Mulit-sited Ethnography:  Five or Six Things I Know About It Now*


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I want to use this opportunity to develop a discussion of the idea of multi-sited

ethnography by engaging with the reactions to it that I have perceived , primarily  among

anthropologists. These reactions express an interesting mix of doubt and hope—an

anxiety structure-- for innovation in the practices of research in the classic tradition of

fieldwork/ethnography that continues, perhaps  more than ever, to give shape and identity

to social/cultural anthropology. However, in answering for  multi-sited ethnography, I do

not  want  to merely offer a justification for it or argue for its feasibility, but  rather I view

the problems of its implementation, and the kinds of  imagination this requires,as an

opening to   a thoroughgoing argument for the need to reform, reinvent, or redesign  the

deeply engrained aesthetic and culture of method  for certain kinds of  research horizons

in which anthropology is now deeply involved. These are referenced by such terms as the

anthropology of globalization, the anthropology of the contemporary, and   calls for

public anthropology, among others.

My concerns here operate at the level of metamethod or  the  ways  in which within a

particular professional culture of research, certain norms, forms, and indeed  aesthetics of

practice, usually communicated more by lore, storytelling, example, and tacit means, than

by an explicit discourse on method, determine what counts as ethnography.  Indeed, the

development of ethnography (and fieldwork)  in anthropology has primarily been

governed within this realm of professional lore and metamethod. So, when one considers the making of ethnography multi-sited, the aesthetics of normal work in a disciplinary context matters quite a bit.

Attempts to do multi-sited ethnography push ethnography (and the culture of fieldwork) to the limits of its classic professional aesthetic or 'feel' (expressed in all the quite informal, but crucially regulative shop-talk about what is and is not good ethnography), for which I will let the Malinowskian paradigm or complex stand as a short hand in this discussion. Much social and cultural anthropology still operates within the limits governed by the Malinowskian complex in the operation of professional culture, and I have no complaint about this, but also there is nothing further , at least for me, that is particularly interesting to be said about method or metamethod here. The ethnography of peoples, places, and cultures in situ, and their immense contemporary transformations, is, piecemeal, alive and vigorous in all sorts of interdisciplinary venues which define anthropology's participations and research agendas . However, particularly over the last decade anthropologists have also been trying to do something quite different with ethnography, and not with just ethnography plus other methods, which is a common solution to the limits challenge of making ethnography multi-sited. This entails the valorization of methodological bricolage and spectacular performance which are cultural studies styles that have had a profound influence on the anthropological culture of method. I would say that an unreconstructed Malinowskian practice does indeed make the idea of multi-sited ethnography as the major modality of basic research difficult to practice. Yet, as part of the responses which I will discuss in a moment, there is also a considerable desire for and attraction to the idea of multi-sited

ethnography    within  this very same tradition. There is something about the way

traditional units or objects of study present themselves nowadays, e.g. culture, cultures,

community, subjects, and the near revolution in theory,  that has immensely complicated

the  way these classic terms are  understood  operationally, and   that makes one want to

conceive of  Malinowskian ethnography within  time-space frames that instill pragmatic

doubt about its very feasibility under the current regime of research norms.  Ethnography,

deeply, is a certain sort of mise-en -scene, and when its conditions cannot be produced,

its virtues are counterfeit. With this position, multi-sited ethnography  is very difficult to

do indeed within the current way research is taught in anthropology.

   My particular vantage point  on the  challenges that multi-sited  ethnography poses to

anthropological research has been as a supervisor of  doctoral dissertations over the past

20 years—a period of   tectonic change in the way classic training is  instilled by

negotiation with student talent of shifting  demographic character  and intellectual

motivation.   I see  the dissertation as a strategic site in several respects.  The  creation

and implementation  of an alternative practice of fieldwork out of the Malinowskian

tradition is possible where disciplinary metamethod has  most effect—where

ethnographers are made at the  critical point in the mode of professional reproduction.

In any case considerable  change is already well  under way—it simply lacks sufficient

articulation and thus design.  There was a rupture in the 1980s even though the culture of

method or metamethod  has continued  authoritatively, and students are now  muddling

through —often very interestingly –in multi-sited space , with skeins of theory,

traditional  practices that bound projects of research, and familiar, comfortable  topoi like

identity and exchange that  sustain the anthropological framing in  research ventures that

could be very well (and I think should) be about something else, in terms of idioms found inside the realm of fieldwork itself. Reading new work—how projects of changing fieldwork challenges still manage to fit into the genre of ethnography such as it is—and also studying the muddling through at the very beginning of careers, at the core of the training model, have been for me the most interesting materials to think with in contemplating multi-sited ethnography as a distinctive paradigm of alternative research practices, , while still true in specific ways to the Malinowskian complex.

Now I turn to the responses to the idea of multi-sited ethnography. I understand making ethnography multi-sited to challenge four pillars of the still regnant Malinowskian complex.

Foremost, there is the worry about the further dilution of an already diluted practice since the ruptures of the 1980s with past disciplinary agendas and especially in the doing of apprentice research projects which launch careers. The Malinowskian ethos of ethnographic research as focused, sustained, intensive life in communities of distinctive difference ,and its US emphasis on interpretation—working through the logics of subjects' perspectives as the mode of developing ethnographic analyses from fieldwork—are endangered. Lurking here is the idea that anthropology will become even more like cultural studies and its interdisciplinary inspirations which in a sense captured its imagination and research agendas after the 1980s.

Second, and relatedly there is the fear that ethnography will become more about systems, institutions, formal organizations, the structures of Western rationality , progress,

modernity, and the thought of experts, than about the conditions of common experience, observed as everyday life in its own idiom. Indeed, multi-sited ethnography has been most creative, critical, and interesting where it has been involved with the study of distributed knowledge systems (and mostly within the growing field of science and technology studies, but not only that; see the 2004 volume Global Assemblages for a sense of the diverse structural , systemic interests –political, economic, scientific, etc— brought together in multi-sited imaginaries).

But there is something uncomfortable for the anthropological ethos in this delving into the plans and practices of bureaucracies and their protocols of substantive rationality. Take the recent work of Marilyn Strathern. After work on new reproductive technologies, keeping it symbolically anthropological by skillfully connecting this research comparatively and conceptually to her established Melanesian work, she has moved boldly into the study of audit and policy cultures, homo academicus today, the ethnography of her own frames of work in knowledge production, without such 'markings' that guarantee its anthropological identity. Following her own student Annelise Riles into the ethnographic study of the "already known" –the predicaments of bureaucrats and designers of interdisciplinary programs, and how the knowledge they produce is circulated and dispersed--Strathern evidences a sensitivity that what she is doing may no longer seem ethnographic in the anthropological tradition. She is in a terrain where there is nothing 'nail-biting' –meaning the life or death situations of the everyday which create interest in ethnography in anthropology. She refuses either the identity or exchange markers of "otherness" that make ethnography anthropological these days in unsettling,or defamiliarizing, 'natural' understandings of familiar

institutional terrains.  Strathern  delves into the known , or simply more technical (read boring?) worlds of bureaucracies  for a different kind of  purer ethnographic   result, true to what is found in those sites.  My point  here   is that she is ironically uncomfortable in her  ethnography   in its possible incapacity to attract  a readership expecting ethnography in either its  more familiar, frankly exoticizing  idiom, or its 'ordinary life' idiom.  I wouid argue instead that it is precisely in the yet to be articulated  metamethod of  multi-sited design    as a  context for such pioneering  work that Strathern  and others are doing that   a vital, innovative  continuity  with the Malinowskian tradition depends. Strathern's gesture of   demur thus conveys something of the stakes of  making ethnography  multi-sited—to create a broader disciplinary constituency for   its most innovative  contemporary  work, by not using the well established technique of   the tying of such projects to the traditional ethnographic archive, in the way that Strathern did in her earlier work  for the sake of  a different kind of result that is not always or only about the usual—identity, symbolic expression, or exchange. In sum, multi-sited work does not guarantee that ethnography will be about its expected tropes. This threatens the identity of ethnography itself but also produces a sense of excitement in  finding new terms for ethnography within the doing of fieldwork itself.



Third, and relatedly, there is the worry  that the demonstration  of significant difference, (e.g, through the technique of defamilarization) as a signature result or product of ethnographic  research will vanish in multi-sited research, that ethnography will lose its distinctive rhetoric with which its functions are deeply bound up. Again, there is  the

worry here of ethnography as entry into the already known (the dynamics of policy, media, academic problematics which attract anthropological research projects). What is distinctive about the anthropological project—that it works through perspectives, categories, logics of subjects who are presumed to be other -- leads to a liking aesthetically for the argument or result that produces defamiliarization or unsettling displacement. Multi-sited ethnography, oriented to process and connections, seems to threaten this, when the subject's perspective is no longer so clearly other, but in the realm of the already known. The past habit of Malinowskian ethnography has been to take subjects as you find them in natural units of difference—cultures, communities; the habit or impulse of multi-sited research is to see subjects as differently constituted, as not products of essential units of difference only, but to see them in development—displaced, recombined, hybrid in the once popular idiom, alternatively imagined. Such research pushes beyond the situated subject of ethnography toward the system of relations which define them. Such subjects are potentially paraethnographers of their own conditions, and the intellectual partners of ethnographers when found—counterparts rather than others. Such subjects are key to the distinctive nature of multi-sited research. In contemporary settings, what is shared is the perception that local realities are produced elsewhere,through dispersed relations and agencies, generating a multi-sited imaginary, one that is practical for the subject, and that is a found design of a mobile ethnography for the anthropologist.

And fourth, culture area expertise remains basic to the formation of the anthropological ethnographer, and to a degree, it calls the tune in how multi-sited ethnography might in a

preferred way  develop in this discipline.  Muti-sited research incorporates  factors of

systematic cultural distinction but  does not give  them priority—so there is the worry

that the emergence of this form of ethnography  might  undermine a component  so basic

to the Malinowskian complex.   There have been many developments in culture analysis

in recent  years that have made more complex any area frame to expertise (area

specialists are certainly not what they were in the 50s through the 70s) , but the proposal

of multi-sited ethnography troubles the heart of this construction of professional identity.

Multi-sited ethnography  indeed tends to cut across the geography  of area studies, but

without denying the factoral importance of  particular cultural histories.  It flexibly has  it

both ways, or all ways, but this hardly promotes  the capital of area expertise itself  which

is  another of the pillars of being a traditional  ethnographer  of peoples  and places.


So—primarily, dilution, and less  articulated  worries about the  observable everyday,

about the demonstration of difference as a result, and  about the diminishing  of the core

importance of  peoples and places cultural expertise —this is the anxiety reaction

formation to the idea of  multi-sited ethnography, in sum.


Now as against all of these concerns about the effects of making ethnography multi-sited

in any radical or unconventional  way , with concern about "dilution" being perhaps the

coded way to raise this whole complex, there  is also perceptible a real hope for   the

multi-sited idea as overcoming  the felt limitation of ethnography—could it be more than

just the production of case studies in the service of the agendas of whoever or whatever

project that find  them interesting or useful? If its own professional community is not a

reliable judge of what it produces,can ethnography generate its own self-sustaining constituencies and contexts of reception within its own research design? This recreates the questions about the reflexive, dialogic nature of ethnographic research raised in the 1980s but limited then to the classic Malinowskian mise-en-scene. These questions are now reformulated and addressed within a different terrain and design for ethnography suggested by the idea of multi-sitedness.

If ethnography no longer serves the ethnographic archive or knowledge bank, then it either serves other broader agendas or can create its own through the very practices of ethnography, derived from the major points of the 1980s critiques. So there is a welcome ambition in the idea of multi-sited ethnography , a speculation, that would expand the intellectual functions of post 1980s ethnographic research, despite the doubts about its practicality and its fealty to the powerful aesthetics of professional culture. What intellectual weight and ambition can the ethnographic project bear, beyond the case study? Crossing between zones of expert and common knowledge as most multi-sited projects entail generates functions for ethnography beyond the analytic and descriptive, characteristic of the case study. This is the warrant for programs of trying to experiment in imaginative ways with the basic premises of the Malinowskian complex such that multi-sited ethnography does not mean mere extensions of them into added-on sites but a more theoretical rethinking of fieldwork itself. I now want to give a taste of this more radical design challenge for a reformed post Malinowskian modality for multi-sited ethnography from my own recent thinking.

My initial response to the worried reactions to multi-sited ethnography was to pose pragmatically a doctrine of "ethnography through thick and thin", and there are still norms to be advocated in relation to this, such as a a strong norm and accountability for intended,structured partiality and incompleteness in ethnographic research designs. Where the strength of ethnography in multi-sited projects is variable , it should not be merely excused (e.g. as problems with differential access to certain sites or subjects), but should be justified by ethnographic design and argument itself (e.g., in certain projects, certain sites are more strategic for intensive investigation than others). It is interesting and important to argue why some sites should be treated "thickly" and others 'thinly" in terms of the loci and design of particular projects. So within the "dilution" worry is actually an entire unexplored level of thinking ethnographically about a research problem, where the traditional subject or conditions of ethnography is not stereotypic. So thick and thin is as much a theoretical question as a matter of fieldwork pragmatics.

Once the idea that differentrelated sites can be designed differently for ethnographic treatment, then I moved into questions about the alternative ways that multi-sitedness can emerge as a research space, not given by existing representations or understandings of processes, but rather as mapping of a space or field of social action that is found in the field itself through closer work and collaboration with certain subjects. And this finding of multi-sited ethnography through the orienting work of ethnography itself suggests a modality of research that leads to a restatement of many aspects of the Malinowskian complex. This is where I have come in my own thinking about multi-sitedness as a provocation to reform the Malinowskian complex with the shaping and supervision of

graduate dissertations in mind for students who come to anthropology with a background in the interdisciplinary movements which have so shaped its agendas over the past two decades.

Multi-sited Ethnography: Five or Six Things I Know About It Now

I want now to present in schematic and fragmentary form a certain line or progression of thinking about a modality for multi-sited ethnography that is a reform or reimagination of the Malinowskian complex in which I was brought up as a student, but for which to pass to present students requires precisely forms and norms of ethnography that are stimulated by the emergence of multi-sited conditions of research.

1.What a project of multi-sited ethnography conceived and pursued by an individual is capable of.

Some have suggested that the potential problems of multi-sited ethnography might be resolved with the return (or increase from the few well known traditional examples) of collective, coordinated research projects like the Rhodes Livingston Institute, the Chiapas project etc. Maybe. But the formal structure and forms of ethnographic research projects in anthropology remain resolutely individual, and I see this continuing into the foreseeable future since it is so programmed into the making of anthropologists professionally. However in my own thinking about a modality for multi-sited research, research becomes de facto collective in at least two ways—by the derivation of the

space of fieldwork from orienting , strategic collaborations at the outset of fieldwork, and by the incorporation of forms of reception within the frame of research itself into the reporting and results of ethnography itself to academic and other constituencies. The need to develop forms and norms in research design to anticipate and manage this collective nature of ethnography , despite its individualistic form in professional culture, is at the core of reforming Malinowskian method in multi-sited proiects. These same issues were strongly raised in the critiques of the 1980s, but those critiques stayed within the classic Malinowskian complex. Multi-sitedness displaces the anthropologist-other binary, and creates collective aspects of research that must become a standard part of authoritative standards for ethnography. At the moment the revised tropes of ethnographic authority after the 1980s critiques offer some capacity, yet still very impaired, to express the collective relations of research on which the design and conduct of multi-sited research vitally depends.

2. Perhaps the key question for me is the alternative ways in which the multi-sited field materializes in research. The multi-sided field is either conventionally a map of a process in various senses, but a map that is already understood and relied on by being expressed in some scholarly or academic literature, or this field is found in the field itself , even in full knowledge of the academic literatures, through an orienting ethnographic process conceived as collaboration. In the formal mode, multi-sited ethnography emerges from the objective following of a known conventional process, or an unconventional process—following a commodity chain/productive process, migration networks, or following a plot/narrative , a metaphor, or circulation of an idea. This is the kind of

multi-sited research that I discussed in my 1995 article. It challenges the Malinowskian complex but does not radically deconstruct and reconstruct it—Bourdieu's scholastic point of view is sustained, rather than seeking epistemological mutually interested alliances with partners or counterparts as subjects, or with research "in the wild" , as Michel Callon has termed it.

During the past year on a resident research fellowship, I have been interested in developing a modality for multi-sited ethnography that embraces this more radical rethinking of Malinowskian premises. This involves understanding the multi-sited field emerging from strategic collaborations with which fieldwork begins. The thorough discussion of the conditions and evolution of such a collaboration is at the core of working out the particular modality of multi-sited research in which I am interested. The conceptual apparatus and design of a research project is derived not from academic literatures or theories, but from ethnography itself by working through a selected subjects' or group's paraethnographic* take on a problem cognitively shared with the ethnographer. There is much to be filled in here about issues of research practice: how collaborative alliance emerges, the various ways the connection to paraethnography can be established, what paraethnography, in practice, is ,etc. Most ethnography today passes through zones of specialized ,technical knowledge before it defines the traditional fieldsite; it can no longer afford to ignore these existing representations in deference to the authority of the academic. What is distinctive about anthropology and precious to preserve in the Malinowskian ethos of ethnography is the pretense and claim to be able to work through subject positions, perspectives, and meanings in order to establish one's

own knowledge.  What produces this commitment at the core of ethnography   in multi-sited  research is the strategic engagement  with paraethnographic perspectives in research,epistemologically equivalent to one's own, and  working through them  literally into other sites of  fieldwork.  Independent ethnographic  knowledge  is a derivation of this process.

There is a literal and figurative odyssey here that defines this way of thinking about multi-sited research.   The design of such research is reflexive in a sense that goes beyond the way this  operation in traditional research was raised in the 1980s critiques  and which has now become thoroughly  clichéd as a norm of conventional practice.
In the Malinowskian complex, reflexivity becomes the norms and standards for the designing  of ethnography  through collaborations and eventual departures from them. It is the necessary account  of how the multi-sited  field emerges in any project.  In this view , multi-sitedness arises from how one  sort of subject (often experts but not necessarily) sees the world versus how another, the anthropologist, sees the putatively same world.  Out of this relation comes the literal movement of the anthropologist beyond it, but  within the ken so to speak of this strategic relation.

Now there  are many ways to express this modality.  The one  I have  been cultivating is the idea that the field exists in a world of distributed knowledge systems and this is often the frame and subject  of finding paraethnography. In the anthropologist's striving for a labile multi-sited ethnography  that works through processes and in locales , distributed knowledge systems encompass,  but replace  the dominating conceptual  role of culture.

To give a taste of this, I quote a recent email exchange between myself and a former student, Kim Fortun, known for her 2001 book Advocacy After Bhopal. It represents a brilliantly evolved rendition of improvisations through the stimulus of the necessity to write a book for tenure about what a multi-sited project of the sort in which I am interested here might be within the standard professional work process in how careers begin. She came to Bhopal three years after the accident in 1984 and lived for two years in a house of activists working on social justice and environmental issues. She wrote her dissertation on the work of activists at Bhopal but even then the multi-sited dimensions for the ethnography were apparent (during that period when rhetoric was a powerful analytic influence in generating ethnography, her work was on the forms of everyday and specialized writing that these activists produced) . She actually wrote a dissertation on advocacy as a mode of thought and practice, but advocacy itself encompasses a kind of paraethnography, as she demonstrates. From Bhopal over the succeeding years she followed the reach of that paraethnography elsewhere in diverse settings but always in conversation with and amendment of the Bhopal material. The published ethnography, a messy text, an experiment pushing the limits of the ethnographic form while keeping it under control, is in conversation , in a double voiced way, with both the 'from the field' discourses of advocacy and the relevant academic literatures as well. It is clearly Malinowskian in its anthropology, but within a practice of ethnographic research still lacking articulation, standards, and expectations.


An exchange with Kim Fortun, May 2, 2005.

George Marcus (Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences ):

This has been a pretty good year--me alone with my thoughts-- I find that in order to get into the reformist project on ethnographic metamethod that I have in mind, I have to give a reader a fairly clear idea up front of the sort of world that fieldworkers (especially apprentices/neophtytes) encounter now. I don't want to use assemblages, regimes of living, emergent forms of life-- these are ok but they reflect the STS (social studiesof science) project. I want something more generic-- I like the notion of encountering and finding oneself amidst 'distributed knowledge systems' rather than 'other cultures'--

The template for teaching students ethnography is still that they go out into the world and find other cultures--some do --the Malinowskian scene-- but many more (those who I tend to supervise )tend to find themselves in the middle of distributed knowledge systems, which is the way that other cultures manifestly present themselves these days anyhow . These are not the contexts of culture in villages and communities etc-- but the form that culture takes so that even if you are not studying experts first ,or as such, and are working in villages, you are also operating in distributed knowledge systems which are the challenge of fieldwork to figure out and operate within. Ethnography needs a new set of understandings of itself as metamethod still in the anthropological tradition to come to terms with this, etc.

Anyhow, what I need here is some stimulation about how to develop the idea of distributed knowledge systems--something you don't map completely before

fieldwork but something you map as a function of fieldwork itself.

Kim Fortun (RPI);

On distributed knowledge systems....  a few things come to mind, some of which may already be obvious to you … but to start....

Thinking about culture as manifested through distributed knowledge systems seems to me related to, or a partial effect of, thinking about the (ethnographic) subject as manifest at the nexus of cross-cutting discursive, political-economic, cultural  currents. .. So ethnographic subjects need to be accounted for as nodes in  distributed knowledge systems  Each has her own specificity; each subject is a tangle of a particular set of forces.  So there is "culture" in the trans-individual sense, but it settles into different subjects in different ways.  And these are particular kinds of subjects -- very subject to change because they operate in always moving currents of information, political economy, etc.  The need for active sense making,  often without known to be reliable criteria, is incessant. There is a lot of figuring it out as these subjects go.  So it is about knowledge making, rather than knowledge holding.  So what these subjects DON'T know, and often know they don't know, is critical -- and different than the simply conceived "enlightenment subject."   So to understand "the subject" in ethnographic projects, one must map the distributed knowledge systems that constitute and continue to iterate them.  The object of ethnographic inquiry is thus a moving object.

 (I once wrote about these kinds of subjects as subject to the "aleatory" in the sense that John Cage uses the term -- i.e. subjects confronted with much that

conventionally would be considered noise, but set up to listen anyway -- in my case, to try to understand toxics, which conventional scientific idioms have a hard time hearing.)

But understanding subjects in ethnographic projects is often not the ends, but the means -- i.e. the means to understand distributed knowledge systems themselves, using engagement with subjects (conceived as above) as the way into these systems. This is what I imagine we were up to in the Late Editions project. And what I think you and Mike (Fischer) told us to do in the World Historical Political Economy chapter of Anthro as Cultural Critique….

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In keeping ethnography accountable to subject perspectives, a distributed knowledge system is not mappable outside the derivation of it from subject points of view. Keeping ethnography ethnographic in the Malinowskian sense means not falling for the temptation to allow given networks or technical systems to be the objective space of ethnography. For example, connected/virtual IT relations and networks suggest a natural context for multi-sited ethnography, but often, the tracks of ongoing processes in relation to such systems are not isometric with the course that multi-sited research takes in its development. The map of such research is to be found in the collaboration,' native points of view' that are found in fieldwork as orienting ethnography.

3. The dissertation and the process that produces it today is the most strategic site not only for seeing new norms and forms of multi-sited research in the making, by means of muddling through, mistakes and successes as well, but also for bringing about reforms of metamethod in anthropology. After all the dissertation is where practicing ethnography feels the weight of the Malinowskian complex most authoritatively today. Dissertation fieldwork and ethnography are where the shape of anthropological research gets collectively and normatively defined in the shadow of its tradition (in fact at present, how this is so is not a straightforward story of indoctrination, but rather a more complex story of the ways in which anthropology has accepted and negotiated influential interdisciplinary models over the past two decades). If basic change is to come it would be in this context.

Systematic discussions are needed of the institution of explicit norms of collaboration: the nature of such relations,how to extend, abandon, or move beyond them in a project of research, and what they are expected to produce as data   The use of theory in setting the analytic frames and writing of much ethnography today is a place holder , I would argue, for better practices in the pursuit of inquiry that has a multi-sited character. Theory substitutes for modalities of inhabiting ethnographically relevant, vital sites for certain projects. This can most clearly be seen in how contemporary complex subjects are rhetorically produced in the dissertation process within the authority of the Malinowskian training complex.


Thus, given the significance of graduate pedagogy in understanding the desire for and resistance to multi-sited ethnography as well as it being an ideal laboratory to work

out its dynamics within the Malinowskian complex, I am using  dissertations  that I have supervised with others    as a data set  for thinking  through the modality I have in mind,.

4, What follows is a sketch, in question-response  form,  of  key metamethodological  issues that address the worries and hopes about the practice of multi-sited ethnography.  At  stake in them is  preserving  the  'feel', aesthetic, and distinction of ethnography  despite the considerable changes that multi-sited projects engender in the  Malinowskian  scene of ethnography.

Questions:

What  prevents the  fieldwork from becoming overwhelmed by the multiplication  of  sites; what gives multi-sited fieldwork a  boundedness and an intensity?

What preserves the  sense  of working through subjects' points of view rather  than  mainly  being in conversation with social theory or other studies of social science with  subjects'   points of views  configured  as "data"?

What replaces the trope of 'being there' so central to conventional  ethnographic  authority, of   inhabiting place?

What preserves the sense of difference, of  the favored trope of 'defamliarization'  as a  mode of argument in multi-sited projects?

Responses:

Here is a set of propositions for the practice of one possible modality of multi-sited ethnography (the one that I have been thinking through) with the special vulnerability of the ethnography as dissertation in mind:

i. Multi-sited projects potentially overwhelm the norms of intensive, patient work in ethnography—the response is a motivated and accountable norm of incompleteness whereby a bounded relation or juxtaposition is exhaustively explored by the traditional norms and ethos while the larger map is ethnographically inferred, and imagined on the same plane, so to speak, as the lived in space of a set of relations which is the intensive object of ethnography (example of ethnography where a 'relation' is the object of study, yet a solely observed 'place' is the scene of fieldwork: Paul Willis' Learning to Labour, which accounts through sheer ethnographic perspective for the posited formative relation between the school and the factory floor in the lives of working class boys .

ii. Multi-sited ethnographies begin with orienting collaborations within certain sites ,the interest of which is an appropriation of paraethnogrpahic perspective. Fieldwork is actually designed in this relation with a counterpart (as in a recent work I have produced with a Portuguese nobleman—Ocasiao, 2005). This is where ethnography is thickest perhaps, not so that an account of this site can be written, as,for example,an ethnography of expertise or elites would entail, but so that the space-time of ethnography can be created. In this modality of ethnography , methodologically, a

complete account of the collaboration is necessary, not in the mode of 1980s reflexivity, but as a means of ethnographically justifying the point of view /the situated knowledge to which the anthropologist commits—this is where such ethnography is most Malinowskian; it is working through a 'native point of view.' Indeed, it is as if I am taking the felicitous improvisations of Kim Fortun's study (the ethnography of advocacy, intensively studied, leading to a moving study of global environmentalism over a marked period of its recent history) and making the norms/forms of metamethod out of it.

The object of collaboration is to move the study to other places, imagined, but not literally visited by collaborators and eventually to bring ethnography back as inputs to those collaborations. These movements conceptually establish the relations that are the object of study of a multi-sited ethnography —not the relations, or literal path, of the research, but the independently existing relations –imagined and real-- that these designed movements of ethnography explore by fieldwork. In my own recent work the laboratory or workshop for exploring this modality has been collaborative research on central bankers and a project on Portuguese aristocrats; in these inquiries, fieldwork is not simply a schedule of interviews but is very often stage managing in collaboration connected events of dialogue and independent inquiries around them. This produces a rich set of materials equivalent to the corpus expected of classic Malinowskian fieldwork.

iii. One moves beyond the relation of collaboration, or with it, to other sites by exploring a juxtaposition, an assemblage, or network as object of study. This is ethnography, variantly both thick and thin, the specific densities of which depend on being in constant conversation with the orienting collaboration as a map or design, so to speak, of the project. Other sites might be literal or orchestrated—events, observations, convened seminars, attendances—but they are anchored in the orienting paraethnographic engagement.

iv. temporal concerns and anxieties displace the classic trope of 'being there." In multi-sited projects, location in space is not the salient factor in defining its context of significance as much as location in time—its detailed situatedness in 'the contemporary'. Such ethnography primarily addresses tempos of change, moments in the flow of events, and is trying to produce something relevant –a kind of knowledge that is as much modulated in temporal terms as placed in spatial terms.

v. Accountabilities are built into the study, into the very relations that generate the data, so to speak. These are accountable primarily to the orienting collaboration, but also to other combined constituencies for/subjects of the research

vi. Multi-sitedness represents three things—the objective relations of a system which can be studied independently of ethnography (e.g., a network) ; the relations set into play as an artifact of a research design (this is important to account for—this is the reflexivity of the fieldwork); and the paraethnographic perspective, the clockwork or 'native point of

view', which is always spatio-temporal, that the ethnography works within for its own purposes and produces results in conversation with. In this modality, ethnography produces its most distinctive and traditional result in the line with the Malinowskian complex. It apprehends a system or systemic relations from within subjects' expressions . The key act is the commitment to develop ethnography from embedded perspective which often entails fieldwork that begins at home. The field is no longer objectively out there, but one networks oneself into a concept of the field through relations of ethnographic research all the way along. Connections are of equal importance to the fact that the fieldworker may find herself in Poland, in Nigeria, or India, for example., at the beginning, middle, or end of a course of research.

5. The redesign of fieldwork for multi-sited ethnography challenges the strong influence that the genres and conventions of ethnographic writing have had on the norms of fieldwork. The Writing Culture critique was widely appreciated as about texts and only implicitly about fieldwork. What was perhaps missed is the powerful regulative influence that the textual forms of ethnography have had on what is expected of fieldwork in professional culture. Indeed the methodological significance of ethnography has traditionally been as a frame to discuss the materials and design of fieldwork, and to create expectations for it . Since the 1980s, the ethnography has not sustained this relation to fieldwork and has in fact become a genre that bears a much heavier theoretical weight for which it was never designed. In the case of multi-sited projects, the limits of ethnographic writing conventions further constrain their possibilities. Perhaps multi-sited fieldwork and research design anticipate a certain

writing problem of a complexity that exceeds the conventions that still hold the ethnographic genre's identity in place--such as the trope of 'being there'. As I noted it is the dimension of temporality rather than place that primarily situates and frames multi-sited ethnography. This requires a different sense of the appropriate textual forms coming out of multi-sited projects, of which the classic ethnographic genre, or what is left of it, may or may not be one. In the meantime, just as the worry of multi-sited prjojects might dilute the intensity of classic ethnographic fieldwork, so the surviving genre tropes of ethnography provide a difficult fit for the scope of multi-sited projects. The fact that the textual needs for writing multi-sited ethnography might exceed the capacities of the ethnographic genre means not that multi-sited research designs should change, but perhaps the sense of what the written ethnography might be, should. While the problems of multi-sited ethnography are largely about the shape and design of fieldwork, it ends by being again about writing culture, or rather, ethnography , in a different era. At the level of graduate pedagogy, the dissertation should not be a rough draft of an eventual book, but some sort of middle range production of texts that engage intensively with the kinds of materials that it produces. As a colleague of mine has said, what is needed are practices of composition somewhere between fieldnotes and finished texts. In other words, far from diluting ethnography, multi-sited projects show potential of returning the focus of ethnography to the materials that projects produce—they put ethnography back in ethnography, so to speak.

6. Finally, multi-sited ethnography in the modality that I am working out suggests the refunctioning of ethnography itself—yes, it is still partly about description, modeling,

and analysis of processes in the world—producing a result for a scholarly community that is going to do something with it , for example, in comparative analysis (indeed,sociological ethnography has remained focused on such results for the purposes of the professional community, e.g. actor-network theory moving toward Michel Callon's interest in markets. Such ethnography is a related, mainly objectified version of the modality which I am discussing that stays clear of the problem of how results are derived from collaborations). But multi-sited ethnography is also about mediations and interventions. Michael Fischer thinks of this as the forging of third spaces—reflexive domains within scenes of social action—regimes of living, global assemblages-- in which questions of ethics are considered; the anthropological ethnographic intervention is distinctive here. What seems basic is that once ethnography becomes multi-sited and engaged intellectually with its subjects, its arguments, articulations have constituencies within the field and unpredictably beyond it, which are constituencies that exist in relation to and alongside the professional constituency. However these relations are worked out or ordered -- a task also for the rethinking of method and standards in anthropology-- the mediational character or form of knowledge produced from ethnography cannot be suppressed or shifted to other pursuits such as activism. The ethnography , as report to the discipline, then can be no more than a version of knowledge or results of research extracted from its circuits of mediation, so to speak, for purposes of the discipline. What these purposes might be in light of the refunctioning I suggest is perhaps the most pressing task for rethinking the anthropological tradition of ethnography as a study of contemporary change. Ethnographies of globalization, I would argue, do not add up to an anthropology of globalization ,the emergence of a

coherent subfield.  The purposes and reception of such ethnographic projects –multi-sited by reception alone--are already within the  confines of the field,  and what the stakes of anthropology as a discipline are  in such an attractive arena that pulls many of its best young researchers remains to be  articulated. Such an articulation does not depend on new reference theories, but  on a project of reform of the classic culture or aesthetic of method , what I term metamethod,  and the  complex issues of practice and  theory involved in that.  The contemplation and attempt to do multi-sited ethnography  in one or more of its alternative  modalities which we have begun to define here opens onto this seminal project.

*The paraethnographiic

Paraethnography  is not merely a matter of identifying  a new ethnographic subject—an accomplished autodidact.  Rather, it opens far deeper questions about how culture operates within a continuously unfolding contemporary and where everyone, directly or indirectly,  is implicated in and constituted by complex technical systems of knowledge, power, health, politics, media, economy etc.  What is at stake  in our conceptualization of the paraethnographic  are formations of culture that are not fully contingent on convention, tradition, and  'the past',  but rather constitute  future-oriented  cognitive practices that can generate novel configurations of meaning and action.  Indeed, this gives  rise to our most radical assertion—that spontaneously  generated para-ethnographies are built  into the structure  of the contemporary and give  form and content to a continuously  unfolding skein of experience.