

5.4. Situated Mediations in Ethnography

The concept of situated mediations can also be applied to my ethnographic work. During my first field days, as described in *Preparing* (Chapter 4), I learnt what tools and methods are best for conducting fieldwork with the biologists, what I can observe directly, where I need to ask for explanations, and what remains entirely invisible to me. I had to enskill my sensory competence on two levels: On the one hand, I learnt how to observe the birds, albeit less competently than the biologists, but still in such a way that I was able to follow their judgements and practices. On the other hand, I needed to learn how to observe the biologists during their fieldwork.

Where do I position myself the best? Do I attempt to align with their gaze when they look up at the sky through their binoculars, or do I simply study them while they do so? I extended my gaze in the same way they did with tools, such as my notebooks and camera. However, I had to develop a practice of mediating between my observations and documentations here as well. I needed to develop a system that helped me document and remember the field situation that would simultaneously serve as data. I had to learn which tool to employ in which moment and develop a routine for handling them in this specific field situation. At times I had to be fast, and at other times I had to face the cold and remove my notebook, take off my gloves, and start taking notes. Sometimes I had to carry my camera in one hand while skiing, hoping that I would not fall in the snow – which happened on several occasions.

The more I was immersed in the field, the less I employed tools, as the tool would always distract me from something else. Thus, I ended up mostly taking notes in my field notebook along with occasional photographs. However, both also worked as tools for framing and guiding my observations and selecting data points to store and take home. Even so,

my data collection was less formalised than that of the biologists; in my case, they were part of the observational apparatus and could be considered situated mediations. Even more so than for the biologists, this situatedness was guided by my specific interest, disciplinary knowledge, and method of observation. My study is highly dependent on me, and I cannot simply be exchanged, as the (natural) scientific narrative of reproducibility claims. I am an inevitable and irreplaceable part of my apparatus of knowledge production. Replacing me means obtaining a different result.

Qualitative data collection also means deciding what situation is qualified to respond to my research interest and how to document this situation best to turn it into data. Unlike the biologists who predefine exactly what needs to be observed and what data must be collected, I follow a self-determined framework. However, I must still decide in almost every situation whether the information is relevant. And the *what* determines the way I may document it, thus turning it into data, which will later act as mediators between me and the field. While the biologists employ technologies for data collection as a means to an end without reflecting on the effects thereof and their role in shaping their data collection, I do the opposite. I continuously reflect on what way of documenting best serves the situation. Do I direct my camera at the biologists, which may cause them to behave differently, or do I simply take notes, bring them home, and immediately make an entry in my field diary, which I do every evening after fieldwork? In short: I reflect on the situations I create within my situated mediations during their employment. In this sense, I have developed routines for the employment of my data-collection practices, which allow me flexibility to react to the situations I encounter in the field. Simultaneously, I employ data collection as a framing practice to ensure that I do not collect arbitrary data.

Lastly, ethnographic research often follows grounded theory rather than a strict predefined research question. Thus, the process is iterative, whereas grounded theory is adjusted to the actual field situation, which can be observed. Along with this, the research questions are reformulated, and data collection depends more on the ethnographer's intuition. It is also based on sensory attention, experience, and a partial perspective, as well as mediations between field, discourse, and practice.

5.5. *Participant Behaviour Observation*

To consider multispecies observational apparatus from a methodological perspective, I conclude with a rather speculative play on the terminology of the formal methods of observation. In doing so, I aim to highlight the agencies of observation at stake. For this, I refer to my own participant observation, which I juxtapose with the behavioural observation study of the biologists.

Both research methods engage with observational settings and are thus bodily techniques that can be advanced and extended by technologies, as previously discussed. While one focuses on an observation method that engages with the research subject by participating, the research subject does not define the nature of the involvement, but instead describes the focus of the observation, the behaviour. In relation to what I have discussed earlier, I argue that, in both cases, a (sensory) involvement and (bodily) interaction between the observer and observed is occurring, even though these are based on different prerequisites. One is a human–human interaction between the biologists and me, the ethnographer, while the other is a human–non-human interaction between the biologists and the birds. Each interaction has different agencies.