

It is regretted that, due to an error at the previous typesetters, a passage on p. 502, and a footnote on p. 516 of *The British Journal of Sociology* XXXIX/4 were wrongly printed. The paragraph and the footnote should have appeared as follows:

First, it is clear that in much of the earlier discussion, disputes about alleged proletarianization have often reached an impasse, because participants in the various controversies have rooted their conclusions in different interpretations of the argument itself, and so have tended to talk past each other. The exchanges between Goldthorpe and Crompton offer a case in point. The former maintains that the post-war periods of affluence and recession alike have seen the continuous expansion of a relatively privileged 'service class' of professionals, administrators, managers, and other skilled white-collar workers. Moreover, in mapping the class structure beyond this stratum, Goldthorpe places routine white-collar employees in an 'intermediate-class' position on the grounds that the market situation, work situation, and typical socio-political proclivities of lower-level clerical and administrative personnel are observably different from those of manual workers generally. Crompton, by contrast, argues that the expansion of administrative and professional occupations is probably more apparent than real because many of these involve the performance of increasingly routinized and therefore degraded labour. Moreover, and *contra* Goldthorpe, routine clerical work has certainly been deskilled because such employees commonly experience the same limited autonomy in the workplace as do unskilled manual workers. Since clerks often perform routine tasks under close supervision they are effectively proletarians. Goldthorpe, in reply, can find no systematic evidence in favour of either of these claims. In his view, particular case-studies of occupational deskilling (such as the study of local authority, life assurance, and banking clerks in which Crompton herself was involved) can readily be offset against others reporting an upgrading of occupational skills and tasks, and in any case are themselves not inconsistent with his own claim that the *net* result of organizational and technical changes over the whole economy is one of increasing both skill levels and the proportion of the workforce benefitting from service-class conditions of employment.⁷

10. It must be conceded here that the strategy of constructing a 'class of origin' variable by determining the class of the 'chief childhood supporter' when he or she was the same age as the respondent is now provides only a limited control for life-cycle effects. Birth-cohort analysis offers an alternative means to the same end. However, even this approach does not fully separate out the confounding effects of history, age, and cohort itself. On the technical issues involved here see Goldthorpe, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

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Researching police deviance: a personal encounter with the limitations and liabilities of field-work

(I) INTRODUCTION

Accounts of field-work occasionally reveal the stress, the deep personal involvement, the role-conflicts, and the time-consuming nature of observational studies for the researcher (e.g. Whyte, Wax, Hofland, Johnson¹). Clarke² has written of the anguish of certain anthropologists, causing some even to abandon the field setting; while Van Maanen³ has contrasted the rich oral tradition among academics, centred on what ostensibly 'really' happened in the field, with the self-censored material in publications on their research experience. That experience may appear incoherent, blurred, or stressful at the time and researchers may have considerable difficulty portraying the story behind the story of their field-work (perhaps because it is embarrassing or else it is considered unsuitable for a 'serious' publication). Reading Van Maanen's insightful work stimulated me to take out an article I had written several years ago, but which I had been unable to publish fully at the time, and to rework it in an attempt to convey in depth both the constraints encountered in the field and my reflections on the research experience long after departure. My initial account was somewhat gloomy and reeked of weary disillusionment. Now I can take a more dispassionate look at the research I conducted with the Amsterdam Police in the period 1974-1980. My purpose in this paper is to focus on three elements of that fieldwork. First, I wish to convey the strain I experienced in a demanding field setting; second, I want to communicate my acute awareness of the limitations of research in penetrating sensitive areas of institutional life; and, third, I hope to illuminate some of the ethical dilemmas encountered in the field (which one may only fully be conscious of in retrospect). And perhaps I should add that, however rough the passage, the experienced field-worker has almost a moral obligation not to discourage others but rather to incite them to get out into the field. For there is something irreducible in the mundane dilemmas of even the most unproblematic field situations that forces academics to

reflect on the meaning, and boundaries, of conducting social science.

My contention is not only that observation can be a tough training in social interaction but also that it ineluctably exposes the researcher to a number of troublesome interactional, if not ethical, dilemmas. My argument is that these dilemmas arise spontaneously in 'straightforward' field research. But, crucially, they emerge in a particularly acute form in those settings where participants wish to hide their deviance. This is of vital importance for those who claim that academics should deliberately investigate, and expose, powerful institutions in our society.⁴ For tackling those institutions can bring us to appreciate both the limitations of field-work as a method but also the inability to push our investigations as far as we would wish. This paper discusses precisely those personal and ethical dilemmas in research and, in my case, I am referring especially to the police organization. According to Skolnick,⁵ the police organization is the most secluded part of the criminal justice system. The researcher's task then becomes how to circumvent the minefield of defences that protect the concealed reality of police work. Prolonged participant observation seems to me to be the most appropriate method for breaking through the culture and for cracking the code of policing.⁶ This is particularly the case because the police organization is itself accused of routinely concealing its own deviance.⁷ Research on the police documents abuses and unearths built-in malpractices⁸ while official enquiries and journalism have unearthed corruption, pre-judice, violence, denial of rights, and manipulation of evidence.⁹

I take this to imply that, first, observation can aid us in penetrating those areas that other sources of information alert us to; and, second, that those areas are more likely to be reached by observational techniques than by more formal styles of research methodology. It is in the nature of much deviant behaviour that it is concealed,¹⁰ and this is particularly the case with police deviance. Ironically however, researching that deviance may present the field-worker with a number of methodological and ethical dilemmas about getting at 'the dirt' which begin to reflect precisely some of the dubious practices of the policeman's trade.¹¹ These dilemmas will be examined here in terms of a study of police corruption that I carried out in Amsterdam in the late seventies.¹²

(11) BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH AND ACCESS

Elsewhere I have argued that *infiltration* constitutes the key technique of participant observation.¹³ Although the word infiltration has a negative tone related to espionage and deception, I use it consciously to emphasize that entry and departure, confidence and trust, and attachment and desertion in the field may sponsor social and moral

dilemmas that spell out a virtually *continuous* process of negotiation of the research role. The weakness of the concept is that it highlights getting in. Getting out may be equally, if not more, problematic. For in a sense you never fully abandon the field; you carry it with you as a seminal life-experience that you continue to mull over and to rework.

In my case the first steps to entering the largely concealed world of the police were taken in Britain where, although I was unable to conduct official field-work, I built up a close relationship with a number of officers who studied at the university where I taught. Later I gained informal entry to a number of police establishments through contacts built up at conferences and courses. The standard literature on the police, novels, press accounts, and personal socializing with policemen gradually helped to peel away the layers of myth and imagery that insulate the hidden reality of policing from public scrutiny. That reality was often profane, bawdy, and irreverent while deviousness was a central element in the occupational culture. One police informant revealed the ambivalence of this world when he told me, 'one thing you have to understand is that when you join the police you have to learn to break the law'.¹⁴

The primary insight that I gained then was that there exists a wide disparity between the public presentation of police work – as sober, legal, competent, professional and even 'sacred'¹⁵ – and the backstage reality. Out of sight, there is another world of largely instrumental concerns, of simply getting through the day, of manipulation, violence, incompetence, humour and tomfoolery, and also of informal norms, rewards, and sanctions. My initial views on the police, then, were permeated with perceptions of in-built deviant practices which were also strongly conveyed in the standard American works of the time (Westley, Skolnick, Reiss, Wilson¹⁶) with their emphasis on brutality, corruption and systematic deviance in urban police work. In Britain, however, access to the police world via the unavoidable central vetting of the Home Office in London proved difficult for me. Then, in the early seventies, I began to focus increasingly on policing in The Netherlands (where I have lived since 1975) and gained access to the Amsterdam City Police where I was able to conduct three projects between 1974–1980.¹⁷

(a) *Project 1; 1974–1976.* My first piece of research was an observational study of patrol work in the inner-city district of Amsterdam.¹⁸ Most of my time (amounting to perhaps six months full-time participation spread over two years) was spent with patrolmen and I was struck at first by the *absence* of serious deviance. In fact it was going on around me, almost literally under my nose, but I did not see it (and, perhaps unconsciously, may not have wanted to see it).

(b) *Project 2; 1977–1978.* In the summer of 1976 I was extricating myself from the field when a corruption scandal involving policemen in the research station began to surface.¹⁹ My reaction was to ignore it on the grounds that I simply could not afford the time to get involved in a new study. By 1977 the scandal was front-page news and, prompted by a number of academic colleagues, I decided to see if I could get back into the department to look at police deviance.²⁰ Permission was granted and the research was based primarily on interviewing policemen and on gathering documentary evidence.

(c) *Project 3; 1979–1980.* As I was teaching in a business school I decided to study senior police officers in terms of ‘managing’ a police district and returned to part-time observation in the original research station. This project brought me into closer touch with the world of senior officers, and also of detectives, and proved particularly revealing because I could witness the reverberations of the scandal which continued deeply to affect relationships within the force. I began to perceive more clearly that deviance is endemic to police work and found myself in effect still carrying out Project 2 under the guise of Project 3.

Gaining entry to the Amsterdam Police was quite easy and all three projects were readily accepted and supported by the Chief Constable.²¹ Although some academics have encountered problems with officialdom in attempts to research the police,²² and although Van Maanen states that ‘antipathy and distrust of the academic researcher are endemic to most police departments’,²³ I found nothing but open doors in gaining formal access in Amsterdam. This continues to be true for other researchers not only in Amsterdam but elsewhere in The Netherlands which must have one of the most open criminal justice systems in the world. The smoothness of my return to a department undergoing an unprecedented criminal investigation into corruption was related to the trust I had built up earlier, the presence of high-ranking sponsors for me within the department, and the fact that I was an individual researcher with no need to go through any gate-keeping institution for funds. The Chief Constable agreed to my research on corruption (Project 2) in May 1977 and promised me access to senior officers, to policemen suspected of corruption, and also to the corruption case dossier. Having said all this, it did prove more difficult to gain ‘secondary’ access.²⁴

Initially, however, things went well and I began to arrange interviews. Being granted a second bite at the cherry proved fascinating. People seemed to be far more candid about the practical dilemmas in policing and about making mistakes than they had been during my first project while the word corruption was no longer taboo. I interviewed senior officers at Headquarters and in the Warmoesstraat (the name of the research station in the city-centre),

plain-clothes men, detectives, investigating officers from Internal Affairs and the State Detectives, journalists and representatives of the legal authorities. There was no clear-cut end to the corruption scandal which continued to unravel and to enter new phases.²⁵ Perhaps pushing my luck I approached the Chief with my third proposal, to study senior ‘management’ in the research station, and observations began in late 1978. I entered this third phase with the second project uncompleted as the repercussions of the corruption cases were still echoing throughout the department, while an internal disciplinary investigation was dragging on interminably. To a certain extent, then, the two projects had an element of overlap which none of us had foreseen.

It was at this stage that I began to encounter resistance and deflection. During the first two projects I was not conscious of doors being closed, and even now no-one actually refused to be interviewed, but I was excluded from certain conversations between senior officers in the Warmoesstraat, discovered coolness outside of the Warmoesstraat, was explicitly not welcome at secret meetings of a clique of officers engaged in lobbying within and without the organization for a more stringent investigation, was asked not to interview the police suspects, was refused the case dossier which had been promised, encountered friction in the field situation, was not permitted to attend a week-long ‘retreat’ of personnel from the station (in relation to a planned change programme²⁶), and was barred from sensitive confrontations between officers and detectives in the Warmoesstraat. In retrospect, this appears only natural whereas, at the time, I felt rather disappointed and let down. The resistance was partly due to the fact that in my third project I was getting much closer to powerful interests at the top of the organization and was discovering that my acceptance outside of the Warmoesstraat was tenuous; and partly because I was caught in the continuing backlash of the corruption affair which aggravated inter-rank relationships at the very time when I was observing both senior officers and detectives. To a certain extent access was continually problematic, particularly in the third project, and to some parts of the organization I was a stranger and was treated accordingly. Furthermore, I was gaining different sorts of data at different stages and, although the third project was not ostensibly about corruption, it did open my eyes to the scandal as part of a much wider struggle related to resilience to change and to the investigation within the organization.²⁷

(III) EVIDENCE

All information is managed to a greater or lesser extent and all observations are subject to interpretation and reinterpretation. The data for my study, then, have varying levels of validity and the observations, interviews, documents, and journalistic accounts on which I rely are all biased in certain ways. This would be true of any study but it is particularly so in one concerned with deviant behaviour which, by definition, is sensitive and subject to concealment. In this section I wish to deal with the nature of the evidence collected and the extent to which respondents were open and truthful in their accounts.

In the first project, for instance, I had a close relationship with one group of patrolmen and a couple of them functioned as 'informants' whom I thought were reasonably open with me. Generally, my impressions, in contrast to what I had anticipated given my previous reading and the negative reputation of the Warmoesstraat, were of reasonably well-behaved policemen who were not noticeably violent, corrupt or crude.²⁸ Indeed, the first person who seriously broached the subject of corruption to me was a chief-inspector, who, in the summer of 1976, told me that he had been confronted with some practices among his plain-clothes men that amounted to corruption.²⁹ This was the first time that I heard the word mentioned seriously in the station.

Clearly, my informants had been less than honest and knew a great deal more than they were prepared to tell me. This ignorance of on-going deviance on my part probably had two causes. First, some of the out-of-work deviance, particularly that related to drinking, was often not visible to me because as a non-drinker I rarely took part and this was particularly true when I moved house away from Amsterdam.³⁰ Second, some of the work-related deviance was of such a highly incriminating sort that it would be dangerous for them to discuss it with *anyone*. And, yet in a way they did want to tell me. Policemen in general delight in talking and gossiping and even enjoy revealing glimpses of their underculture to outsiders. A number of researchers have remarked on the surprising openness of policemen when discussing their work and even in not disguising their deviance in front of observers.³¹ My informants became particularly frank after I had completed the first project and after one of them had moved away from the department. Two men told me of dubious practices including fabricating statements, forging signatures on crime reports, and of one case where they 'were one thousand per cent certain' that a suspect was a drug dealer so they replaced his fake heroin with real heroin in order to get a conviction.

Also one of them explained to me later that it was impossible to

trust anyone in that milieu, *including* your partner, and that you had to learn to keep your mouth shut, 'otherwise you are digging your own grave'. He then recounted an incident where he had searched a flat for firearms with a colleague, 'Tom'. It appears that Tom may have removed a revolver from the flat without reporting it

When I heard that story later I felt really pissed off. This has now lead me to the practice of never letting a colleague out of my sight when we're engaged in a search. Pulling a stroke like that can land you in sticky situations. Which boss or judge is going to believe your story if it comes out later? 'You were with your partner weren't you?'

This revealing comment shows not only the *absence* of trust among policemen but also their vulnerability to control when engaged in risky escapades. Some of the patrolmen were clearly locked into intricate and intimate relationships of collusion and cooperation which would be almost impossible for an outsider to prize open.

Furthermore, some of the men justified drinking in the inner-city, which was explicitly against instructions, as a means of gathering information from underworld characters and some of them took off on risky escapades as a result of these 'tips'. On some occasions I accompanied them on these unofficial jaunts but was not always fully aware of what was at stake. Perhaps to a degree I was fortunate in *not* having made the breakthrough to the deviant practices going on in the area during the first project. This may sound a curious thing for a sociologist to say — who should be dutifully sniffing around for the first whiff of a free-meal or a handout — but, in retrospect, it kept *me* out of trouble. For example, one of the men, who was nicknamed 'Crazy Horse' because of his impulsive behaviour, went out on patrol with a new policeman. Late at night the old hand fired his pistol at a car with some youths in it which had driven straight at them when they had attempted to stop it. Not a soul was around and 'Crazy Horse', wishing to cover up his rather hasty decision, turned to his new colleague and said, 'You did not see anything, and you did not hear anything, o.k.?' They did not report the incident although all use of firearms must be documented for later scrutiny at Headquarters. Unfortunately for the two men the incident was reported later when the driver of the car was arrested and complained bitterly about being shot at. As a result, both men were identified and were carpeted before the station chief.

Now the whole point is that if I had been present then I just know that *I* too would have kept quiet and this might have damaged my credibility with senior officers when the incident was exposed. What would I have done if I had found out that women suspects were being sexually harassed in the station or that some men were on the take (as was the case); turn them in and destroy the research? What

if I had gone out to a club and been invited to indulge my wildest erotic fantasies with a voluptuous lady paid for by a Chinese gambler (which was also happening)? Would I have shrugged my shoulders philosophically, thought that social science demands the occasional sacrifice for the sake of data, and plunged between the sheets while ethnographically absorbing as much of the situation as possible?

Knowledge of, and involvement in, deviant practices within an organization can be dangerous for the field-worker in terms both of sanctions from senior members if caught and of the ethical dilemma as to whether or not one should expose the practices at the cost of terminating the field-work.

In the two later projects no-one really emerged as a classical informant although one or two senior officers were particularly helpful and a certain marginal figure within the organization approached me at a late stage with a good deal of juicy inside information. I never had the close relationship with people that I enjoyed in the first project and yet people still seemed reasonably, and in some cases remarkably, frank. This was probably because the 'shit had hit the fan', people had taken sides, and I was seen as a chronicler who could represent their particular point of view. However, it proved impossible for some time to get in touch with the policemen under suspicion of corruption. The Chief Constable had suddenly requested that I postpone interviews with the suspects until after their trial. This may have been a seriously missed opportunity in that the suspects were suspended, were sitting at home biting their nails, were deeply frustrated by their treatment, were uncertain of the outcome of their cases, and might have been willing to talk. When I did get to talk to them almost two years had elapsed, their cases had been to court, they had told their stories to journalists, and had doubtless developed a pat version that they had been mulling over for two years and which they could trot out on request. As it was, I only managed to talk to four of the eight men who had been arrested and, significantly, all four were from the Warmoesstraat. My acceptability was plainly much more limited at Headquarters. In addition, the Chief Constable also went back on his promise to provide me with the case dossier which he said was now the responsibility of the Justice Department and, therefore, outside of his authority to give me. Fortunately, however, I managed to get my hands on a copy of the 300 page dossier, containing transcripts of interrogations of witnesses and suspects up to the trial in May 1978, with the help of a journalist to whom it had been leaked. Simply possessing these documents was illegal.³²

To a large extent I never actually witnessed the phenomenon I was studying — 'corruption' — so that observation (and certainly *participant* observation) is something of a misnomer in relation to an

activity that is basically concealed from view. This means that my major data sources are interviews and documents which are biased in the sense that the interviews are forms of special pleading and the documents represent official versions of reality. During the second project it felt as if I was getting through to levels of information about the department which are not normally accorded to outsiders while I was under the impression that I was concerned with a number of cases in the *past* but that those cases revealed considerable current defects within the department.³³

During the third phase of my involvement with the Amsterdam Police, however, I became increasingly aware that the continuous and unforeseen internal rumblings and external criticism surrounding the corruption issue had begun to overshadow the original intention of studying senior officers as 'managers'.³⁴ During this stage, moreover, material was gathered incidentally, and partly covertly, for the corruption research under the mantle of the third project. This opportunity came from the continued contact with senior officers who were closely involved in the affair and who occasionally said things pertaining to the persistence of the investigations, from interviewing the suspects, from obtaining the corruption dossier, from keeping in touch with a number of informants, and from field-work with detectives that largely by chance led to a glimpse of yet more widespread and persistent corruption than I had anticipated.

In a sense, I had moved into a new level of information which proved uncomfortable to handle because it identified highly-placed individuals who were difficult to disguise, the information itself was either given in confidence or might reveal my source, and because I had moved into a circuit of gossip and rumour which by its very nature was impossible to verify. Often policemen would intimate cryptically that they had a lot more to tell and I got rather tired of this and began to think that they really did not know anymore. Much of my data, then, was based on hearsay, gossip, and suspicions. Like a nervous girl at the doctor, enquiring about a 'friend' in trouble, respondents always pointed to someone else who had committed the act. None of the suspects ever levelled with me and simply said, 'O.K. Maurice, this is the way we went about it'. And, of course, some people were simply keeping quiet, having doubtless very sound reasons for saying as little as possible.

All the evidence presented in my work, then, needs to be treated with more than the usual dose of caution. The quality of press reporting was patchy and tended to follow events rather than take an 'investigative' strategy. The case dossier was incomplete and contains only what witnesses and suspects were prepared to reveal and what the investigators considered worth writing up. My acceptance within the organization was varied and I received

different sorts of information from various parts of the organization. Indeed, most of the incidents referred to in the investigation occurred *before* my arrival, so that by 1976, when the first internal police investigation commenced, some people were already running for cover.

(IV) DILEMMAS OF THE RESEARCH ROLE

Initially I approached field-work with a naive and almost insatiable enthusiasm. Toward the end, however, I increasingly experienced frustration, fatigue, despondency, and ethical qualms and these, together with other considerations, made me leave the field prematurely in the middle of my third project. These feelings were related to practical considerations (such as domestic constraints, professional commitments, pressure to move off the police area from within my institution) but my emotional reactions were also connected with certain features of the research role and the field-work situation.

(a) *Factionalism and role-playing.* There existed a different sort of relationship between me and the senior officers than with patrolmen and detectives.³⁵ The latter were amicable and jocular whereas the former were often busy in sedentary pursuits (reading, writing, phoning) that could not easily be shared, had less time or inclination for 'idle' gossip, and never invited me to take part in out-of-work socializing. In addition senior officers were less anonymous, were more easily identifiable, and had other career prospects to consider than the more anonymous members of the lower ranks and this made them more cautious in what they were prepared to reveal. Another aspect was that I was moving between officers and men, between 'upstairs' and 'downstairs', and I now had a highly visible role flitting between groups where I had to be careful not to say too much to either side. Once I was talking to a detective when another one called out 'Watch out, he'll tell it all to the bosses', and the first one replied, 'That's why I don't tell him everything'. It was said as a joke but the detectives were aware that I was closely involved with the 'bosses'. Clearly, field-work becomes more difficult when the researcher is dealing with more than one group within the same organization and particularly when there exists a high measure of factionalism.³⁶

(b) *Research fatigue.* Another feature of my predicament was a certain weariness with the research role. Over a period of six years I carried out three projects in one and the same police station. Obviously as a researcher you are keeping up a front continually

and, in the end, you do get tired of it, laughing and smiling and trotting out your potted biography, and never letting your guard drop ('the field-worker has to get used to being treated as a sort of fool and being laughed at and ridiculed').³⁷ The tiredness even became mutual to a certain extent as the station itself was experiencing 'research-fatigue' in that it had been exposed to negative publicity for some seven or eight years. Because of its notoriety it had become a favourite spot for journalists, television crews, foreign academics passing through (and even members of a Royal Commission from Britain), students doing a thesis, trainees from the Justice Department, and so on. One of the senior officers said to me,

You know you should get away from the Warmoesstraat. It doesn't matter what you say about us because somehow it all turns out negatively. The reputation of this station is contaminated and journalists are only interested in material that confirms that reputation. If you come along and say something positive about us then they attack you in order to get at us. But it's still *our* reputation that gets blackened. And it keeps our name in the news. What we need is peace and quiet in order to be left alone to get on with our job. I really think it's better for us but also for you, and I don't mean this negatively — I'm just being realistic — and for your research to break with the Warmoesstraat. Go to another station in Amsterdam or go and look at a station in a completely different city.

(c) *Disillusionment.* An essential element of field-work is *sharing* the experience of a group, either as a full or partial member, with which the researcher to a greater or lesser extent identifies. Over-identification may involve 'going native' but practically all field-work implies that the researcher not only identifies, but actually *likes*, the subjects of his study. I found that it became difficult to believe that I was genuinely sharing the experiences of policemen, while I began to suffer a measure of disenchantment with the policeman's world. This was perhaps because you tend to be carried along in your first major project by boundless curiosity and naive enthusiasm, by the novelty of the experience, and by your involvement with, and attachment to, the group. Later, however, there was in my case no clear focus for identification while there were no heroes anymore as the seedy side of organizational life was exposed.

Other features that played a role in my disillusionment were a feeling that I had overstayed my welcome; a growing lack of stimulation in the field as I ceased to learn new things and as incidents became predictable. (I had been around longer than some

of the policemen and when they start learning from *you* then maybe it is time to retire gracefully). And also there emerged a growing consciousness of the logistical and practical limitations of the research role. There was so much going on at so many different levels that I, as a part-time researcher, just could not cope with it. Now that my focus had broadened to include the whole organization, not to mention external environmental influences, what I really needed was four or five colleagues to cover the senior officers at Headquarters, the specialised detective-squads, the Mayor and the political environment, the Justice Department, and the underworld of the inner-city. In a sense I was conducting two projects at once and there was so much data available that I simply could not handle it all. Furthermore, field-work is meant to enable one to develop confidential relationships with key informants in the organization but 'there is a limit to the sheer number of people to whom he (the researcher) can relate on a basis of personal confidence'.³⁸

Yet another element in this process of disenchantment came with increasing insight into the intractability of organizational mechanisms which trapped people in their roles and which were powerful enough to undermine and deflect the 'good guys' wishing to clean out the stables. Compared to the real battles for survival going on around me my research seemed almost futile and even self-indulgent. I was surrounded by rampant disarray and rancorous dissatisfaction and all I could say was that they were faced with difficult dilemmas and that my book would be out in a couple of years time! It was plain too that the corruption affair had created victims by a selective process that left some of the more culpable ones untouched. I found it extremely difficult to hide my feelings at questionable developments. For instance two internal commissions were set up to discuss the issue of corruption within the department and one was chaired by an officer whose passivity had probably helped to sponsor corruption while the other was chaired by an officer who was said to have had his finger, if not his entire fist, in the deviant pie.

In a way I became somewhat disenchanted with certain members of the Amsterdam Police. Like the detective, I became suspicious of everyone and felt that no-one was to be trusted. By this time, I had interviewed several of the suspects and had seen the effects that two years of personal turmoil — suspension, arrest, trial, disciplinary investigation, public exposure, etc. — had had on them and their families. Furthermore, their stories were diametrically opposed to the stories of other respondents including some highly-placed officers. It was clear that some people were lying to me, or were spreading misinformation, and I began to have this 'Rashomon' feeling of hearing widely varying versions from different people. I began to resent the resistance I was encountering and wearied of respondents who failed to turn up for successive appointments and

who promised hidden documents which never materialized. Perhaps the researcher was being conned?³⁹

A key issue here is not so much that it is difficult to recapture that initial excitement in the field but, that far more importantly, you become increasingly self-conscious of the social processes involved in gathering data. In 1975 I could convince myself that I was at one with a patrolman whereas in 1979 I could see through this pretence because I was a professor whereas my former buddy was still a patrolman. It seemed fraudulent to pretend otherwise than that we lived in two totally different social worlds. Now I was increasingly aware that relationships were transitory and that my purpose was not to build up friendships but to get data. I was going around being nice to everyone and smiling disarmingly at them and then later I would take down everything they said or did or that I had overheard. Maybe they understood this better than I and did not care particularly (and I was feeling guilty for nothing) but I could not help feeling increasingly uncomfortable, if not manipulative, in the research-role. If a latent aim of field-work is to create trust in the researcher then what was the aim of that trust? And did not the relationship involve a double betrayal: first by them of me but then by me of them?

In short, I felt that in field-work the subjects are conning you until you can gain their trust and then, once you have their confidence, *you begin conning them*.⁴⁰ In other words, I could not escape the realization that deceit and dissemblance were part of the research role and I did not feel ethically comfortable with that insight. Lies, deceit, concealment, and bending the truth are mentioned in many reports of field-work.⁴¹ Indeed, Berreman states that 'participant observation, as a form of social interaction, always involves impression management. Therefore, as a research technique, it inevitably entails some secrecy and some dissimulation'.⁴² At the time I found this all genuinely distressing and confusing. Evans Pritchard remarked that 'an anthropologist has failed unless, when he says goodbye to the natives, there is on both sides the sorrow of parting'.⁴³ In the end I decided to fade away discreetly and walked out of the station in early 1980. I have never been back.

(d) *Breakthrough and dead-end*. If there was one particular incident which finally confirmed my intention to depart then it was, paradoxically, on the night that the veil was lifted to reveal yet a deeper layer of deviance. Detectives in the district station, who normally only handle fairly mundane cases (compared to the specialised units at Headquarters), had become involved in a long drawn-out, complex series of cases (which I will call the 'big case') involving several professional criminals who had carried out burglaries where the victims were held hostage at gun-point. The

detectives working on the big case were deeply engaged in interrogations, identity parades, searches, and arrests but there were no strong leads as suspects were plainly scared of talking in case they were labelled 'stool-pidgeons' and met with reprisals from the underworld.

Then one evening a young woman walked in with clean clothes for one of the prisoners concerned in the case. It turned out that she was the daughter of a senior police officer, was living with the suspect, and had a child by him. In addition, the suspect's alibi for a particular evening was that he was at the senior policeman's house with the daughter. Now clearly this was a highly delicate issue but one of the policemen, X, wanted to treat the woman as a suspect. He questioned her and at one stage used a phrase that intimated that she was 'whoring with trash'. The daughter of the senior officer was so incensed at her treatment that she complained to her father. He allegedly phoned X and gave him a dressing down hinting that he still had several years in the department and that X would have to reckon with him. The detectives believed that the senior officer would get his own back on X. Subsequently, X, who could have expected an attractive move to a specialised detective unit as the next step in his career was put back into uniform (which is in most policemen's eyes a form of demotion). This also meant that he came directly under the authority of the senior officer whose daughter he had insulted. The detectives were convinced that X had been 'screwed' and that the daughter had been avenged. The significance of this was that I could glimpse the informal system at work in terms of retaliatory sanctions and the manipulation of a policeman engaged in a criminal case involving the relative of a senior officer. But all my information on this matter came from gossip which was sometimes impossible to verify and too personal to be used without identifying both the people concerned and my sources.

By chance I was also present one evening when the detectives involved in the case came back from interrogating a key suspect. They seemed almost physically disgusted and, rather emotionally, they began to express considerable sympathy for the suspect.

I tell you poor old Jansen (the suspect) has been screwed right and proper. If you listen to him then you open up a right old cess-pit and it really turns your stomach. If we told you everything then your hair would stand on end. He was conned completely by detectives in 'Molendam' (a nearby town) and also by the Justice Department. He gave interviews to detectives in confidence but they were taping him secretly in a drawer and when he arrives at the Commissioner of Enquiry,⁴⁴ the tape is pulled out and played back to him in evidence. He swears straight up that he didn't shoot van Luijk (a policeman wounded during a traffic control at

night in Amsterdam) but that they are determined to pin the blame for it on him. I'm telling you there's an underworld out there with all sorts of connections, and even with gun factories where you can order a pistol to your own requirements, that we know almost nothing about and where we have almost no control. And senior officers and Public Prosecutors and politicians all have their connections — it's incredible. You know the shooting in District East, when van Luijk was wounded, well the night before a detective from Headquarters was paying a friendly visit to Jansen (who was on the run from prison and thought to be armed)! We're telling you that you can't trust anyone, but especially at Headquarters. The Warmoesstraat is clean but other departments are not to be trusted and that includes Public Prosecutors as well.

Now this conversation took place in the detective room and the detectives concerned seemed out of their depth and were somewhat distraught. They were on to something but it was getting too big for them but also for me. A sergeant advised them to call in X and Y (senior officers) from their homes, put their cards on the table, and take the matter to one of the more trustworthy Public Prosecutors. X and Y arrived and went straight into a conclave with the detectives from which I was excluded. From the detectives' room the rest of us could look across to another part of the building and into X's room where the meeting was taking place. The remaining detectives were now also rather distraught and concerned. One of them ventilated their unease

It's just like three years ago all over again (he is referring to the first corruption investigation of 1976 — MP). Then you would watch X and Y pacing around that room and wonder what was going to come next. Now they are going to use those detectives to get at the people they couldn't get three years ago. But those detectives will suffer because they'll become contaminated and they will suffer as a consequence. This district has already been through it once and now once again we'll be contaminated because Cees and Bert (two of the detectives on the big case) have started to push a case against powerful people. We don't want to spend the rest of our lives typing out statements for a stolen bike or a mugging because later when we apply for transfer to another department they'll say, 'Wait a minute, you're from the Warmoesstraat, the guys who screw their mates, no thanks, try somewhere else'. Believe you me, it'll be the ordinary detective who'll suffer here because you can't take on Headquarters and hope to get away with it. There are senior officers involved and we're convinced that things are just not right with some of them,

that they are bent, but you can't expect to take them on and get away with it. They are just too powerful.

This incident hinted that key members of the organization could impose informal sanctions, particularly against the rank-and-file, which could be cloaked as rational decision-making in terms of suitability for promotion or assignments but which might be utilized against those merely *associated* with the exposure of deviance.

I was on the verge of a breakthrough to an area that promised to expose a network of connections in Amsterdam between policemen and criminals that perhaps also involved senior officers and even Public Prosecutors. And yet I decided to leave. Why did I get out at this stage?

There were a number of pressures outside of my research but the basic ones were disillusion with the research role and growing scepticism about getting to the mucky area exposed by this big case. I was not Woodward and Bernstein with unlimited time to spend on a case. I was, in effect, a part-time researcher and I baulked at the time and energy that would be required to complete the picture. But basically I felt that I could not get further within the police organization without betraying my purpose to expose the new vein of corruption and that too many powerful interests were at stake to allow me to do this. It was tantalizing to be part of the gossip circuit but more concrete evidence was needed if I was to piece together a much deeper investigation. But I just could not see how I would ever get to the level of information needed. It was clearly in no-one's interest to give it to me.

Perhaps we have to recognize that, as we move higher up the hierarchy of an organization and as we begin to encounter powerful entrenched groups and individuals who are identifiable, jealous of their reputations, prepared to fight for their survival, and powerful enough to deflect attention, that we may be attempting to research areas of institutional life which are to all intents and purposes *unresearchable*. Ironically and frustratingly for me, at any rate, the 'break-through' proved to be a dead-end.

(V) ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Generally discussions of ethics in research centre on informed consent, deception, privacy, identity, confidentiality, and spoiling the field for further research.⁴⁵ Applying B.S.A. or A.S.A. Codes of Ethics in my field-work seemed ludicrously inappropriate as there was no way I could have employed them without effectively destroying my research. All three projects were formally permitted by the Amsterdam Police and were overt but in the third project I

concealed my motives and interests and therefore engaged in a measure of deception. Disguising the name of the town ('Windmill West?') or of the station scarcely seemed feasible as it is instantly recognizable to anyone in The Netherlands. This does mean, however, that when I talk of the Chief of the Warmoesstraat then that can only mean *one* man. When you move into research with the top of the organization, the people are far more easily identifiable than when researching the relatively anonymous lower ranks. At the same time it is true that many people mentioned in my book were public figures in the sense that their names, and their photos, were kept in the news over a period of years and that much of what I have to say about them was covered extensively in the press. Although I have used various techniques to disguise the identities of respondents (I employ pseudonyms for all the Dutch policemen) I can imagine that these will be fairly transparent for people inside the organization. But I see no-way around this without making my account so anodyne as to be almost worthless.

As much as possible I utilized my data in such a way that I hoped it could not be used to bring harm to anyone although there is no way that I can guarantee this completely. Most of the incidents are related in a style that precludes revealing material in a manner that might lead to a disciplinary or criminal enquiry. In the end I did begin to feel uneasy about the many confidences I was getting or was overhearing. Some information came in the form of inside gossip which was potentially highly damaging to individuals yet by its nature was impossible to verify. Finally I am not aware that I 'fouled the nest' to any great extent, although I gather that my publications are scrutinized closely at Headquarters for their degree of favourableness towards the department. Certainly there has been no sign of it being more difficult for researchers to gain access in Amsterdam (if anything the reverse is true). In retrospect, my research raised a number of ethical issues with regard to the conduct of field-work and, while I engaged in a measure of deception and misrepresentation, I did endeavour to follow convention as closely as possible in terms of avoiding identification and harm.

Clearly, academic researchers can end up in the same moral predicament as policemen and may even employ the same imagery of muddy boots and grubby hands ('in getting at the dirt one may get dirty oneself', according to Marx).⁴⁶ When I withdrew from the field I did so with a disappointed feeling that I had failed to investigate corruption satisfactorily. I had begun with the cosy cohesive world of the patrol group but ended up studying the predicament of a large, incoherent organization caught in the intense glare of publicity and ineptly endeavouring to set its house in order. In addition I was accorded a view of the nasty side of the organization with feuds, victims, taking revenge, pulling strokes,

'screwing' opponents, broken promises, and broken careers. I believe that part of my problem was that I commenced with what might be called a 'supportive' approach.⁴⁷ But I became frustrated at my inability to change the research paradigm in mid-stream to an 'investigative' or 'conflict methodology' approach (personal communication, M. Clarke). In the last resort I shrank from getting my hands too dirty.

(VI) THE STING IN THE TAIL: LIBEL

Having withdrawn painfully from the field I set about exorcising my research through writing. In 1983 I approached Tavistock in London about publishing a book and in 1984 I signed a contract with them. In the summer of that year I handed over the final typescript and looked forward eagerly to publication. On signing the contract I was amused by the clauses mentioning rights related to Book Clubs, serials, strip cartoons and television but rather glossed over the 'Author's Warranty'. That clause contained the assurance that 'the work contains nothing obscene, indecent, objectionable or libellous' and that the author was responsible for any legal costs incurred by the publishers. Libel had not occurred to me because the corruption affair had been extensively reported in the press and also because libel cases are rare in The Netherlands where damages are low in such cases and where parties usually prefer to reach agreement out of court. I had not reckoned with the intimidating laws of libel in Britain.⁴⁸

The first intimation of difficulty came in a letter from Tavistock in the autumn of 1984. The manuscript had been read in the publisher's legal department. The opinion was that it was libellous and therefore it was being passed on to a legal firm for a specialised appraisal. This was an extremely busy period for me and the editor was unable to contact me personally. She left an urgent message cryptically requesting my attendance at a crucial meeting with a lawyer in London. I was petrified.

From the offices of Tavistock in central London we walked to the Inns of Court and to a cramped and busy Dickensian office in Dr Johnson's Buildings. The editor, myself, a diminutive solicitor (who mutely and impassively earned his fee merely for being present), and a secretary crowded into a tiny, overheated room where a young, bouncy barrister opened the proceedings by cross-examining me on the meaning of symbolic interactionism. Having clearly failed to satisfy him on that score he then turned to my manuscript, and in an advice that was later written up in eighteen pages, alerted us to the danger of libel. In essence, he explained that many passages were potentially defamatory. He considered it unlikely that anyone would

sue, mentioned that any case against me would be difficult to prove, and estimated that damages would be minimal. But costs might be high. Around £20,000 (currently about \$12,000) was mentioned at which I nearly passed out.

The barrister maintained that it is defamatory to suggest that someone is corrupt, connived at corruption, or hindered an investigation into corruption. A reference could be actionable if any individual was identifiable. This was true even of references to policemen in published secondary sources such as newspapers and magazines. I had not appreciated this and assumed that it was safe to quote from published sources. A section in the book on London mentioned several real names of senior detectives who had been convicted of corruption in well-publicised trials (which had been documented in seemingly reputable sources such as 'The Sunday Times', 'The Observer', and 'The Economist'). It was necessary to check with the Registrar of Criminal Appeals at the Royal Courts of Justice that conviction had not been quashed on appeal. It was also necessary to contact other publishers in order to enquire if any writs were outstanding in respect of allegations made against policemen in London following publication of their material.

Apart from those steps there were two other measures imposed on me. First, I had to build up a dossier of my secondary sources on the Amsterdam scandal. If anyone then approached the publisher he could be confronted with the public documents on the affair as a warning that similar accusations had already been aired widely in the Dutch media. Second, a whole series of deletions and amendments had to be made in the text where individuals were identified or might be identified. At times it seemed that any negative reference, however innocuous, to a living person could be construed as libellous in British law. Eventually I provided the publisher with a number of assurances, compiled the dossier, and made a number of deletions. The publisher was only then prepared to give the green-light for the book to go into print.

This episode scared the daylight out of me. I was clearly ignorant of the law. I had not anticipated the extent of potentially libellous material in the book and was unaware of the crippling costs that legal action might impose on me. The cautionary message is that research on a sensitive area of a public bureaucracy may easily land the researcher in the courts. This is particularly the case where the institution and/or individuals are readily identifiable. In short, assurances on confidentiality and identifiability given to individuals in the field are not only required ethically but can also be essential legally. In England the libel laws are taken seriously, damages can be high, costs are potentially prohibitive for the author and publishers are intimidated by the mere threat of legal action. And policemen are especially likely to be aware of their rights to seek

redress through the courts given their legal training. Let the unsuspecting field-worker beware; read the small print.

(VII) CONCLUSION

In this conclusion I wish to return to the three main issues I raised earlier and which were inspired by Van Maanen's contention that it proved extremely difficult for him to tell the field-work story as it 'really' was. There are several accounts that do reveal stress, conflict, physical and mental effort, drudgery and discomfort, frustration, disorientation and even danger in field-work.⁴⁹ For, in essence, the field-worker has to learn how to inveigle his or her way into the life of a group, build up contacts with key actors, and continually retain an emotional balance in order not to spoil acceptance and also to keep on collecting research material. Wax states that the most fundamental technique of all is 'alleviating suspicion'; Gans argues that the researcher must be 'dishonest to get honest data'; and Ditton claims that participant observation is inevitably unethical 'by virtue of being interactionally deceitful'.⁵⁰ Yet I suspect that field-workers have only the haziest conception of the ethical, and legal, dimensions of observation and merely wish to immerse themselves in the field and frequently do so without a great deal of forethought and preparation.⁵¹ This is despite a considerable literature indicating that in the field almost inevitably a measure of mutual deception and impression management develops that borders on the edge of deception and untruth but that is doubtless interactionally unavoidable and even morally tolerable. To a greater or lesser extent people are evasive and may lie⁵² and the researcher may feel that some degree of duplicity is required to penetrate fronts and to conceal his real purpose. In this paper I have revealed that I became acutely conscious of some of these dilemmas during a field-study and that eventually I found it impossible to continue with the research in question on police deviance.

It is interesting, then, and somewhat ironic, that some sociologists find themselves employing the techniques normally associated with morally polluted professions, such as policing and spying, and enjoy some of the moral ambivalence surrounding those occupations. The ironies and ambivalence are magnified when sociologists study deviants and run the danger of what Klockars calls getting 'dirty hands'; they may end up getting dirty themselves.⁵³ In entering polluted areas, the 'back' region where 'trade secrets' may be exposed,⁵⁴ the researcher faces moral dilemmas related both to involvement in the practices and to exposing the wrongdoing observed. This may cause a measure of discomfort if the academic reflects seriously on the moral and political dilemmas of field-work.

For the observational method is suffused with irreducible ambivalence that may cause such emotional and intellectual confusion in the researcher that he or she abandons the field, refuses to write up the data, or becomes 'converted' and ceases to investigate altogether.⁵⁵ The moral imperative dictating that the researcher guarantees authenticity in accounts may, in practice, founder on the realization that the reality of the field evades description, the research process may seem fraudulent if not predatory, and the attempt to experience membership at first-hand may become almost self-defeating. Paradoxically, the sensitive field-worker may come to feel that the research experience is untranslatable and that even reflecting on it somehow betrays the intimacy and irreducibility of direct involvement.⁵⁶

This raises an issue of over-sensitivity on the part of the researcher and even of prior matching of the personal style of research to the norms and culture of the setting. By that I mean that perhaps the demanding and volatile Amsterdam situation required a tougher and more cynical investigator than I could be in order not to be distracted and diverted by the personal and moral flak that the setting kept firing off and to which I perhaps over-reacted at the time. I can only confess that I was unable to alter my personality, and my 'supportive' research paradigm, in mid-research. As a consequence I may have dubbed the setting as virtually unresearchable as a rationalization for my own sense of defeat.

Reaching this painful insight has led me to the position that it is incumbent on mature field-workers to reflect on the dynamics of the micro-politics and interactional ethics of research in order to shape their selective 'war-stories' into a body of knowledge available for analysis and instruction.⁵⁷ The moral career of the project should be an essential part of the methodological analysis of the field-work experience.⁵⁸ But this is a lofty ambition whereas in practice we are frequently left with the feeling that professional, and publishing, constraints mean that authors could tell us far more about the concealed micro-politics of research.⁵⁹ Frustrating as it may be we simply have to face up to the fact that institutionally it proves difficult for social scientists to be totally open about their research experience.⁶⁰

Here, in somewhat self-conscious 'confessional' style (as opposed to the 'didactic deadpan' of many methodology accounts),⁶¹ I have endeavoured to reflect on those limitations of field-work with which I was rudely confronted in attempting to study police corruption. From that research experience with the Amsterdam Police I evolved a number of views concerning observational studies. Initially I felt that most people carry out only one major field-study and then at a specific period in their career when abundant time is available and when domestic and professional commitments are low. Furthermore,

once one becomes fully aware of the social processes involved in researching people then it becomes more difficult to go through with the almost inevitable deceit and dissimulation. Building up a relationship of simulated friendship with people can lead one to feel dishonest and the observer can become afflicted with doubts about deceit and fraudulence. This may be particularly true of the 'lone wolf'⁶² and I consider team-research to be healthier (while I would argue that all field-workers, even experienced ones, should have constant 'debriefing' sessions with a close colleague as a release mechanism and as a technique for getting the field into focus).

The whole question of trust needs to be explicated too in order to make clear the extent to which observation is largely a *means* to establishing confidence so that one can make the breakthrough to interviews which tell it 'like it is'.⁶³ How much is observation actually used as a basis of *data* in observational studies because, as Holdaway has pointed out for the police and Dingwall *et al.* for ethnographies in general, many writers are lamentably obscure on this.⁶⁴ The dilemma of gaining trust is that one may be told much in confidence,⁶⁵ that cannot be used because it cannot be verified, can damage individual's careers, and can reveal one's sources.⁶⁶

Observation often seems best-suited to diffuse projects of low visibility with lower-level participants in an organization. For, the higher you go up to hierarchy, the more likely it is that restrictions will be placed on the researcher. Deviance and sensitive issues in an organization can rarely be studied frontally and have to be approached obliquely while it may require pure good luck to make the breakthrough to the 'dark' regions.

Despite my own set-backs and frustrations in Amsterdam (with mixed and confused feelings of loyalty, abandonment, bad faith and betrayal) I remain a fervent supporter of observational studies. But then with the proviso that researchers appreciate that field-work is *demanding* and that it requires sound reflection on the ethical dimensions involved. Field-work may not be easy because the object of research may only emerge as the research develops⁶⁷ while at some time the necessity will eventually arise to finish and to draw a line under further commitment. Rather like corruption investigations, field-work never really ends and you can go on indefinitely peeling away successive layers of institutional reality (until exhaustion sets in or you are kicked out).

However, it is probably wise not to stay too long.⁶⁸ Experienced researchers speak of qualities such as stamina, determination, curiosity, vitality, and doggedness (and even of having to be young and in good physical condition, according to Wax⁶⁹) but I cannot avoid the conviction that most successful field-studies exude two basic qualities — naive enthusiasm ('naive' because then you are still learning) plus more than a measure of good luck. Field-work

also implies a form of personal commitment and involvement. This can make departure a hard process and perhaps my earlier gloom and pessimism was simply part of the field-worker's withdrawal symptoms. (This was coupled to a prolonged 'mid-career crisis' as I found myself locked into seemingly inescapable family commitments and turbulent and time-consuming administrative burdens at work.)

For on reflection I can now perceive two positive elements that may help encourage others to return to the field. First, the experience gained is part of the maturation process of the field-worker and the insights gained through substantial exposure should make it easier to continue in qualitative research. Perhaps prolonged immersion is something of a fetish retained from the anthropological tradition and the experienced researcher can later use time far more efficiently and chart his way through the social process more effectively. And, second, I have become increasingly conscious that advancing age and higher status are positively functional in gaining access to areas denied younger academics and this is particularly evident, for instance, in the world of management which I now encounter as a teacher in a business school (and this doubtless holds true of certain other professions, social groups, and institutions). Perhaps too there are periods where sabbaticals and/or an altered domestic situation can allow one a renewed opportunity to return to the field where prior experience and social maturity prove valuable in combating the strains and limitations of the research process. A whole new set of areas to be researched emerge if we think in terms of the advantages of promoting field-work for the over-forties.

In my case I researched an institution that is anathema to some of my colleagues but which I readily accepted. However, over a period of six years, my attitude to the police went through a cycle of ignorance, curiosity, admiration, disillusion and scepticism.⁷⁰ Initially I wrote empathetically about them but became uncomfortable when I came on negative material which could be damaging to them and could also be misused by others. Earlier I had seen my uniformed group in almost heroic terms whereas now I perceived policing as having the sad and sordid elements of a morality play ('the ethnographic hero is a fixer . . . winning daily victories over the hassles of life').⁷¹ But then I too began to sense that my role was becoming increasingly less laudable and more manipulative while I occasionally felt in danger of becoming yet another victim of a bitter and protracted institutional struggle. The difficulty of conveying this accurately to those who have no first-hand knowledge of participant involvement in qualitative research so enraged me that I wanted to be able to physically force all academics into extended field-work. I was grimly prepared to frog-march reluctant colleagues out of their offices and to abandon them on sleazy street corners in slums, before the intimidating gates of mental hospitals, and within the walls of

chilly morgues. My conviction was that even the most routine immersion in the field is potentially valuable in the social-moral development of the sociologist. This preoccupation with the salutary effects of field-work emerged from my own insights that participant observation can be demanding and stressful; that it can have limitations in terms of exploring the sensitive areas of organizational deviance; and that it can confront one with ethical dilemmas that may seem situationally almost insoluble.

The research in Amsterdam brought me face-to-face with my own personal limitations in trying to crack through the tough nut of police deviance.⁷² As one reviewer of my book observed, the norms of the academic profession demanded that I press on fearlessly whereas, in practice, I followed the 'operational code' of Sociology which 'requires us to avoid being found, floating face-down, in the canals of Amsterdam'.⁷³ At the time getting out seemed the most expedient and even the most honest thing to do.

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NOTES

1. W. F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1955 (2nd edn). R. H. Wax, *Doing Fieldwork*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971. J. F. Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings*, New York, Wadsworth, 1971. J. M. Johnson, *Doing Fieldwork Research*, New York, Free Press, 1975.

2. M. Clarke, 'Survival in the Field: Implications of Personal Experience in Field-Work', *Theory and Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 95-123.

3. J. Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*,

Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

4. Douglas represents strongly this 'conflict methodology' style of investigative research. J. D. Douglas (ed.), *Investigative Social Research*, Beverly Hills, Calif., Sage, 1976. For a critical discussion of it see M. Punch, *The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork*, Beverly Hills, Calif., Sage, 1986.

5. J. H. Skolnick, *Justice Without Trial*, New York, Wiley, 1975 (2nd edn).

6. M. R. Chatterton, 'From Parti-

cipant to Observer', *Sociologische Gids*, vol. 25, no. 6, pp. 502-16.

7. L. W. Sherman (ed.), *Police Corruption*, New York, Anchor, 1974.

8. W. A. Westley, *Violence and the Police*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1970.

9. J. Rubinstein, *City Police*, New York, Ballantine, 1973.

10. D. Downes and P. Rock, *Understanding Deviance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982.

11. Norris' research with the police in Britain revealed some highly dubious and illegal practices and he felt himself in 'a quagmire of ethical considerations' related to informed consent, invasion of privacy, trust and deceit. C. Norris, 'Fieldwork with the Police: Personal Dilemmas and Professional Consequences', paper presented at American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, 1986.

12. M. Punch, *Conduct Unbecoming: The Social Construction of Police Deviance and Control*, London, Tavistock, 1985.

13. Punch, *op. cit.*, 1986, p. 11.

14. Van Maanen, *op. cit.*, 1988, p. 89, described himself as a 'walking violation' when on patrol with the police because of the illegal weaponry he was encouraged to carry by patrolmen.

15. P. K. Manning, *Police Work*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1977.

16. Westley, *op. cit.* Skolnick, *op. cit.* A. J. Reiss, *The Police and the Public*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971.

J. Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behaviour*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1968.

17. My research base was in the 'Warmoesstraat' station which is one of the six district stations in Amsterdam (which is a force of c. 3000 officers, policing a population of c. 700,000 inhabitants).

18. M. Punch, *Policing the Inner City*, London, Macmillan, 1979.

19. M. Punch, 'Developing Scandal', *Urban Life*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 201-30.

20. Amsterdam experienced in the early seventies a growth of drug-related crime connected to the import of heroin by Chinese 'Triads' (Bresler). Then between 1976-1980 the Amsterdam City Police Department became embroiled in

a long drawn-out scandal related to accusations of entrapment, planting evidence, stealing from suspects, abusing female suspects, possessing illegal firearms, and transporting drugs. Previously The Netherlands had been remarked on for the absence of corruption and scandal of this magnitude was virtually unprecedented. It revolved around the Chinese run drug trade in the inner-city and was a constant source of media attention. The specialized detective units were housed at headquarters. The Chief Constable was answerable to the Mayor and to the Public Prosecutor. When faced with a possible criminal investigation involving his personnel the Chief must inform the Mayor who then asks the Public Prosecutor to mount an investigation. The Prosecutor can call on centrally-appointed State Detectives attached to the Amsterdam Court for assistance in conducting the enquiry. F. Bresler, *De Chinese Mafja*, Amsterdam/Brussel, Elsevier, 1981.

21. M. Punch, 'Backstage: Observing Police Work in Amsterdam', *Urban Life*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 309-35. The 'research bargain' (Becker) was very diffuse and while I hinted that there might be some form of feedback, of utility in coping with the issue of corruption, I made it plain that my interview material was confidential and also that I intended to publish my material in some form. No formal restrictions were placed on me by the department at all and I was not asked to sign a contract. H. S. Becker, *Sociological Work*, London, Allen Lane, 1970.

22. R. Reiner, 'Assisting with Enquiries: Problems of Research on the Police'. Paper presented to British Sociological Association Conference, Warwick University, 1979. R. V. Ericson, *Making Crime: A Study of Detective Work*, Toronto and Vancouver, Butterworth, 1981.

23. J. Van Maanen, 'On Watching the Watchers', in P. K. Manning and J. Van Maanen (eds) *Policing: A View from the Street*, Santa Monica, Calif., Goodyear Publishing Company, 1978, p. 63. Van Maanen was denied access to fourteen

police departments. Also Wax, *op. cit.*, 1971, p. 47, remarks that if the researcher 'tries to obtain membership in elite groups (such as physicians, big business executives, Orthodox Jews), he will soon "observe" that most doors are firmly closed in his face'.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

25. Punch, *op. cit.*, 1982.

26. M. Punch, 'Organizational Change and Police Deviance', paper delivered at American Sociological Association Conference, Toronto, 1981.

27. *Ibid.*

28. From the early seventies the Warmoesstraat had been bathed in negative publicity related particularly to violence and racial discrimination, Punch, *op. cit.*, 1979. Its officers frequently attracted complaints for abusive or aggressive behaviour.

29. This chief inspector tried to reorganize his plain-clothes squad and stumbled on deviant practices. His determination to push the matter lead to a snowball effect; plainclothes men pointed at detectives, detectives asked that attention be paid to specialised units at headquarters, and some suspects began to implicate senior officers.

30. I have never acquired a taste for alcohol. This 'handicap' (which would seem to debar me from any serious research with the police — certainly in Britain where among detectives the liquid lunch is virtually mandatory) does mean that I cannot actually join in drinking sessions but, on the other hand, I console myself with the thought that, by remaining sober when I do go along, I can continue to collect data and was even in demand as a driver for drunken policemen. I've always wondered what it must be like trying to do field-work when you are drunk particularly when you try to reconstruct events and conversations from the night before (contributions please to a special issue of 'Contemporary Ethnography').

31. Reiner, *op. cit.*, 1979, p. 12. C. P. Florez and G. L. Kelling, 'Issues in the Use of Observers in Large Scale Program Evaluation: the Hired Hand and the Lone Wolf', Unpublished paper, Kennedy School of Government,

Harvard University, 1979. Reiss, *op. cit.*, 1971.

32. Eight men were arrested (four men from the research station and four from specialised units at headquarters). Six of them came to court and five were fined. They all faced a disciplinary enquiry as well as a criminal investigation. Eventually they either retired on health grounds or were taken back after their long suspension in non-detective functions. No senior officers were ever prosecuted. Technically it is illegal to possess the corruption dossier and to quote from it. But one of the suspects received a copy from his lawyer and sold it to the press. The media were not penalised for reproducing extensive extracts and my legal advice was that no-one would bother prosecuting an academic using it for research purposes providing individual identities were concealed. Rules of 'sub judice' are not enforced in The Netherlands.

33. M. Punch, *Management and Control of Organizations*, Leiden/Antwerpen, Stenfert Kroese, 1981.

34. M. Punch, 'Officers and Men: Occupational Culture, Inter-Rank Antagonism, and the Investigation of Corruption', in M. Punch (ed.), *Control in the Police Organization*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1983, pp. 227-50.

35. M. Cain, *Society and the Policeman's Role*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973. Ostensibly I was studying 'management' by senior officers of a police district but, as their work was confined to office-hours, I used the opportunity to spend evenings and weekends with the detectives.

36. Those features which I employed consciously in studying senior officers, such as my new status as professor at a 'respectable' business school and wearing formal clothes, distanced me from my old comrades from the uniformed branch whom I would pass amicably, but uncomfortably, on the stairs or in the canteen.

37. Wax, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

38. L. Klein, *A Social Scientist in Industry*, London, Gower, 1976.

39. Ericson, *op. cit.*, 1981, p. 232.

40. N. Fielding, 'Observational

Research on the National Front' in M. Bulmer (ed.), *Social Research Ethics*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p. 370.

41. Florez and Kelling, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Van Maanen, *op. cit.*, 1978, p. 328. Wax, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

42. G. D. Berreman, *Behind Many Masks: Ethnography and Impression Management in a Himalayan Village*, Ithaca, N.Y., Society for Applied Anthropology, Monograph nr. 4, 1964, p. 18.

43. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Some Reminiscences and Reflections on Fieldwork', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, no. 4, pp. 1-12.

44. A judge who does not sit on a case but who can conduct further investigations of a case in close cooperation with the Public Prosecutor.

45. C. B. Klockars and F. W. O'Connor (eds), *Deviance and Decency: The Ethics of Research with Human Subjects*, Beverly Hills, Calif., Sage, 1979. M. Bulmer (ed.), *Social Research Ethics*, London, Macmillan, 1982.

46. G. Marx, 'Notes on the Discovery, Collection and Assessment of Hidden and Dirty Data', Unpublished paper delivered at Society for the Study of Social Problems Annual Meeting, New York, 1980. Fielding, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

47. 'We fall into deep sympathy with the people we are studying', Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

48. F. R. Wallis, *The Road to Total Freedom*, London, Heinemann, 1976.

49. R. G. Burgess (ed.), *Field Research: a Sourcebook and Field Manual*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1982. G. McCall and J. L. Simmons (eds), *Issues in Participant Observation*, Reading, Mass., Addison Wesley, 1969.

50. Respectively, Wax, *op. cit.*, p. 79. H. J. Gans, *The Levittowners*, London, Allen Lane, 1976, p. 46. J. Ditton, *Part-time Crime*, London, Macmillan, 1977, p. 10.

51. Anecdotes recount that Hughes encouraged students at Chicago to get out of the nest quickly and 'fly on their own' (Gans, *op. cit.*, p. 310) without the benefit of much instruction; also that Becker was almost appalled when a

British student asked him what paradigm he should use in the field and Becker advised him to stop worrying and just 'to get in there and see what's going on'; M. Atkinson, 'Coroners and the Categorisation of Deaths as Suicides: Changes in Perspective as Features of the Research Process' in C. Bell and H. Newby (eds), *Doing Sociological Research*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1977, p. 32. Wax, (*op. cit.*, p. 61) reinforces this idea of diving in without elaborate preparation beforehand when stating 'like many field-workers I went into the field ill prepared, technically and intellectually'.

52. J. Van Maanen, *Qualitative Methodology*, Santa Monica, Calif., Goodyear Publishing Company, 1979, p. 539.

53. C. B. Klockars, 'Dirty Hands and Deviant Subjects' in C. B. Klockars and F. W. O'Connor (eds), *op. cit.* Marx, *op. cit.*

54. E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1959.

55. Clarke, *op. cit.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. Van Maanen, *op. cit.*, 1988.

58. P. K. Manning and L. J. Redlinger, 'The Political Economy of Fieldwork Ethics', in C. B. Klockars and F. W. O'Connor (eds), *op. cit.* P. Hammond (ed.), *Sociologists at Work*, New York, Basic Books, 1964.

59. In my manuscript for Tavistock I tried to raise some of the points covered in this paper on the assumption that this account was essential to understanding the research. Before the question of libel arose, and caution was called for, I received comments from the reader for the publisher who wrote unfavourably of the methods chapter as 'anecdotal, over-subjective, too flippant, almost storytelling'. I had hoped that the chapter would be central to the book, and would be placed as an early chapter before the main text, but, following the libel scare, it was banished, bowdlerised and condensed to just a few pages, to a forlorn appendix.

60. C. Bell and H. Newby (eds), *op. cit.*

61. J. W. N. Watkins, 'Confession is

Good for Ideas', *The Listener*, vol. 69, 18 April, pp. 667-8.

62. Florez and Kelling, *op. cit.*

63. Cain, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

64. S. Holdaway, *The Occupational Culture of Urban Policing: An Ethnographic Study*, Unpublished Ph.D., University of Sheffield, 1980. R. Dingwall, C. Payne and I. Payne, 'The Development of Ethnography in Britain', Mimeo, Oxford, Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, 1980.

65. One can perhaps be told *too* much, c.f. Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

66. This was exactly my position on the 'big case'. For I had a tenuous connection with the detectives anyway and could not associate myself closely with the four detectives working on the 'big case' because it would have aroused suspicions. In addition, I myself was virtually in the position of a detective with a key informant in that any information I used could easily be traced back to that source. This was complicated by the fact that two of the detectives were suddenly attached to headquarters in order to follow-up on the case. Now they had a different boss and new loyalties and, who knows, they may have been moved to headquarters — which they themselves had condemned as untrustworthy — in order to get more control over them. I tried to keep in touch with them but discovered that they would talk far less readily now that they were part of a specialised unit at headquarters. Furthermore at one stage I was approached by a marginal figure in the organization who, out of a mixture of distrust of senior officers and sympathy with the plight of the suspects, had become involved in the affair and who had a great deal of inside knowledge that was of value to me. He almost implored my help in a bid to tackle the problems surrounding deviance in the department. But I neatly, if guiltily, side-stepped the issue in order to avoid an involvement which would have forced me to show my colours.

67. J. A. Roth, 'Comments on "Secret" Observation', *Social Problems*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 283-4.

68. Wax, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

70. Van Maanen, *op. cit.*, 1978, p. 334.

71. Dingwall *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

72. Wallis muses as to whether or not his field days are over now that he has been scarred by various legal skirmishes and by a series of hassles (and highly embarrassing harassments) related to his research on religious sects. In Amsterdam some police officers had their phones secretly tapped by suspects and also had received threats of violence to their families. Some witnesses were beaten up. Around that time a senior officer on another case had a brick thrown through his window at home. I became worried both about being called as a prosecution or defence witness, in which I might be asked to reveal the confidences of my interviews, and also about being visited by some of the suspects to frighten me off divulging anything to senior officers or officials of the Justice Department. In fact, my suburban tranquillity was never disturbed and publication sparked off an almost disconcerting silence. An English language book on a Dutch police scandal brought no response from the Dutch police, the Dutch media, or for that matter, from Dutch social science. I almost felt like throwing in the sponge and was acutely conscious of a lack of recognition of what I had been through and felt frustrated at an inability to fully convey the world I had experienced which was one of faces, smells, situations, and emotions which were for me indelible, colourful, and three-dimensional. 'Is it all worth it?' was my maudlin preoccupation of the time and I mused about writing a novel as the only way to portray effectively in print the richness and complexity of the stories behind the stories. See also, R. Wallis, 'My Secret Life: Dilemmas of Integrity in the Conduct of Field Research', unpublished paper, Queen's University, Belfast, 1986.

73. D. Smith, Review of M. Punch (1985), 'Conduct Unbecoming', *Sociology*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 486-7.

Patrolling the facts: secrecy and publicity in police work*

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the police as news sources in Canada. Analysis focuses on the ways in which the police patrol the regions of their organization to which journalists can have access, and on the forms of enclosure they effect over knowledge about their activities. The analysis builds upon theoretical foundations laid by Goffman and Giddens regarding privacy and revelation, illustrating that their social psychological formulations can be extended to the organizational and sociological levels. A typology is developed to distinguish police practices in back region enclosure (secrecy), back region disclosure (confidence), front region enclosure (censorship), and front region disclosure (publicity). Journalists' efforts to overcome the spatial, social and cultural barriers erected by the police are delineated. Consideration is given to the ways in which journalists police the police: how news texts 'play back' into the police organization and affect relations and practices there, including renewed efforts to patrol the facts. The process is shown to be equivocal and problematic, respecting the fact that information is the most difficult thing to guard because it can be taken without leaving its place.

THE POLICE AS GUARDIANS OF SYMBOLIC ORDER

The police are usually conceived in material and physical terms. They are seen to be at the forefront of the coercive arm of the state, the embodiment of the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. As law enforcers, the police are equipped with the technological and legal means to coerce citizens who victimize other citizens. As preventers of crime, the police are equipped with the technological and legal means of deployment and surveillance. As social service agents, the police are equipped with the 'velvet glove' of service provision and welfare referral aimed at managing trouble