I have further attempted to demystify the concept of validity, maintaining that verification of information and interpretations is a normal activity in the interactions of daily life. Even so, a pervasive attention to validation can be counterproductive and lead to a general invalidation. Rather than let the product, the knowledge claim, speak for itself, validation can involve a legitimation mania that may further a corrosion of validity—the more one validates, the greater the need for further validation. Such a counterfactuality of strong and repeated emphasis on the truth of a statement may be expressed in the folk saying, "Beware when they swear they are telling the truth."

Ideally, the quality of the craftsmanship results in products with knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they, so to say, carry the validation with them, like a strong piece of art. In such cases, the research procedures would be transparent and the results evident, and the conclusions of a study intrinsically convincing as true, beautiful, and good. Appeals to external certification, or official validity stamps of approval, then become secondary. Valid research would in this sense be research that makes questions of validity superfluous.

14

Improving Interview Reports

When the understanding of validation and generalization is extended to include communication with readers, the writing of reports takes on a key position in an interview inquiry. Reporting is not simply re-presenting the views of the interviewees, accompanied by the researcher's viewpoints in the form of interpretations. The interview report is itself a social construction in which the author's choice of writing style and literary devices provide a specific view on the subjects' lived world. The writing process is one aspect of the social construction of the knowledge gained from the interviews, and the report becomes the basis for the research community to ascertain the validity of the knowledge reported. The current focus on conversation and rhetorics in social research, as well as what is termed a crisis of representation, leads to an emphasis on the presentation of research findings.

Interview reports are often boring to read. Some ways of improving standard modes of reporting interviews will be outlined and some ethical issues of reporting interviews pointed out. Finally, after discussing writing as a social construction, modes of enriching interview reports are suggested.

Boring Interview Reports

Some three thousand years ago, Odysseus returned to Greece from his research inquiry in distant countries. Homer's oral tale of the

voyage, later written down, was cast in a form that still engages today. Freud's soon hundred-year-old therapeutic case stories still provoke heated controversies. Current interview studies may not be that long lived; reports need to be read to have a life after publication. Some impressions from reading current interview reports will be offered.

Tiresome Interview Findings. Interview studies are often tedious to ...d: They are often characterized by long, obtuse, verbatim quotes, ...sented in a fragmented way, with primitive categorizations, and ...t seldom at inflated length. Hundreds of pages with quotes from ... interview transcripts, interspersed with some comments and a few ...les with numbers from categorizations, seldom make interesting ...ding. The subjects' often exciting stories have—through the analyz... and reporting stages—been butchered into atomistic quotes and ...lated variables.

This style of reporting interviews may have been influenced by a qualitative hyperempiricism, with the many interview quotes made to serve as basic facts. Extensive verbatim transcripts are regarded as rock-bottom documentation of what was really said in the interviews. The different rhetorical forms of oral and written language are overlooked in the construction of verbatim interview transcripts, with their tiresome repetitions, fillers, and incomplete sentences.

After having endured the reading of a series of interview reports, one may long for some dramatic therapeutic case histories with narratives that can both be entertaining and carry provocative new insights. One may even look forward to reading about laboratory experiments with their neat logical rigor, elegant designs, clear presentations, and stringent discussions of the findings and considerations of possible sources of error that could invalidate the findings.

Dreary impressions of qualitative reports are not new:

> For 30 years, I have yawned my way through numerous supposedly exemplary qualitative studies. Countless numbers of texts I have abandoned half read, half scanned. I'll order a new book with great anticipation—the topic is one I'm interested in, the author is someone I want to read—only to find the text boring. (Richardson, 1994, pp. 516-517)

There may be several reasons for colorless interview reports. The writer may be so overwhelmed by the extensive and complex interview

texts that any personal perspective on the interviews is lost. The researcher may strongly identify with the interview subjects, "go native" and be unable to retain a conceptual and critical distance from the subjects' accounts. The fear of subjective interpretations may lead to reports that consist of a tiresome series of uninterpreted quotes, refraining from theoretical interpretations as if from some dangerous form of speculation. The page inflation of interview reports may simply be due to researchers not knowing what story they want to tell, and they therefore are not able to select the main points they want to get across to their audience. Without knowing the "what" and the "why" of the story, the "how"—the form of the story—becomes problematic.

Method as a Black Box. If readers actually find the interview results of interest, they may want to know about the design and the methods that have produced this intriguing knowledge. They are then likely to encounter a black box. The readers will have to guess about the social context of the interview, the instructions given the interviewees, the questions posed, and the procedures used during transcribing and analyzing the interviews. For a reader who wants to evaluate the trustworthiness of the findings, to reinterpret or apply the results, information on the methodic steps of an investigation is mandatory. In interview reports, however, the link between the original conversations and the final report is often missing.

Qualitative interviews can contain detailed descriptions of the subjects' life situations, their experiences and actions, but may be virtually devoid of descriptions of the interview situation and of the researcher's actions used to obtain the information reported about the subjects. Though the strengths of qualitative studies are their detailed descriptions and the use of the researcher as an instrument, depictions of the researcher's own activities while producing the knowledge are conspicuously absent.

One reason for the neglect of method may be that an interview study hardly follows discrete, formal procedures; much is left to improvisation and the intuition of the interviewer and interpreter. A further reason may be that there are no established common conventions for reporting qualitative studies. Rather than leading to a silence on method, the unique nature of an interview study should in fact pose

a challenge to the researcher to describe as precisely as possible the specific steps, procedures, and decisions taken in the specific study.

A possible reason for the neglect of method in interview reports may be as a counterreaction to the positivist idolatry of methods that equated science with formalized bureaucratic procedures. We may further speculate that the interview researcher has a bad methodic conscience—that his or her study does not live up to established canons of social science research. This methodic insecurity may then lead to omitting any mention of method—the procedures applied are simply swept under the carpet. Freely applying psychoanalytic defense mechanisms, one may invoke a repression of method due to anxiety and guilt from not living up to the ruling method ideals.

Investigating With the Final Report in Mind

The aim of a report is to inform other researchers and the general public of the importance and the trustworthiness of the findings. The report should contribute new knowledge to the development of a field, and be cast in a form that allows the conclusions to be checked by the reader. The interview report is the end product of a long process; what is worth communicating to others from the wealth of interview conversations is to be conveyed in the limited number of pages of an article or a book, presenting the main aims, methods, results, and implications of an interview inquiry. The writing of the report is here presented as the last of the seven method stages of an interview study.

As one approach to making interview reports more readable, I will suggest taking the final report into consideration from the very start of an inquiry. In the story of the five hardship phases of an interview project, reporting was depicted as the final phase of exhaustion (Chapter 5, Openness and Emotions in Interview Studies). As a countermeasure it was recommended that an interview project be directed from the start toward the final report; that the researcher keep in mind throughout the stages of the investigation the original vision of the story he or she wants to tell the readers. In Box 14.1, a consistent directedness toward the final report is envisaged throughout the seven stages of an interview study.

Box 14.1

Investigating With the Final Report in Mind

1. *Thematizing.* The earlier and clearer that researchers keep the end product of their study in sight—the story they want to tell—the easier the writing of the report will be.

2. *Designing.* Keep a systematic record of the design procedure as a basis for the method section of the final report. Have the final form of the published interviews in mind when designing the study, including the ethical guideline of informed consent with respect to later publication of the subjects' stories. Under the ethical ideal that research should serve to enhance the human situation, communicating the findings to the scientific and general communities is of prime importance.

3. *Interviewing.* The ideal interview is in a form communicable to readers at the moment the tape recorder is turned off.

4. *Transcribing.* The readability of interviews that will be published should be kept in mind during transcription, as well as the protection of the subjects' confidentiality.

5. *Analysis.* In a narrative analysis, the analyzing and reporting of an interview merge and result in a story to be told to the readers. In other forms of analysis, too, the presentation of the results should be kept in mind, with the analysis of the interviews becoming embedded in the writing of the findings.

6. *Verification.* With a conception of validation as communication and action, how a study is reported becomes a key issue.

7. *Reporting.* Working toward the final report from the start of an interview study should contribute to a readable report of methodologically well-substantiated, interesting findings.

Writing for the Readers

Until recently there has been little interest in how to communicate the results of interview studies. The writing of an interview report has often been regarded as merely re-presenting what was done and found, with little regard for the readers and their use of the report.

In contrast thereto, researchers in system evaluation and market research have been well aware of the effects of the form of their reports on their intended audiences—such as the length of a report or the differential impact of quantitative and qualitative data. Patton (1980) thus mentions that an extensive, well-documented, and formally elegant evaluation report may end up in the recipient's waste basket. A face-to-face communication, perhaps including a few pages of report summaries, may have a far stronger impact on the recipients and their decision making.

For market research, it has been posited that lower-level managers often want extensive quantitative data in order to legitimize their decisions and thereby give them an alibi if things should go wrong. Upper-level managers, who are responsible for the future of the company, may be more open to qualitative methods with creative and new interpretations: "Those who really want the help of an investigation in order to solve concrete issues are more susceptible to consider a qualitative investigation, whereas the 'alibi-seekers' rather choose quantitative studies" (Osiatinsky, 1976, p. 58).

The closeness of interview studies to ordinary life, with their often lively descriptions and engaging narratives, makes an interview report potentially interesting to the general public. In some cases, this may entail a conflict between the demands of the scientific and the general communities, between presenting the results in a scientifically documented and controllable form or in an illustrative and engaging popular form. The dilemma of presenting captivating stories versus formal documentation of method and findings may be envisaged by two contrasting scenes for the report—the art gallery and the court room.

In *art* it is the end product—a painting or a sculpture—that is essential, and not the methods of the production process. The painting techniques employed may be of interest to fellow artists and to art historians, but the techniques are not the reason for taking a piece of art seriously. A painting carries its own message, it convinces through

its expression and style. In literature, the content and form of Shakespeare's dramas still capture us today, while little is known about the dramas' origins or of Shakespeare's methods of writing.

In contrast, in a report to a *court,* say from interviews by a psychologist about child abuse, eloquence and style are not essential to the report. There will be an intense cross-examination from the prosecution and the defense, critically trying to find weak points in the interviews and their interpretations. The procedures will be under scrutiny and attempts made to undermine the reliability of witnesses; of the forms of interrogation, such as the influence of leading questions; and the logic of the interpretations drawn.

An interview report should ideally be able to live up to artistic demands of expression as well as to the cross-examination of the court room. Before turning to possible ways to improve interview reports with regard to scientific criteria of rigor and artistic criteria of elegance, some moral issues involved in publishing interviews will be addressed.

Ethics of Reporting

The publication of a research report raises moral questions about what kinds of effects a report leads to. Thus psychological research should ideally both produce scientific knowledge and contribute to ameliorating the human condition (see Chapter 6). This involves communicating the findings in a form that is both scientifically sound and readable to the potential users of the knowledge reported. The publication should further be in line with the ethical guidelines of informed consent, confidentiality, and consequences.

Informed Consent. As discussed earlier, care should be taken before the interview situation to have a clear understanding with the interviewees about the later use and possible publication of their interviews, preferably with a written agreement (Chapter 6, Ethical Guidelines; Chapter 8, The Ethics of Interviewing).

Confidentiality. In order to protect the subjects' privacy, fictitious names and sometimes changes in subjects' characteristics are used in

the published results. This requires altering the form of the information without making major changes of meaning. Yet disguising subjects is not without hazards.

A misleading camouflage can be illustrated by an interview study of refugees' adaptation to the Danish culture. At the suggestion of her advisor, myself, a student had changed the names as well as the nationalities of the refugees she had interviewed and quoted at length in her master's thesis. The external examiner pointed out a serious lack of understanding in the thesis's analysis of the social and psychological situation of a refugee from Chile. On closer examination it turned out that the "Chilean" refugee was a disguised Polish refugee. The student, herself an immigrant, had not taken into account that Polish refugees in Denmark in the 1970s tended to be strongly anticommunist and Chilean refugees to be equally strongly socialist or communist. Disguising names and nationality had brought about marked changes in the meaning of the social situations and identity of the subjects, whereby several of the interpretations made little sense. The example points out the problems of concealing information without substantially changing its meaning, a decision that requires an extensive knowledge of the phenomena investigated.

The particular problems of privacy in the writing stage of a qualitative inquiry have been discussed by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), who mention several well-known social science studies in which, despite the use of fictitious names and the like, reporters and others have been able to track down the actual persons. Among the more easily resolved issues of confidentiality are the interviewees who do not want to be anonymous subjects: They have engaged themselves strongly in a project and want to be responsible for their statements with full names.

Consequences. It may be difficult for a researcher to anticipate the potential consequences of an interview report. One unintended consequence of the grade study will be mentioned. A teacher of French, who had received a copy of the chapter containing the results from his interview, called and asked me not to use his statements in my book. In high school, French was an unpopular subject for many pupils and this teacher was keenly aware of and eloquent about his use of grades to motivate his pupils to learn French. His statements were highly illustrative of the use of grades as a motivational device and

would be easily grasped by the readers. At the time of publication, however, a public discussion had started about the relevance of keeping French as a subject in Danish high schools. The teacher now feared that his descriptions of using grades to motivate his pupils to learn the unpopular French could be used in the public debate as an argument for omitting French as a school subject. The negative consequences did not directly concern the teacher himself, but rather his profession with regard to the public image of French as a school subject. I concurred with his request and changed "French" to "English" in his statements—and thereby lost some of their expressive value.

Other decisions about whether to change a report due to anticipated consequences may not be so easily solved. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) raise a general question:

> What obligations does the researcher have to research participants when publishing findings? If the researcher's analysis is different from that of participants, should one, both, or neither, be published? Even if respondents tend to agree that some aspect of their community is unflattering, should the researcher make this information public? (p. 119)

The intended result of the grade study was to document the effects of grading in contrast to official Danish curricular goals, such as promoting the pupils' independence and their creativity, cooperation, and interest in lifelong learning. I had believed that this would have an emancipatory effect through leading to public knowledge about, and possible changes in, the new grade-based restricted admission to the universities. The study had no such consequence: By the time the book was ready for publication, public interest in the issue had waned. Furthermore, the book was written in an academic style, heavily documented with quotations, and contained extensive methodical discussions. I had attempted to refrain from interesting but more speculative interpretations in anticipation of the common critiques of qualitative interview research. The result was that the lived reality of the pupils' school situation was lost, and the book had no appeal to either the pupils or the general public. There were a few reviews of the book: Those in conservative newspapers were critical of the results, maintaining that they were based on too few subjects, may have been provoked by leading questions, and that the speculative interpretations were biased by the author's leftist views.

Improving Standard Modes of Reporting

Readers of an interview report can adopt a multitude of perspectives to the text: Are the results interesting, do they give new knowledge, novel insights, provoke new perspectives on the topic of the study? What are the theoretical implications of the findings? Does the new knowledge support or go against current theories in the area? From a methodic stance questions also arise: How trustworthy are the findings? What is the methodical base for the results reported? And from a practical viewpoint still other questions arise: What are the practical consequences of the study? Are the findings sufficiently trustworthy to act on? In this section standard formats for reporting interviews will be outlined, and in a later section modes of enriching the interview reports will be suggested.

STANDARD STRUCTURE OF A REPORT

In Box 14.2, the seven stages of an interview investigation are placed under the standard headings of a scientific report: introduction, method, results, and discussion (see, e.g., American Psychological Association, 1989). The reporting of the methods and the results of interview studies will now be treated in more detail.

METHOD

The reader of an interview report needs to know the methodical procedures in order to evaluate the trustworthiness of the results. Knowledge of specific details of method may also be required for a reinterpretation or for an application of the findings of a study. And, in rare cases, the reader may be interested in the method for replicating or extending the original study. Box 14.3 lists some of the information that a reader not satisfied with a black box in the method section can look for.

RESULTS

In contrast to a critic's interpretation of a literary text—where the poem or novel will either be known by or available to the reader—the interview interpreter will have to select and condense the interpreted

Box 14.2

Structuring an Interview Report

I. Introduction: *Thematizing*

The general purpose of the study is stated, the conceptual and theoretical understanding of the investigated phenomena is outlined, a review of the relevant literature on the research topic is provided, and the specific research questions for the investigation are formulated.

II. Method: *Designing, Interviewing, Transcribing, and Analyzing*

The methods applied throughout the study are described in sufficient detail for the reader to ascertain the relevance of the design for the topic and purpose of the investigation, to evaluate the trustworthiness of the results, and, in principle, to be able to replicate the investigation.

III. Results: *Analysis and Verification*

The results are reported in a form that gives a clear and well-structured overview of the main findings, and with the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the findings critically evaluated.

IV. Discussion

The overall implications of the results are discussed. This involves the relevance of the findings to the original research questions and the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

texts for the reader. In contrast to engaging and well-structured, rich, and "eminent" literary texts, some interviews may be boring to read, trivial, redundant, with little inner connections or deeper significance. It is up to the researcher to provide the perspectives and contexts that render the interviews engaging to the reader.

Box 14.3

Reader Questions About Methods

Design: Were subjects selected at random, by accessibility, by self-selection, or by theoretical sampling? Such information is a precondition for decisions about applying statistical analysis upon the results, and for the reader to draw generalizations from a study.

Interview Situation: What information was given to the subjects before the interview? What was the social and emotional atmosphere like, the degree of rapport during the interview? What questions were posed? How was the interview guide organized? Such information is essential for interpreting the meaning of what is said in an interview.

Transcription: What instructions were given to the transcribers, particularly with respect to verbatim versus edited transcripts? Such information is especially relevant for linguistic analyses and for psychological interpretations.

Analysis: What were the steps of the analysis? Was the analysis a personal intuitive interpretation, or were formal procedures applied? If categorizations were undertaken, how were they done, by whom, and how were the categories defined?

Verification: What checks were conducted of the reliability of interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing? What controls were made for counteracting biased and selective interpretations? What are the arguments for the validity of the findings?

There are no standard modes of presenting the results of interview studies. There are standard ways to present quantitative data. For example, in Figure 11.3 on grading behaviors (see Chapter 11), a

simple computer program provided eight graphic options for presenting the numbers. Even though there are no comparable standard forms for presenting qualitative interview studies, there are several options available. The usual mode of presenting interview findings in the form of quotations will be treated here, and modes of enriching reports will be suggested later.

Interview Quotations. The common mode of presenting the findings of interview inquiries is through selected quotes. The interview quotes give the reader an impression of the interaction of the interview conversation and exemplify the material used for the researcher's analysis. Box 14.4 suggests some guidelines for improving readability when quoting interview statements.

'*The Number of Pages.* Quantity appears to be a persistent problem for qualitative researchers: they seem to feel that the sheer number of pages will justify their studies not having quantitative data; and they can have too many pages of interview material and too few pages for reporting the findings. Interview researchers sometimes complain that it is impossible to report the rich findings of their studies in short articles or even in books of normal size. In particular, they may want to include many pages of transcripts as documentation for their conclusions. They may also point out that it is easier to report in short form the neat designs of experimental and questionnaire studies with their quantitative data presented in simple tables and figures. The response of the editor of a Norwegian medical journal to such demands for extra pages by qualitative researchers was simple: "Everyone is special." Thus experimental researchers want more space to present the elaborate design and the sophisticated new equipment of a study, statisticians need extra space to develop the mathematical presuppositions of the statistical computations presented, and so forth.

Qualitative investigations in themselves need not require extra space—several of the qualitative studies used in the present book are in the form of short articles (e.g., Giorgi, 1975; Runyan, 1981; Scheflen, 1978). Psychotherapists may be able to present provoking findings in brief case studies, and also by means of short examples (see Laing, 1962). One reason may be therapists' long experience in

Box 14.4

Guidelines for Reporting Interview Quotes

1. *The quotes should be related to the general text.*

The researcher should provide a frame of reference for understanding the specific quotes and the interpretations given. Frames can vary from the lived world of the subjects to the researcher's theoretical models.

2. *The quotes should be contextualized.*

The quotes are fragments of an extensive interview context, which the researcher knows well but which is unknown to the reader. It will be helpful to render the interview context of the quote, including the question that prompted an answer. The reader will then know whether a specific topic was introduced by the interviewer or by the subject, and whether in a way leading to a specific answer.

3. *The quotes should be interpreted.*

The researcher should state clearly what viewpoint a quote illuminates, proves, or disproves. It should not be up to the reader to guess why this specific statement was presented and what the researcher might have found so interesting about it.

4. *There should be a balance between quotes and text.*

The quotes should not make up more than half of the text in a chapter. When interview quotes come from several subjects, each with their particular style of expression, many quotes with few connecting comments and interpretations can appear chaotic and produce a linguistic flicker.

5. *The quotes should be short.*

The maximum length of an interview quote is ordinarily half a page. Readers can loose interest if quotes are too long, often because these long interview passages contain several different dimensions, which makes it difficult for

Box 14.4 Continued

the reader to find a connecting thread. If longer passages are to be presented, they may be broken up and connected with the researcher's comments and interpretations. The exception to this is lively narrative interview passages, which may be read as stories of their own.

6. *Use only the best quote.*

If two or more interview passages illustrate the same point, then use only the best, the one that is the most extensive, illuminating, and well-formulated statement. For documentation it is sufficient to mention how many other subjects expressed the same viewpoints. If there are many different answers to a question, it will be useful to present several quotes, indicating the range of viewpoints.

7. *Interview quotes should be rendered in a written style.*

Verbal transcriptions of oral speech, with its repetitions, digressions, pauses, "hms", and the like, are difficult to grasp when presented in a written form. Interview excerpts in a vernacular form, in particular in local dialects, provide rough reading. To facilitate comprehension, the subject's spontaneous oral speech should in the final report be rendered into a readable, written textual form. The exception is when the linguistic form itself is important to the study, for example, for sociolinguistic interpretations.

8. *There should be a simple signature system for the editing of the quotes.*

The interview passages presented in the final report are more or less edited. Names and places that violate confidentiality will have to be altered. In order that the reader will know about the extent of editing of the quotes, the principles for editing should be given, preferably with a simple list of symbols for pauses, omissions, and the like.

SOURCE: These guidelines are taken from Borum and Enderud (1980) and have been edited and extended here.

listening to patients, becoming experts in attending to and selecting the essential aspects of the many stories they hear. In contrast, interview researchers who are novices in relation to their subject matter and the interview method, may have difficulty in developing a critical and selective distance from what they hear.

Art contains highly condensed and eloquent depictions of the manifold human condition. The quality and impact of a work of art are not enhanced by increasing its size. The short stories of Hemingway would hardly be more telling if they had been twice as long, nor would Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* be more intriguing if painted on a double-sized canvas.

Writing as Social Construction

Current developments in the social sciences have promoted an interest in the writing of research reports. A postmodern movement from knowledge as corresponding to an objective reality to knowledge as a social construction of reality involves a change in emphasis from an observation of, to a conversation and interaction with, a social world. When validation is conceptualized as a social construction of knowledge, with a communal negotiation of its meaning, communication of the findings becomes a focal part of a research project. There is today a renewed interest in rhetorics (Simons, 1989), and there is an emphasis on audience reception in media research.

With an epistemological crisis in the representation of knowledge, with a disbelief in an objective world to be copied and re-presented in a objective form, the question arises: How can a researcher tell his or her story? Three approaches to the crisis of representation in reporting social research will be presented. These are van Maanen's (1988) *Tales of the Field,* from ethnography; Richardson's (1990) explicit, postmodern *Writing Strategies;* and Eisner's (1993) artistic approach to representing educational research.

Van Maanen (1988) has addressed the narrative conventions in ethnography for presenting the social reality of the cultures studied; they are mentioned above in Lather's discussion of different ways of reading a text (Chapter 12, The Quest for "The Real Meaning"). From his own studies of police departments, van Maanen depicts and

illustrates three kinds of tales from the field—realistic, confessional, and impressionistic.

A *realistic* tale is narrated in a dispassionate, third-person voice, with the author absent from the text. The author is "the distant one" in a realistic tale based on an assumed "Doctrine of Immaculate Perception." The natives' point of view is produced through the quotes that characterize realistic tales; the quotes render a story authentic while the many technical and conceptual issues of constructing a transcription from an oral conversation are bypassed. With the ethnographer having the final word on how the culture is interpreted, he or she takes on an interpretative omnipotence.

The *confessional* tale, narrated in the first person, is highly personalized and self-absorbed. Mini-melodramas of hardship in the field endured and overcome, with accounts of what the fieldwork did to the ethnographer, are prominent features of confessional tales.

The realistic tale focuses on the known, and the confessional tale on the knower, a third tale—the *impressionistic*—attempts to bring together the knower and the known by focusing on the activity of knowing. Impressionistic tales present the doing of the fieldwork rather the doer or the done. The impressionistic tale is self-conscious and, as in impressionistic painting, it focuses on an innovative use of techniques and styles, highlighting the episodic, complex, and ambivalent realities studied. The impressionistic tale unfolds event by event, suggesting a learning process.

Van Maanen's (1988) goal in outlining the different styles of writing is not to establish one true way of writing ethnography, but to make ethnographers aware of the classic uses of rhetoric, such as voice, style, and audience, and from this knowledge to select consciously and carefully the voice most appropriate for the tales they want to tell.

Richardson (1990) addresses the issue of how to write a research report with the postmodern realization that all knowledge is socially constructed: "Writing is not simply a true representation of an objective reality, out there, waiting to be seen. Instead, through literary and rhetorical structures, writing creates a particular view of reality" (p. 9). This raises questions of criteria for evaluating a text, such as scientific soundness, aesthetic resonance, and ethical rightness.

With a crisis of representation there is an uncertainty about what constitutes reality. Richardson (1990) takes issue with a modernist belief in the externality of facts and the belief in a neutral, transparent language, where scientific writing lets the reader see the external world as it is. She goes on to discuss how writing up what the researcher has learned is itself a central theoretical and methodological problematic, with the writing itself imparting value: "Language is not simply 'transparent,' reflecting a social reality that is objectively out there. Rather language is a *constitutive* force, creating a particular view of reality" (p. 12). The grammatical, narrative, and rhetorical structures of the language we use bestow meaning and value on the topics of our writing, in poetry and in science.

The author is a narrator, a person who speaks on behalf of others:

> Because writing is always value constituting, there are always the problems of authority and authorship. . . . Narrative explanations, in practice, mean that one person's voice—the writer's—speaks for that of the others. . . . These practices, of course, raise postmodernist issues about the researcher's authority and privilege. For whom do we speak and to whom do we speak, with what voice, to what end, using what criteria? (pp. 26-27)

Going beyond a modernist disregard of the rhetorics of scientific writing, Richardson discusses, on the basis of her own interviews with "the other woman," strategies for shaping qualitative research into texts for different kinds of readers—trade, professional, and mass circulation—and outlines the use of literary devices such as different narratives and metaphors in writing the voices and lives of her interviewees.

In his presidential address to the American Educational Research Association, Eisner (1993) approached the representation of qualitative research from an artistic point of view. "The battle that once ensued to secure a place for qualitative research in education has largely been won. . . . Now the question turns to just what it is that different forms of representation employed within the context of educational research might help us grasp" (p. 8). Representation, in Eisner's use of the term, does not refer to the "mental representation" of cognitive science, but to "the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public form so that they can be stabilized,

inspected, edited, and shared with others" (p. 6). The act of representation is also an act of invention; representational forms provide the means through which meaning is made:

> Stories and narratives by no means exhaust the ways in which the processes of education in and out of schools can be studied or described. Film, video, the multiple displays made possible through computers, and even poetically crafted narrative are waiting in the wings. I believe that we won't have to wait long before they are called to center stage. (p. 8)

These forms, as well as more propositionally formulated descriptions of events, all have the potential to reveal aspects of the world. The different forms of representation are appropriate to different topics, require different skills of the researcher, as well as different competencies for those who are to evaluate the visual, narrative, or poetic forms of representation. Eisner even goes as far as not ruling out the possibility of accepting a novel as a dissertation at the Stanford School of Education.

Enriching Interview Reports

Going beyond the standard requirements for scientific reports, I will now outline some ways of enhancing the readability of reports of interview studies. Such devices become preeminent in the representation of interviews when writing an interview report is conceived as a social construction of knowledge.

JOURNALISTIC INTERVIEWS

One way of reporting interviews is simply as interviews. The social science researcher may here take a lead from journalists, who from the start of each of their interviews will have a specific audience in mind, a limited amount of space, and a nonnegotiable deadline.

The journalist, and also the radio reporter, will in a portrait interview try to build the situation and the interpretations into the interview itself. The local context and social situation may be introduced through the interviewer's questions, for instance: "We are now sitting in the living room of the house you built when you retired, with

a view through the birch forest to the fjord. Could you tell me about . . . ?" The main points and interpretations can develop from the subjects' replies to the journalist's questions, or be suggested by the journalist for confirmation or disconfirmation by the subject. Thus the contextualization and interpretation can be built into the conversation, with both journalist and interviewee more or less having the intended audience in mind. The journalist may later edit the sequence of the statements in order to provide continuity in the interview. The oral form is usually changed into a written form appropriate to the subjects' own linguistic style. The guiding line throughout the interview, the transcribing, and the editing will be to assist interviewed subjects to tell their stories as eloquently as possible to an anticipated audience. Finally, there is the ethical consideration of allowing the subjects to hear or see their edited interview before it is published.

There are exceptions to the above idealized journalistic portrait interview, such as critical demasking interviews. Social science is not the same as journalism, one difference being the responsibility of the researcher to make explicit the procedures used for editing and analyzing the interview. The journalist also has a right to protect his sources, which goes counter to the principle of scientific control of evidence. Yet when it comes to the presentation of results, research interviewers can still learn from good journalism.

DIALOGUES

Interviews can also be reported in the form of dialogues. Again, the information is conveyed by the interview interaction, but formalized and stylistically edited.

Socrates' conversations with his philosophical opponents are classical examples of a philosophical discourse: All of the information is included in the dialogue, with few subsequent interpretations by the reporter—Plato. Historians of philosophy have different views on the extent to which Socrates' dialogues were direct accounts of philosophic disputes that actually took place, or whether they were mainly or entirely constructions by Plato. Independent of their status as verbatim reproductions or literary constructions, the content of the philosophical dialogues continues to interest us today with the critical questions they pose as to the nature of truth, goodness, and beauty. Socrates' dialogues have an eminently artistic form; librarians may

today have problems with whether to categorize them according to their content as philosophy or according to their artistic form as literature.

THERAPEUTIC CASE HISTORIES

A free and reflective approach to conversations and narratives can be found in reports of therapeutic interviews. Freud's clinical case stories are one illustration of an engaging and artistic presentation of conversations: He received the Goethe Prize for his writing. The works of Laing (1962) also show that it is possible through the careful use of brief conversations—theoretically interpreted from double-bind theory, psychoanalytic theory, and existential philosophy—to communicate radically new ways of understanding therapy in a simple understandable form.

In scientific psychology journals a more impersonal, formal style has generally been required. For a personal narrative of experimental studies one has to go to an exception such as Skinner's "A Case Study in Scientific Method" (1961; see also Chapter 5, Openness and Emotions in Interview Studies).

The case study is an exemplar. In the present understanding, the use of exemplars is not a mere popularization of theoretical points or putting some "flesh on the statistical bones" of a study. Rather, the case has its own value as an exemplar: It can serve as a vehicle for learning, as in Løvlie's discussion of ethics (Chapter 6, Ethical Theories). Donmoyer (1990) has pointed to the use of stories in teaching as a halfway house between tacit personal knowledge and formal propositional knowledge. Case stories also serve as a basis for generalization in the legal and clinical fields (Chapter 13, Generalizability).

The relational and tacit aspects of the interview situation are difficult to present in explicit verbal form. The oral knowledge gained from therapy is not easily transformed into written texts. Important facets of therapeutic knowledge are best communicated by anecdotes, case stories, narratives, and metaphors (Polkinghorne, 1992). Therapists' formulation of their experiential knowledge as case stories and narratives become a link between the singular and the general. Such forms of transmission come closer to craftsmanship and art than to the standard norms of formal scientific reporting.

NARRATIVES

While case stories may contain reports of spontaneous stories, the interview report can also be systematically structured with regard to narratives. In the therapeutic tradition, Spence (1982) has applied narrative forms in both the process and the presentation of therapy. Scheflen's (1978) article on the interpretations of Susan's smile (Chapter 11, Meaning Interpretation) was cast in the narrative form of a therapeutic team watching a video recording of a family therapy session, with the therapists in turn contributing new interpretations, and with the narrator, Scheflen, weaving the threads of interpretation into a fabric.

Narratives can serve as a mode of structuring an interview during analysis (Chapter 11, Meaning Structuring Through Narratives). The interview report itself may also have the form of a narrative rendering subjects' spontaneous stories, or their stories as structured into specific narrative modes, or as recast into new stories. In the latter case, the stories are reconstructed with regard to the main points the researcher wants to communicate. In a narrative approach the interviewer may conceive of his or her investigation as storytelling from beginning to end. The narrative interviewer will encourage subjects to tell stories, assist them in developing and clarifying their stories, and during the analysis work out the narrative structures of the interview stories and possibly compose the stories to be told in the final report.

"Narrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation. People can apprehend the world narratively and people can tell about the world narratively" (Richardson, 1990, p. 21). Narratives provide a powerful access to the temporal dimension of human existence, and Richardson discusses the use of different forms of narrative reporting from everyday life, autobiography, biography, and in cultural and collective stories.

METAPHORS

Novelists surpass qualitative researchers in communicating a complex social reality: "Their appeal is that they dramatize, amplify, and depict, rather than simply describe social phenomena. The language itself is often figurative and connotative, rather than solely literal and denotative. Part of this has to do with the use of metaphors, analogies,

symbols, and other allusive techniques of expression" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 221). A study's main points may be more easily understood and remembered when worked into vivid metaphors. Through a metaphor, one kind of thing is understood in terms of another. Psychoanalysis is replete with metaphors, often taken from myths and literature, such as the Oedipus and the Electra complexes. Metaphors also, though often unnoticed, permeate mainstream social scientific writing with terms like theory-"building," knowledge as "enlightening," and so on (see Richardson, 1990).

Miles and Huberman (1994) advocate the use of metaphors in reporting qualitative studies. A metaphor is richer, more complete than a simple description of the data. Metaphors are data-reducing and pattern-making devices. Miles and Huberman thus found in a school improvement study that a remedial reading room felt like an "oasis" for the students sent there. The metaphor "oasis" pulls together separate bits of information: The larger school is harsh and resource-thin, like a desert, and some resources are abundant in the pupils' remedial room, like the water in an oasis.

VISUALIZING

Although interview data are of a verbal nature, the possibilities of presenting the results in visual form should not be overlooked. Quantitative data are today often presented visually in the form of graphs and figures. A comparative choice of standard visual modes of presentation does not exist for qualitative inquiries. There are, however, several options, such as a tree graph of the main categories and their subcategories, diagrams with boxes and arrows showing the main sequences of a story, and the like.

If the researcher has artistic abilities, interview results may be presented as drawings. Going to a different field, a Danish professor of architecture found that he could not convey to his students through lectures or writing what he found essential about modern and postmodern architecture. He then resorted to collages, where he, through his placing of buildings in unexpected contexts, from new angles, such as an opera house under the sea, was better able to comment on the current situation of architecture than through words (Lund, 1990). The collages attained an aesthetic value of their own, and are now being displayed in art galleries.

MODES OF PRESENTATION IN THE PRESENT BOOK

Different forms of writing about interview research have been tried throughout this book. Interview *quotes* were used as illustrations, such as in different forms of transcribing the same statements. Quotes were also used as material in the interpretation of the meaning of grading behaviors as competition and wheedling. Larger sequences of interviews on learning and on grading, as well as therapeutical and philosophical conversations, have been reproduced as *exemplars* of specific forms of interviewing. The grading study has been used throughout the book as a *case* to depict some of the pitfalls and the potentialities of interview research.

There have been some attempts at a *narrative* form, such as the personal account of five emotional phases of an interview project, and a more formal course of an interview investigation was pictured as going through seven stages. The answer to the 1,000-page question was in the form of a *deconstructive tale* where the presuppositions of the question were destructed and alternative constructions for enriching the interview analysis were put forth. A short *imagined conversation* was constructed to illustrate controversies over ownership of meaning. *Metaphors* have been used to condense and profile certain meanings, such as the miner and traveler metaphors of research interviews and the Scylla and Charybdis dilemma of therapeutic inquiries. The figure of two profiles forming the outline of a vase was an attempt to *visualize* the interrelational nature of interview research.

In keeping with a traveler metaphor of interview research, the present book can be read as a travel report about interview inquiries. It has outlined a travel route through seven stages from an original idea to the finished report. Practical advice for other travelers in the field has been offered, real and imagined conversations taking place on the way have been reported, and reflections on the events encountered have been provided.

When interview travelers return home from their conversations with the people they met, their tales may enter into new conversations with the research community and the general public. The next, concluding, chapter is introduced by two conversations constructed to illustrate contrasting receptions of travel reports about interview inquiries.

PART IV

CONCLUSION

Throughout this book I have treated interviews and interview research as forms of conversation. Interviews have been regarded literally as inter views. The interview researcher was depicted in the first chapter as a traveler in a foreign country, learning through his or her conversations with the inhabitants. When the traveler returns home with tales about encounters in the distant land, he or she may discover that listeners react rather differently to these stories. In the concluding chapter I turn from the interviewers' original conversations with their subjects to their conversations with others about the interviews.