Chapter I

Introduction

Constructing the field

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In the joint anthropology and sociology department where I teach, students have frequently asked me somewhat hesitantly, assuming they ought to already know the answer, 'What, after all, is the difference between sociology and anthropology?' I usually tend to talk vaguely about general orientations versus absolute disciplinary boundaries but, if a flurry of recent publications are correct, in answering the same question most anthropologists would be likely to invoke ethnographic fieldwork as the quintessential hallmark of social and cultural anthropology. According to Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997: 1):

> the single most significant factor determining whether a piece of research will be accepted as (that magical word) 'anthropological' is the extent to which it depends on experience 'in the field.'

So what is 'experience in the field'? Much as fieldwork is the most commonly cited defining criteria of anthropology, intensive participant observation in turn is frequently treated as defining anthropological fieldwork (see Clifford, 1992). You have to actually be physically present in the field, assert Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Hervik (1994a: 3). Long-distance methods of communication will not do. Ethnographic fieldwork must be experienced as performed rather than just communicated in dialogue (ibid.). Duration is also critical, according to Judith Okely (1992). The bounded periods of sociological versions of ethnography, she argues, bear no comparison to the long-term and thorough immersion of anthropological fieldwork, 'a total experience, demanding all of the anthropologist's resources, intellectual, physical, emotional, political and intuitive' (ibid.: 8). But of course, this is fundamentally a social rather than a solitary experience mediated by and constituted through the fieldworker's relationships with others (ibid.: 2). The scope of

activities which an ethnographer can observe and in which s/he can participate, his/her vantage point and premise of involvement are contingent on the nature of the relationships s/he is able to form with those engaged in these situations. Finally, fieldwork has generally incorporated an expectation of travel away from the researcher's ordinary place of residence and work or 'home' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997).

Thus in this composite but familiar portrait, 'fieldwork' involves travel away, preferably to a distant locale where the ethnographer will immerse him/herself in personal face-to-face relationships with a variety of natives over an extended period of time. While this is a familiar representation, as the chapters in this volume illustrate, it is a rendering of ethnographic 'fieldwork' that in one respect or another no longer suffices even as a serviceable fiction for many contemporary ethnographers. The contributors to this volume are hardly alone in their discomfiture with the gap between the experience and archetype (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) of fieldwork, as the latter is subjected to increasing critical scrutiny by anthropologists (ibid.; Flinn *et al.*, 1998; Hastrup and Hervik, 1994b; Okely, 1996; Okely and Callaway, 1992; Robbins and Bamford, 1997). In this introductory chapter I want to examine some of the paradoxes embedded in the anthropological tradition of fieldwork. While these dilemmas reflect epistemological variabilities that are not amenable to overly generalized solutions, how we respond to them has the possibility of either opening up or alternatively limiting the scope of anthropological enquiry. It is to the former orientation that this book is dedicated.

Compartmentalizing fieldwork

One of the peculiarities of participant observation as ethnographic fieldwork is the way in which the researcher and his/her personal relationships serve as primary vehicles for eliciting findings and insight. There is surely no other form of scholarly enquiry in which relationships of intimacy and familiarity between researcher and subject are envisioned as a fundamental medium of investigation rather than as an extraneous by-product or even an impediment. This onus towards comradeship, however incompletely and sporadically achieved, provides a vantage point imbued at once with significant analytical advantages as well as poignant dilemmas of ethics and social location. On the one hand, it encourages ethnographers to see people as rounded individuals, as multifaceted social beings with involvements, experiences and stories reaching far beyond the limited purview of any research project. It makes

it difficult, if not impossible, for fieldworkers to regard the people with whom they are conducting research merely as one-dimensional research subjects. Hence the discomfiture many anthropologists have with using terms such as informant, respondent or research subject as textual references for people they have known as friends, neighbours, advisers, etc. Nonetheless, opting instead for the latter terms of reference may not resolve the problem that however sincere and nuanced the attachment they express, ethnographic fieldworkers are still also exploiting this intimacy as an investigative tool. Participant observation is therefore often uneasily perched on the precipice between the inherent instrumentalism of this as of any research enterprise and the more complex and rounded social associations afforded by this particular method.

The tension between the personal and the professional aspects of fieldwork has, however, extended both ways, equally raising concern about the integrity of anthropologists' claims of professionalism. Judith Okely is undoubtedly correct that anthropologists have tried to respond to pressures for scientific detachment (1992: 8) as a marker of professionalism. But the effort to separate work and home or the professional and the personal is responsive to a much more pervasive structural bias in capitalist, industrial societies extending well beyond the university gates. Anthropologists whose principal methodology has rested on a maverick if sometimes uneasy melding of these domains have nonetheless attempted to uphold their overall separation by compartmentalizing fieldwork spatially, temporally and textually. The result has been a set of epistemological conventions which have both reproduced and camouflaged key contradictions in anthropological practices. There is now a copious literature attesting to the distortions and contradictions involved in one of these efforts: the absence of the ethnographer as an active and embodied participant in the social relationships and situations described in published texts. Drawing on Johannes Fabian's analysis of the disjunction between fieldwork and text contrived by textual conventions, Helen Callaway notes that 'ethnographic research involves prolonged interaction with others, yet anthropological discourse conveys the understanding gained in terms of distance, both spatial and temporal' (1992: 30).

Another device for establishing distance has been more literal, involving a convention for choosing fieldwork sites that are 'away', preferably far away from the ethnographer's usual place of residence and work. Gupta and Ferguson argue that this convention has resulted in a 'hierarchy of purity of field sites' (1997: 13).

> After all, if 'the field' is most appropriately a place that is 'not home', then some places will necessarily be more 'not home' than others, and hence more appropriate, more 'fieldlike'.

Ironically, however, anthropology has also traditionally been dedicated to the cause of contextualizing the exotic and unfamiliar so effectively that it is rendered explicable and unexceptional. Fieldwork has focused on the ordinary, the everyday and mundane lives of people and often relegated more exceptional and unique circumstances to the province of sensation-seeking journalists (Malkki, 1997). Thus anthropological conventions regarding the selection of fieldwork sites have first insisted on cultural, social and spatial distance as a gauge of ethnographic authenticity but then measured the craft of anthropology through the capacity of its practitioners to render the distant familiar. The nearby is assumed not to require this alchemy and is thus treated as ethnographically unproblematic. As Virginia Caputo's chapter in this volume illustrates, in spite of a post-Said decade replete with anthropological atonement for the sins of orientalism, the disciplinary bias towards the distantly exotic as more valid sites for fieldwork continues to shape training and hiring practices at the very least in North American and British anthropology departments. In designing her doctoral study of children's songs and narratives in Toronto, the city in which she resided, Caputo had assumed that a concept of fieldwork as defined by a journey to distant and specific places no longer held sway in anthropology. And yet the notion of journey and geography subtly recurred in the assumption that doctoral students would adopt a regional specialization, an assumption that appeared in record-keeping practices and comprehensive examinations. In applying for academic positions, Caputo also found that 'geographic area' continued to be a crucial criterion for judging candidates and that her own specific choices of 'field' and 'fieldwork' had become limiting factors.

On the sliding scale of recent efforts to reform fieldwork practices over the last fifteen years, anthropologists have subjected the artifices of textual distantiation to the most sustained introspection and revision. They have sought atonement for representational exoticisms but continue to embed them in their locational strategies. Nonetheless, they appear to have been least inclined to relinquish some long-standing presumptions about what makes the experience of fieldwork truly anthropological. Tellingly, some of the critics who have been most concerned with reshaping ethnographic conventions have also been among the most insistent that anthropological fieldwork must continue to be exemplified by thorough immersion in the daily practices and face-to-face relationships of a particular set of people (Hastrup and Hervik, 1994a; Okely, 1992). Thus Judith Okely has been a long-standing critic of the exoticist bias in anthropological orthodoxies which artificially position 'field' versus 'home'. She has argued strongly for the importance of an autobiographical reflexivity as an integral element of ethnographic fieldwork. Indeed, Okely has gone so far as to subject episodes of her own childhood experiences in an English boarding-school to a retrospective ethnographic analysis (1996). Yet she insists that the quintessence of what makes ethnographic fieldwork anthropological continues to be a commitment to a process of utter social immersion.

Kirsten Hastrup has argued that in the face of the mobility and displacement of peoples worldwide, anthropologists are being forced to relinquish the conflation of place with collective and cultural production (Hastrup and Olwig, 1997). Yet only a few years earlier, she and Peter Hervik were contending both that the anthropological tradition of fieldwork as participant observation is more relevant today than ever before, and that it requires the actual physical presence of the ethnographer as an absolute prerequisite (Hastrup and Hervik, 1994a: 3). It is as if in order to do something different, anthropologists have to reassure themselves and each other that it is not too different. Even such thoughtful critics appear unwilling to relinquish a long-standing epistemological tautology: that anthropology is validated as a separate discipline through a particular methodology which, while valued for its open-endedness, is in turn legitimated through spatial and social encapsulation. When am I doing anthropological fieldwork? When I am 'there' and doing nothing else. Given the persistence of conceptions of immersion and presence as archetypes for anthropological fieldwork and the continuing status of fieldwork as a virtual charter for anthropology as a discipline, it seems appropriate to examine these presumptions a little closer.

Autobiography, immersion and constructing the field

The conception of fieldwork as comprehensive immersion presumes a singularity of focus and engagement which flies in the face of the actual practices of many anthropologists whether working near or far from their usual place of residence. Many ethnographers are accompanied by or continue to live with their families (Flinn, 1998), visit or

are visited by long-standing friends and associates, and maintain professional and personal communications, all while initiating relationships with and observing the activities of still other sets of people. These practices are hardly new. Indeed, one could argue that transgressions of the solitary fieldworker model of ethnographic fieldwork are as much an anthropological tradition as the model itself. If this model was unsustainable even during less reflexive phases of anthropological production, the effort to retain a version of it, however reformed, to take account of *fin-de-siècle* sensitivities, is puzzling, given nearly two decades of effort to bring the anthropologist's own positioning into focus. It is difficult to reconcile the contradiction between an emphasis on the importance of autobiography with the implicit insistence on an interregnum of the ethnographer's usual relationships, routines, commitments and preoccupations so that s/he can be utterly encapsulated in fieldwork. The notion of immersion implies that the 'field' which ethnographers enter exists as an independently bounded set of relationships and activities which is autonomous of the fieldwork through which it is discovered. Yet in a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts, the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred. This process of construction is inescapably shaped by the conceptual, professional, financial and relational opportunities and resources accessible to the ethnographer. Seen from this perspective, an idea of fieldwork in which the ethnographer is expected to break from his/her usual involvements in order to immerse him/herself in the 'field' of others' involvements is an oxymoron. Instead, as the chapters in this volume illustrate, the construction of an ethnographic field involves efforts to accommodate and interweave sets of relationships and engagements developed in one context with those arising in another. Or perhaps to view ongoing relationships from altered perspectives as ethnographers ask different questions on 'entering' and 'leaving' the 'field'. As Nigel Rapport argues (Chapter 5, this volume), anthropologists have used the outward signs of transit entailed in travel from one site to another as the validation of what is much more crucially an experiential and cognitive rather than a physical movement.

While I studied the activities of a network of ethnic lobbyists in Montreal (Amit-Talai, 1996), I looked after my young son and also lectured and attended departmental meetings as I was required to do to earn my living. But my interest in this 'field', indeed my awareness

that such an institutionalized round of minority representation even existed, arose from my previous involvement on this circuit as the paid employee of a community and lobbying organization. In this earlier role, I had spent most of my days immersed in the activities of the circuit. While this immersion contributed greatly to my knowledge and understanding of this set of activities and relationships, I was engaged in it as a participating lobbyist rather than as an ethnographer *per se*. Later, as a researcher, juggling other inescapable professional and personal commitments, I could not devote the same amount of time to the activities of the circuit yet I did feel that I was now seeing the circuit as an ethnographer rather than as a participant.

The melding of personal and professional roles in ethnographic fieldwork makes for a 'messy, qualitative experience' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 22) which cannot readily or usefully be compartmentalized from other experiences and periods in our lives. For a number of years, Noel Dyck was actively involved as a parent, coach and technical official in the sports programmes which occupy so many children in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. This involvement had come to feature as his 'time out' from his professional roles. This welcome separation between domestic and professional activities unravelled, however, when Dyck started to recognize the rhetorical and ideological components of what had passed until that point as 'small talk'. Gradually, his analysis become more systematic, a shift finally formalized in an application for funding to study community sport. Yet the roles Dyck had previously performed as a less self-conscious participant, the relationships entailed in these roles and the knowledge they bequeathed did not end when he realized and formally acted upon the ethnographic potential of this field, nor did they end when this phase of fieldwork came to a close.

Helena Wulff's access to the backstage of the Royal Swedish Ballet Company, her ability to contextualize some of the dancers' biographical narratives, her understanding of the non-verbal bodily work entailed in ballet were made possible by experiences and relationships which she had shared as a dancer herself long before her re-entry into the 'field' of ballet as an ethnographer. Wulff argues that the stark dichotomy between native and anthropologist posited by Kirsten Hastrup has to give way to the more nuanced shifting multiple subjectivity experienced by many anthropologists. Wulff's perspective and relationships as an ex-ballet dancer and the new forms of nativeness she acquired in the course of her 'fieldwork' crucially informed but were not erased by the ethnographic lens she now trained on the ballet world.

It is important, however, to be clear that this interfusion of contexts, involvements, roles and perspectives is not peculiar to the circumstances affecting ethnographers working in close geographic proximity to their place of residence. After all, in studying professional ballet companies, given her previous experiences as a dancer, Wulff was in a sense coming 'home', but 'home' in this context was a transnational occupational field and her study of it involved multilocale fieldwork in a number of different countries.

The boundary between anthropological field and home which has so often been demarcated by the metaphor of travel has incorporated a presumption that 'home' is stationary while the field is a journey away. It is a presumption which is undone as much by the cognitive and emotional journeys which fieldworkers make in looking at familiar practices and sites with new ethnographic lenses as by the transnational organization of many academics' lives. Frequent migrants and travellers themselves, for many academics home is as peripatetic and multisited as fieldwork has increasingly come to be. As Sarah Strauss' and Caroline Knowles' chapters indicate, the two forms of journeys often converge. At first glance, Caroline Knowles' choice of research subject appears to establish a much sharper dichotomy between autobiography and fieldwork than is the case in Noel Dyck's and Helena Wulff's studies. As a white British professional, Knowles' own identity and history seem far removed from the black people diagnosed as 'schizophrenic' whose narratives she has collected both in London and Montreal. Yet as Knowles points out, her interest in the administrative and personal processes involved in racialization could equally be addressed in many other places. The specific choice of Montreal and London is 'frankly autobiographical: I once lived in one and now live in the other, and I am trying to devise a way of living in both'. Notions of home and belonging are key constitutive ideas of the transatlantic field inscribed by Knowles both personally and professionally.

Sarah Strauss' study of yoga as a 'community of practice' also involved multilocale research in India, Germany, Switzerland and the United States, but her ability to realize a project involving such dispersed locations was shaped by the interaction between the transnational connections of yoga adherents, her graduate training at the University of Pennsylvania and her subsequent peripatetic location as an 'academic migrant labourer'. After conducting her doctoral research in the Indian pilgrimage town of Rishikesh, Strauss accompanied her husband to Zurich where he had been hired as a post-doctoral researcher and used this base for a series of short ethnographic trips to other locales even

while her possessions, bills and many personal associations remained anchored in the United States, her native country. As Strauss notes, her ability to imagine and act upon the research possibilities afforded by her husband's job in Switzerland was informed by an educational formation at the University of Pennsylvania that had featured an emphasis on transnational studies.

To the extent that the personal, professional and fieldwork involvements of ethnographers are mutually constitutive, the construction of ethnographic fields is not a one-way process of accommodation to the fieldworker's already existing associations and commitments, for these are also inevitably altered. However much ethnographers may seek to leave the field, whether through travel, changes in activity or shifts in perspective, they cannot help but take it with them because the 'field' has now become incorporated into their biographies, understandings and associations. I conducted fieldwork in Grand Cayman over the course of five visits between 1993 and 1996. Back in Montreal some time after the last of these visits, I was informed that a friend whom I had known in Grand Cayman was very ill and had returned to another province in Canada, her native country. In the weeks that followed I spoke on the telephone with her, with her friends in Canada and the Cayman Islands as we shared our anxieties and information about her condition. One of the people also seeking news of this situation was a colleague from Montreal who, while visiting me in Grand Cayman, had met my friend and was now concerned about her illness. In seeking and sharing news of my friend, I was surely not conducting research. But my friendship with her had arisen in the course of and had been crucially shaped by my research foci, just as the course of my fieldwork had been in no small measure affected by her incisive insights and thoughtful suggestions.

In the course of conducting fieldwork in Cordoba, Sarah Pink met and married her Spanish partner. Having arrived in Cordoba without local social networks, by the time she finished her fieldwork, she had developed local family and social responsibilities similar to those of her Spanish informants and friends. When she left Cordoba to return 'home' to Britain, she was accompanied by her partner and she remained in contact with Spanish friends through telephone calls, letters and visits. But Pink was not the only person from her Cordoban social circle to make the move from Spain to Britain. Her social life in Canterbury incorporated friends from her fieldwork now resident in Britain as well as new friendships with other Spanish migrants. Gradually, Pink came to realize that these personal relationships could be construed ethnographically as

fieldwork, and she started to formalize her study of Spanish graduate migrants in Britain, but her key informants remained herself, her husband and friends.

How is it that so many of the contributors to this volume were able to sustain friendships that constituted but transcended their fieldwork engagements when other anthropologists have reported serious ruptures as a consequence of their effort to combine these professional and personal roles? Joy Hendry, reporting on the breach of a long-standing relationship when Sachiko, a Japanese friend, became a key informant and research assistant, wonders whether she needs to readjust her conception of friendship. In explaining the rift, Sachiko complained of being burdened by Hendry's constant presence and frequent enquiries about her private affairs as well as belittled by her new role as a waged subordinate (Hendry, 1992). One wonders why an intrusiveness which had not arisen during an association of many years should suddenly be introduced in the course of fieldwork. Perhaps what needed to be adjusted was not Hendry's notion of friendship which seems to have been quite effective at sustaining a relationship for many years, but the conception of immersion which she shares with many anthropologists.

One of the ironies of an a priori insistence on intensive immersion as the *sine qua non* of ethnographic fieldwork is the way in which it can, as in the case reported by Hendry, undermine the principal asset of this methodology: its malleability. The strength of this form of fieldwork is the leeway it allows for the ethnographer to respond and adapt flexibly to social circumstances as these arise, to be open to a wide variety of different types of relationships and interaction. Thus when Paul Stoller conducted fieldwork among West African street traders in Harlem, he realized that approaches which had been appropriate in his earlier study of Songhay religious practices in Niger would not be similarly effective or appropriate in this new situation.

> The precarious situation of the traders, of course made them suspicious of any newcomer even if he or she spoke an African language. Rather than plunging into the field with a barrage of demographic surveys or plans for intensive participant observation, I decided to periodically hang out at the 125th Street market . . . I am convinced, however, that had I adopted a less open-ended and more intensive field approach, the results would have been far more limited.
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> (Stoller, 1997: 90)

There is, Virginia Caputo argues (Chapter 2, this volume), an instability to the ground that marks doing 'anthropology' at home because it requires a constant shifting of positionings between situations, people, identities and perspectives. But the range of experiences described in this volume suggests that fieldwork 'away' as well as at 'home' is similarly episodic and fluid. It is not a coincidence, I believe, that the willingness of these researchers to accept this level of indeterminacy has also been associated with a capacity to envision and pursue the ethnographic possibilities of a disparate range of situations: sporadic dialogues with a former resident of a small farming village in Northwest England; exploring children's narratives and songs in Toronto; multilocale research among black people diagnosed as 'schizophrenic', ballet dancers and yoga adherents; shifting from research among female bullfighters in Spain to research among Spanish graduate migrants in a variety of locales in Britain, from tutelage relations in Indian administration to organized children's sports in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, from ethnic lobbyists in Montreal to expatriate professionals in the Cayman Islands. To explore these 'fields', some of the contributors stayed put in one site for many months, others made short periodic visits to one or several sites, saw some informants daily, others very infrequently, still others balanced face-to-face interaction with email, letters and telephone calls. It is the circumstance which defined the method rather than the method defining the circumstance.

Place and fieldwork

So, what does this approach mean with regard to Hastrup and Hervik's call for the physical presence of the anthropologist as a *sine qua non* of anthropological fieldwork? In considering this question we need to step back for a moment and consider what anthropologists in general and Hastrup and Hervik in particular have been trying to achieve through participant observation. For Hastrup and Hervik, what the anthropologist is attempting to explore is 'the flow of intersubjective human experience' (1994a: 9), which is penetrated, however partially, through the ethnographer's own fieldwork experiences. They stress that the study of social experience concerns far more than just language or sterile cultural categories. With the shift in anthropological theoretical foci from a prescriptive view of culture to a focus on individual agency has come an interest in practice and motivation. And the practices through which cultural models are embodied involve values, emotions

and motives as much as the words through which these are expressed. In this view, therefore, the strength of participant observation is the access it provides to lived experiences which incorporate but transcend language. The corollary to this approach is that more indirect interactions, for example, by telephone, are restricted again to the word, missing crucial dimensions of social performance which are non-verbal (Hastrup and Hervik, 1994a).

Yet the access of ethnographers to such social performances has always been limited, whether because some local arenas were restricted to long-standing intimates or to people of a certain gender, class, ethnicity, ritual status, etc. Even the most intense involvement in activities located at a specific site was unlikely, in and of itself, to provide direct information about influential but more distant processes and agents. The ethnographic 'field', therefore, has always been as much characterized by absences as by presences and hence necessitated a variety of corresponding methods – interviews, archival documents, census data, artefacts, media materials and more – to explore processes not immediately or appropriately accessible through participant observation.

This kind of methodological flexibility has become all the more crucial as the contexts in which anthropologists seek to conduct fieldwork have changed. Anthropologists have rarely been the only ones arriving and leaving their field sites. But today, the people whom they are trying to study are increasingly likely to be as mobile if not more so than the ethnographers trying to keep up with them. In the course of a year of fieldwork in north-west England, in the village of Wanet, Nigel Rapport amply fulfilled the methodological criteria of presence and immersion stressed by Hastrup and Hervik and Okely. 'I sat in my cottage and then my caravan, I visited local houses and drank in local pubs, I engaged in local relationships, I worked the land.' But during this period in which Rapport remained stationary, Greg, a former native of Wanet, journeyed in and out of the village. Nor was Greg a unique emigrant, for he was one of a large number of former Wanet residents who had settled elsewhere and now visited their former homes with variable frequency. As Greg came and went, he elaborated on a personal life narrative which suppressed the distances between his visits to Wanet and re-established his sense of belonging and groundedness in this locale. In echoes of Wulff's argument for a blurring of the distinction between native and anthropological perspectives, Rapport argues that the narrative form acts as a *modus vivendi* for fieldworker and ethnographic subject alike as both seek 'a place cognitively to reside and make sense, a place to continue to be'.

Karin Norman was already conducting fieldwork in Gruvbo, a small town in central Sweden, when the public housing area in which she had rented an apartment became the site of a reception centre for 'refugees' mainly from the former Yugoslavia. Norman's field site was changing as she stayed in her apartment, looking out of her kitchen window. She became close to several Kosovo Albanian families in particular, but in less than a year the whole situation changed again. The reception centre was closed down and the refugees were relocated to a variety of sites elsewhere. Norman felt abandoned, left behind. Gruvbo lost its meaning and she found herself also moving, trying to maintain her contact with those Kosovo Albanian families that were relatively nearby and struggling to maintain her connections with those further away. 'For several years then, everyone has been on the move, nothing seems predictable, and the field keeps changing boundaries, connecting several locations.'

The increasing mobility of the people whom anthropologists study has coincided with a period of critical introspection in anthropology resulting in a re-evaluation of a number of long-standing conventions and assumptions. Among these has been the deconstruction of 'a place-focused concept of culture' (Hastrup and Olwig, 1997: 4) and the allowance instead for a more contingent relationship between collective identity, place, social relations and culture. The shift away from locality as the boundary and site for cultural production has allowed anthropologists to take more cognizance of migrants and travellers whose social networks and frames of reference are likely to be dispersed and multilocale rather than conveniently fixed in one place (Hastrup and Olwig, 1997). Anthropologists have correspondingly redefined their ethnographic 'fields' to explore the multisited, transnational circulation of people, practices and objects (Marcus, 1995). As the chapters by Wulff and Strauss indicate, just in and of themselves the logistics of spreading one's attention over activities and individuals at several sites necessitates a methodological shift from older conceptions of an extended presence in one locale. Instead both Wulff and Strauss combined this kind of stay with a series of much shorter visits to other sites.

There is however much more to the shift from the study of small, localized communities featuring dense and multiplex networks to that of territorially dispersed and fragmented networks than a simple multiplication of the sites at which an anthropologist conducts fieldwork. Combined, the personal networks of the expatriate professionals and workers who make up a large segment of the workforce of the Cayman Islands are virtually global in their reach. Yet the amount of

overlap between them is very small. They originate from a number of different countries and, unlike the circular migration which has featured in movements from and within the Caribbean, many of the temporary workers arriving in the Cayman Islands had no previous associations with this locale. Yet the nature of the extralocal relationships and attachments which expatriates maintain and form while living in Cayman is potentially crucial since, as unenfranchised contract workers, most will eventually leave this location (Amit-Talai, 1997, 1998). To try to track these networks or the movements of expatriates beyond the Cayman Islands I would have to find a means of defining the parameters of and moving through a diffuse and largely unintegrated field demarcated principally by a temporary biographical connection with one particular site and my own investigation. In other words, my 'field' would be defined in terms of a social category that I have singled out rather than a self-conscious social group, whose members are interacting with one another on an ongoing basis, independently of my intervention.

Such a shift renders the ethnographer an even more central agent in the construction of the 'field'. Thus the fulcrum of the network of Spanish migrants who formed the subject of Sarah Pink's fieldwork in Britain was Pink herself. This was not a collectivity that existed independently. Some of these individuals knew each other, others came into contact with each other partly through Pink's own efforts, but only Sarah Pink herself knew or was in touch with all these individuals. Ironically, given Hastrup and Hervik's call for the physical presence of the ethnographer, in such a scattered and sporadically connected 'field', the closest one may come to participant observation may be through the vehicles of indirect electronic communications joining together a number of dispersed associates, while face-to-face contact may be more reliant on dyadic encounters planned for and structured by the fieldworker's movements. Even in more self-aware and integrated fields such as the transnational yoga 'community of practice' studied by Sarah Strauss, Strauss' movements and contacts still served as the key articulation between all the individuals, events and sites she encountered.

In seeking to expand their research scope to include the study of mobile individuals, dispersed and/or fragmented social networks, anthropologists may no longer be able to rely on a concept that traditionally has been as, if not more crucial than place for locating their field: the habitus of collectivity. Episodic, occasional, partial and ephemeral social links pose particular challenges for ethnographic fieldwork. How do we observe interactions that happen sometimes but not necessarily when we are around? How do we participate in social relations that are not continuous, that are experienced most viscerally in their absence? How do we participate in or observe practices that are enacted here and there, by one or a few? How do we take into account unique events that may not be recurring but may still have irrevocable consequences: a demonstration, a battle, a sports event (Malkki, 1997)? Where do we 'hang out' when the processes which we are studying produce common social conditions or statuses (freelance workers, peripatetic entrepreneurs, consultants, tourists) but not necessarily coterminous collectivities? To cope with these conditions, it may not be sufficient or possible for anthropologists to simply join in. They may have to purposively create the occasions for contacts that might well be as mobile, diffuse and episodic as the processes they are studying. But what then of the 'total experience' (Okely, 1992: 8) of fieldwork?

Coming 'home' again

It is becoming a virtual truism to note that the distinction between 'home' and 'away' has become blurred by the transnational contexts in which anthropologists and their ethnographic subjects now move. Karin Norman started off her fieldwork 'at home' in a Swedish town and ended up in Kosovo; Sarah Pink started off in Cordoba and returned 'home' to Britain, only to find that her fieldwork friends and partner had followed. But are these and similar efforts by other anthropologists to achieve this kind of ethnographic mobility undermining the contextual depth they once achieved through intensive fieldwork in more contained and localized communities? And without that kind of fieldwork is anthropology still anthropology?

In 1982, when addressing a similar range of issues *vis-à-vis* ethnographic fieldwork in dense urban settings, Sandra Wallman cautioned against equating the discipline of anthropology with its principal technique of enquiry and confusing the perspectives facilitated by participant observation with the method itself (1982: 190–191). It is the perspectives highlighted by Wallman, the appreciation of context, meaning and social relationships that still shape anthropology, and thereby the crucial contributions it can make to an understanding of the coming century's ethnoscapes. Anthropology's strength is the ethnographic spotlight it focuses on particular lives, broadly contextualized. In this focus, anthropology, at best, collapses the distinction between micro and macro and challenges reifications of concepts such as diaspora,

state, globalization and so on which, in their geographic, political and social reach, can easily appear distant and abstract. It allows us to penetrate even those institutions or structures whose size and influence threaten to overwhelm analysis through a focus on the actions, understandings, decisions and relationships of specific people whom they affect or incorporate. In turn, our efforts at contextualizing the actions and understandings of these specific actors always impart an open-ended quality to ethnographic investigation. Changes wrought by time, unfolding spatial configurations, the intricacies of even the most contained and continuous of relationships ensure that we are always chasing context but never squaring it off. This open-endedness is further heightened by the social nature of ethnography which makes it fundamentally *ad hoc*, sense-making as the poetics of the possible and negotiated, equal measures of serendipity and deliberate enterprise. Where, when, how and whom we encounter can never be subject to our firm control.

Paradoxically however, the old 'arrival' tales in exaggerating the social isolation of the 'field' also robbed it of much of its ethnographic context. More recent interpretations of ethnography as social experience have in turn tended to overstate the fieldworker's experiential envelopment in the field, a strangely persistent bubble of isolation in an otherwise earnestly contextualized (at least in principle) situation. We cannot disconnect ourselves from our lives to live our fieldwork, just as our subjects cannot disconnect themselves from the world and their pursuits to engage with or to be abandoned by us. They are as likely to leave us when we don't want them to or to follow us when we think we have left for good. Surely then in examining the role of the ethnographer, the defining questions are not how many senses we engage while conducting our research, whether we carry out long-term, full-time continuous fieldwork, make numerous brief visits or sustain ongoing but part-time contacts, or have face-to-face or electronically mediated communication. Surely the crucial issues that should concern us are the frameworks which anthropologists and the various people they encounter in their fieldwork use to site their activities, their sense of self, their homes, their work and relationships. Because in considering the structural, biographical, intellectual and political issues which enter into these efforts at siting fieldwork in our lives and ourselves in the lives of our informants, we are also considering the common dilemmas we and others face in trying to make sense of our passages through 'a world in motion' (Rapport, Chapter 5, this volume).

To overdetermine fieldwork practices is therefore to undermine the very strength of ethnography, the way in which it deliberately leaves openings for unanticipated discoveries and directions. If in cleaving to a methodological orthodoxy, anthropologists a priori limit rather than leave open the scope of circumstances to be studied, they will be operating at epistemological cross purposes with their own disciplinary objectives. Thus the answer to what happens to anthropology if its practitioners adapt their fieldwork practices to the exigencies of new circumstances is that it wouldn't remain as anthropology if they didn't.

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Chapter 2

At 'home' and 'away'

Reconfiguring the field for late twentieth-century anthropology

Virginia Caputo

Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between anthropological configurations of the 'field' and 'fieldwork', key orienting concepts of the discipline on the one hand, and contemporary research practices on the other.[1] I argue, following Clifford (1992) and Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 1997), that a continued insistence on a spatialized notion of a 'field', as a site of research involving physical displacement to a geographically distant place in order to pursue extended face-to-face encounters with 'others', obscures many of the realities faced by anthropologists working at the end of the twentieth century. Not only does a spatialized sense of the field persist despite recent critical re-evaluations of place and culture in anthropology that challenge a view of the world made up of discrete places (Appadurai, 1988, 1990; Kaplan, 1990; Scott, 1989), it continues to uphold an evaluative hierarchy regarding the kinds of fieldwork and subjects of research that are deemed 'appropriate'. In turn, this has implications for the kinds of anthropological knowledge that are produced.

These issues became particularly significant for me while pursuing my doctoral research. As I attempted to design and carry out a field-based study of gender in Canadian children's lives in the same city in which I resided at the time, I was continually faced with negotiating with a heavy-handed disciplinary legacy, especially in my own challenge of the central symbol of 'the field'. What follows is an account of some of the critical junctures and predicaments that I encountered in my anthropological journey. I begin by considering the questions of authenticity and value in the ways fields and fieldwork are determined to be 'real', and hence more valuable than others. In doing so, I hope