have evolved. More difficult because the powerful always find ways to protect their time. Thus, the problem of getting access remains a key topic in social studies. If we mean to do powerful and meaningful research on power-relations, we need to take it seriously, and challenge current practice in this field.

The very practice of research is, in fact, undergoing major changes due to the network economy. Knowledge passes more quickly, and in new forms. This opens opportunities, but poses threats, as well. In order to be on top of the game, we have to master a specter of techniques. To become an empowered researcher, we have suggested learning from the journalist, the therapist, and the detective. Or, ultimately, from the Networkers themselves – our research topic.

Gatekeeper-relations are crucial on a practical as well as a theoretical level. Basically, access is secured by claiming powerful allies, if only for a second. You may very well borrow power from the surroundings. Using the power of the powerful is a valid technique. This can be done in numerous ways without compromising your integrity as a researcher. Blending interview techniques, constantly improvising, gives the best results. Being familiar with a repertoire of techniques gives an entrance into relevant knowledge about the field you are investigating.

The very essence of an interview is to create a meaningful social encounter. You need to use the same communicative techniques you would use when introduced to a new person you want to charm. You need to know what you are interested in finding out, but be flexible, being able to switch perspectives as you go along. Sooner or later it is going to become a trade-off, where you both ask "what's in it for me?" Then you need answers, for both of you. The empowered researcher has thought out these issues, and knows well how to act upon them. Access to élites is best obtained by using the powers of the powerful.

Realizing that the thrust of the approach we have discussed cannot be learned easily, we nevertheless stress the importance of awareness. Without changing your personality, or putting weight enormous weight on intuition, some of these issues are relatively down to earth. Basically, it is about acknowledging the potential power we have as researchers, reassessing our role in a changing society. Acknowledge your power means not be ashamed to use and control it.

The more general question raised in this article has to do with the role of the researcher. What is appropriate to do? Where are the limits to what we can do without compromising our integrity? What is our appropriate position in society? How much power do we have -as a profession, or as individuals with varied background, and different professional status (undergrads, grad-students, post-docs, researchers, or tenured professors). Ever so often, handbooks on interview methods just assume we are all the same, and have the same needs. But it is not so. The most important lesson, in the end, is to be pragmatic about method. The question asked is what works.

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