his own biases, assumptions, and cultural baggage. He might ask himself these questions about his descriptions, as all of us should about our fieldsites:

- Why do I focus on this element of the landscape and not that?
- What is my reason for narrowing my gaze to any specific place?
- What spaces have I rejected as I've narrowed my gaze?
- Why do I use the metaphors and descriptions I do?
- Which metaphors and descriptions did I abandon as inappropriate?
- Where in my fieldnotes do I find evidence for this description?
- What have I rejected, and why?

Spatial details are an important part of the fieldworker's data. All fieldworkers describe their informants in a setting, working from an abundance of evidence: fieldnotes, photos, maps, and background history gathered over time. Researchers cannot lean entirely on visual details; the ethnographic "eye" should also record sounds, textures, tastes, and smells. Important details also come from noticing and documenting, as Glassie does, conditions of color, weather, light, shape, time, season, atmosphere, and ambiance. Choosing details is an act of **selective perception**. As we write, we revise our worldviews. The point of doing fieldwork is to learn to see not just the other but ourselves as well. The spatial gaze demands that we look—and then look back again at ourselves.

Writing a Verbal Snapshot

BOX 16

Purpose

Your fieldnotes are a rich source of data from which you can select key details to begin to create verbal snapshots for your project. Choose a small portion of your fieldsite to describe for this exercise. Whether you have recorded your data as a list, double-entry fieldnotes, or as a narrative, read and review those fieldnotes, and underline, tag, or highlight five to 10 details that stand out for you at your fieldsite. What detail did your informant call to your attention that you might not have noticed? What is the most typical? The most unusual? One that stood out for you?

Writing a place description involves more than making an inventory or listing details. Your description needs to suggest the overall sense of place you are trying to understand and should mirror your informants' perspective as well. Sometimes one small detail from your data can expand into a rich image that reflects a dominant theme within the culture. For example, Glassie (see page 186)

gives us the image of Joe sweeping the hearth with a "besom of heather bound round with twine," which evokes the poetic and domestic sides of Irish culture. It would have been a quite different description had he written, "Joe swept the floor with a homemade broom." Such a sentence would imply more of an outsider's perspective than an insiders', and one of the goals of fieldworking is to include your informants' worldview.

Action

Comb through your data to determine categories of sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes; weather, atmospheric conditions, colors, light, shapes. Categorizing will help you write your description, and it will also help you fill in the missing data in your fieldwork. Noticing the gaps helps you determine where, or in what ways, your data might be incomplete. "Do I need different sensory details? More about the setting at different times of day? Do I want to focus on a certain spot in this place where important activity is going on? What details do I need more of? What did I forget to take in?" Asking these questions will help you decide if you want to return to your fieldsite to gather more evidence.

After writing a short description based on your notes about setting details, share a page or two with a colleague to see if you've successfully created a sense of place and to discuss what you might research further. As you respond to your partner, point out your most telling details. Which details evoke larger images? Which details uncover cultural information about the place? Which details seem to represent the informant's perspective? Do any specific words seem like insider language?

Response

Jason Ceynar's fieldwork project, "Life in the Stacks," was a study of the culture of the university library where he worked. Although his focus was the stories his coworkers told, the settings were key places where librarians and aides interacted (or, in this case, didn't interact). This is Jason's description of the periodical sorting room:

> When I walk into the bound periodical sorting room, my feeling of claustrophobia disappears. In the stacks I'm trapped on all sides by towering bookshelves; in here I'm able to move around with relative ease. The shelves in this room are pushed up against the walls. I always look forward to sorting periodicals because of the relative cheerfulness of these surroundings. The lighting in this room is much brighter than it is out in the stacks. This really perks me up after an hour of tedious reshelving. The room's color scheme also puts the atmosphere in the stacks to shame. The rosy-beige colored walls and floor tiles that alternate between burgundy and light brown are far superior to the stacks' dull gray decor. I try to spend as much time as I can sorting periodicals so I don't have to leave this atmosphere.

Today I'm the only one in the sorting room. I wander over to the wooden table in the middle of the room, which is piled high with books. I move some of the books aside to read my coworkers' graffiti, which adorns the table top: "Spam," "For a good time call Mark," "Ivory Soap," "United we stand, Divided we fall." A coworker walks in, and I concern myself with looking busy. I've never talked to this girl; she likes to keep to herself. We exchange a quick glance and a smile and go about our business. The reshelving room is normally a social area. It's one of the few places that we can talk freely while we work. We work alone in the stacks, so it's a welcome change to have some human interaction. I'm disappointed that I won't have somebody to converse with today. I sit down on a stool and begin to put the "A" books in order. I notice scuff marks on the wall behind the backless shelves—red, brown, green, and blue—probably made by colorful bound journals that were carelessly tossed on the shelves. A newspaper crinkles behind me; my introverted friend must be taking a break. To my left is a wall of windows that looks into a hallway that leads to the English as a foreign language department. Occasionally I make eye contact with people as they walk down this hall. It's uncomfortable; our gaze seems to say "We're not supposed to see each other. This is unnatural."

A few of the ceiling tiles are out of place, I notice when I look above me. I can see wires, vents, and insulation. It reminds me of the disrepair out in the stacks, and I remember how lucky I am to have been assigned to the periodical sorting room today. A small white fan whirs in the corner. Ever since I've worked here, this fan has been on, even when it's freezing in the library. Nobody turns it off because nobody knows who turns it on. The paper crinkles behind me again, and I hear my coworker leave the room. As I resume my sorting, I wonder if that girl thought it was strange that I've been writing madly in my notebook. Aaaah, with this silence, I'll never know.

The editor of our book, Joelle Hann, visited Brazil while we were revising this edition of *FieldWorking*. Before she left, she became interested in how the fieldworking process provides a lens for everyday life and decided to take pictures and fieldnotes on her trip from a focused perspective—as a new fieldworker, not just as a traveler. Here are some excerpts from her extensive notes, as well as the photographs that accompany them. Notice how Joelle captures the sights and sounds of Brazil from an outsider's point of view and how she converses with Cacique, a taxi driver, about his cultural artifacts to learn more about his culture from an insider's point of view.