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Vincenzo Matera

Ethnography: experiences, representations, practices for studying cultural diversity. Introductory notes

During the second half of the twentieth century, anthropologists increasingly addressed the issues of conflict, cultural and social change and, in more general terms, the merging (or, better, the creolization, see Hannerz 1996), of different cultural and social traits. Hence, at the turn of the century, the making of hybrid (or creole) cultures, the confluence of separate and different traditions – that is, traditions with historical roots in different continents at the moment of their creolization – became the main dimension of cultural analysis. This turn signalled that older notions of culture as a holistic and integrated entity, and especially as a localized entity, were replaced with a new awareness regarding the creole nature of cultural processes. This turn had (and still has) important consequences on ethnography. In part, such consequences, although they were evident in ethnographic reports (often in non-official ethnographic notes like Malinowski's *Diary*, for example) or at least in the ethnographic awareness of many scholars, did not emerge fully until the publication of *Writing Culture* and its growing circulation within the anthropological community. Still not yet completely clear in contemporary anthropology is that, if we accept the idea of creolization as the major factor in the production and circulation of cultural meanings, we have also to deal critically with the idea of an organic relationship among a population, a territory, a language, an identity, a form of political organization, and one of those organized packages of meanings termed “culture” whence the classic concept of “field” has been drawn.

As Thomas Fillitz writes in his paper, indeed, «Malinowski's concept of fieldwork has for long passed into the non-debated “archetype” of the discipline's tradition». However, in more recent ethnographic research practice, the conceptions that ethnographers have of their fields appear very distant from that ideal.

Ferdinando Fava too, in his paper, asks a crucial question regarding the archetype of the “field” in the anthropological tradition.

Località geografica, dove l'antropologo, creden-

dosi ancora eroe solitario, si cimenta con una lingua differente dalla propria, in condizioni talvolta rudi e, più di tutto, con forme altre di vita; oppure oggetto testuale, costruito narrativo rivelatore piuttosto dei codici e dei dispositivi retorici che ne hanno governata la scrittura, rianimato infine solo dalle riletture di chi cerca in esso l'illusione nostalgica di mondi sempre a lui lontani?

A similar question is the one posed some years ago by Steven Feld, in the first lines of the second edition of *Sound and Sentiment* (1990).

Recent commentaries on anthropological writing have argued that ethnographic texts involved a formidable sense of allegory. The genre is said to tell us significant things about ourselves, our modes of constructing “otherness”, our idealizations and self-deceptions, our gender and class biases, our time and historical positions. These arguments are undoubtedly true in a general way [...], but it is also true that an ethnography is something more than a Rorschach test of writing conventions, intellectual fads, and tacit prejudices. An ethnography is a report of a unique experience. It is about the dialogue of sensibilities implicated in encountering and depicting a people and place. The work and the writer are thus specifically accountable not just to the interpretive preoccupations of scholarly readers, but to that people and that place, and to need for incisive and honest depiction (Feld, 1990: X).

This point recalls the one underlined by Gregory Bateson, several years ago, in the first pages of his famous book, *Naven* (1936); Bateson warned against constraining cultural complexity experienced on the spot, so to speak, into the rigid form of a written text made up of linear sentences, sequences of words that can be read one after the other. *Naven* is an anomalous ethnographic text in which the effort to find a more articulated way to write ethnography was evident. According to Bateson the core of the ethnographic experience lies in the encounter with a fully multi-sensorial range of

human interconnections (see Finnegan 2002). It has to do with complex rituals, material objects, with all sorts of indexical links between space and time. This gives a dense sense to this peculiar experiential dimension of human life. All these multiple communicative processes are mediated through publicly-shared enactments, not through publication in written texts. Something similar has been claimed by Dennis Tedlock (1983) with regards to the dialogical emergence of culture. Tedlock (and Bruce Mannaheim 1995) assign a status of priority to dialogue with respect to monologue. The latter is the real core of any ethnographic experience – especially in storytelling and oral narrative studies – even though it will sooner or later be transformed into a monological written text following the norms of the ethnographic genre. Of course, the issue of dialogue in ethnographic research is a very complex one (see, for example, Vincent Crapanzano's criticisms of Tedlock, in Crapanzano 1990). It concerns more in general the value of experience as a cognitive tool (see Tropp 2003) and the status of life-histories as epistemologically valid ethnographic sources. What is at stake here is the difference between "dialogue" – as a narrative fiction – and conversation – as a concrete exchange among individuals within a concrete social and political context. This dualism is, from a different point of view, another version of the opposition between experience and representation in ethnography.

However deeply we delve into the culture that we are studying, our experience – and the knowledge that we derive from it – will remain a picture-postcard experience unless we transform it into a good text. In other words, the endeavour to make a field experience understandable is a condition *sine qua non* for anthropology.

Two of the main outcomes of the deconstructionist debate are, as is well known, the achievement of ethnographic texts as fiction – in the sense of things made up, of things not actually real that have been invented – and the question regarding the empirical foundations of ethnography as fieldwork. In his well-known *Introduction to Writing Culture* James Clifford expressed the ambivalence of ethnographic texts in the formula "true fictions". The oxymoron postulates that ethnography is always partial, committed and incomplete. Yet, it is also real, in the sense that it is rooted in an ethnographic experience. While these ideas were developed in 1986, this debate stayed alive until the millennium shift. At that point of time we believed that ethnography does indeed tell us something certain about other people, or about ourselves, provided that the ethnographer – who is also the author and the writer – has a very high level of po-

litical, epistemological and ethical self-awareness. This means that the central question at the turn of the century was no longer only that of Representation. Another "R" had been added to ethnography, that is, Reflexivity. The latter entail an exploration not of the lived experience of the knowing subject, but of the effects and limits of the (political and engaged) act of representations (see, for example, Bourdieu 2002; Clark 2004; Kempny 2012; Nazarkuk 2011; Burawoy 2003; Salzman 2002).

Indeed, political and epistemological consciousness – reflexivity – entails a critical view of culture, no longer something that we observe as social scientists and talk about and describe by writing, by a more or less plain (more or less unproblematic) use of writing. Rather, it is a position that we speak from (our position). In other words (see Hastrup 1995), culture is what we see with, not what we see (or observe).

Hence the crucial questions for ethnography are these: what is a good ethnographic text, that is, a good Representation of our fieldwork experience? And what is the field where we acquire our relevant ethnographical Reflexive experience?

Of course, cultures and societies are not 'out there' with all their diversities, ready for the ethnographer's eye and for the ethnographer's writing. Certainly, anthropology – as Clifford Geertz clearly stated – cannot be made out of real events on the hill or in the centre of the village; rather, it exists in texts, books, conferences, academic contexts – that is, in representations of real events. However, as Ulf Hannerz stated:

[...] culture is not only in books; it makes also human beings. So, out there, on the spot, we just can find human beings to talk with and to observe in their agency. Indeed, cultures are not themselves living beings; they are shaped and carried by people in varying social constellations, pursuing different aims (Hannerz 1996: 69).

Today ethnography is extremely fragmented. What was once its core – the "field" – has been progressively dismantled. Very few anthropologists today would start their research having in mind the localized notions of field and fieldwork that characterized the first half of the last century. There is today at least some awareness of the wider networks in which every single community is embedded. Clifford Geertz's African proverb-inspired claiming that "Wisdom comes out of an ant heap" fits well here. Anthropology has, in fact, the "artisan task of seeing broad principles in parochial facts" (Geertz 1983: 167). This sentence underlines that if anthropologists have historically opted for

conducting work on “traditional” and “authentic” usages and customs and “pure” and uncontaminated social and cultural systems, today they are raising their awareness about what is beyond the field, i.e. the “wider world” surrounding it. Once strictly situated, localized, intensive, deep and, indeed, artisan, fieldwork is now progressively entailing a capacity to look outwardly. Ethnographers need to be able to look outwardly in terms of space (how do our fields take us elsewhere?), and in terms of time (fieldwork is nothing but a short step in a much longer process with a past, a present, and a future).

So, the key of the ethnographic approach, reflexivity, leads contemporary ethnography toward an enlargement of its epistemological horizons. Reflexivity, in global contemporary social context, implies more than ever that sort of openness and ability to “find things without specifically looking for them” (Hannerz 1992: 203). In this perspective, serendipity, already widely recognized as another key notion not only in scientific practice but also in ethnography, acquires probably a new methodological value in actual ethnographic practice (see Rivoal, Salazar 2013). Serendipity requires “time” and “space”, in the sense of an epistemological de-construction of both the spatial unity (see in this special issue Thomas Fillitz’s paper) and the temporal integration (see in this special issue Paolo Favero’s paper) of the classical field. Serendipity requires also an epistemological mood of the ethnographer for taking her/his “conceptual” time (see Ferdinando Fava’s paper in this special issue) and her/his “nomadic” path to discover the relevant points for local people under studying (see Nigel Rapport’s paper in this special issue).

Ethnographic research focused on local, delimited, and specific social and cultural contexts is of course of capital importance. We need to decode and interpret the content of specific cultures, those specific webs of meanings which a certain people produce in a certain environment, to grasp the sense of living in that place. And we must also make that world less opaque and more transparent to our gaze. But even if we laboriously achieve, by intense, prolonged and engaged ethnography an (almost) complete and detailed understanding of some (small) portions of local culture and local cultural phenomena, this is of little or no use in improving our knowledge of Culture. This is because most of our local insights lack connections with the wider world beyond the local. Field periods are limited, in fact, and fragmented. And, of course, local cultures are not fixed. As recent criticisms of the writing of anthropological texts have pointed out they are changing and hybrid “objects” embedded in wider temporal and spatial frames.

«Facts», as Adamson E. Hoebel (1958) wrote many years ago, «are not enough. All phenomena have their meanings, but they never speak for themselves» (1958: xi). Cultural phenomena are indexes of wider frames, and of more general processes. These frames and processes are decisive for an anthropological knowledge with all its fullness of meaning. Otherwise, anthropology runs the risk of becoming a fragmented, inconclusive, and marginal plurality of ethnographic details and peculiarities without consistent epistemological and political openness.

All the essays presented here are “field de-centred”, so to speak, and they are all important analyses based on empirical research regarding what is meant today by doing ethnography. Thus, in the following papers, the “field” emerges as an evanescent entity, a sort of relational or discursive space far from the notion of the “field” as a distant place where the ethnographer will finally meet cultural alterity. Obviously, these insights on the ethnographic field are closely linked with a revisited concept of culture and society. If we go beyond the view of culture as a closed system to embrace an idea of cultural flux, of culture as a flux of meanings, locally-rooted empirical practice will provoke an epistemological short circuit. Fredrik Barth, as Fillitz recalls in his paper, underlined that societies are probably systems, but if they are, they are open and disordered ones. Today it is likely that the noun “system” – a complex set of elements coordinated in a functional, integrated unit – qualified by the adjectives “social” and/or “cultural” gives a wrong image of its reference.

Thomas Fillitz’s essay demonstrates that the shift from the rigid dimension of the social system to the flexible one of action and relational networks was already at the basis of the methodology employed by the members of the Manchester School: for example by Max Gluckman – see his celebrated study on a bridge-opening ceremony in Zululand – and also by James Clyde Mitchell in his study on the Kalela Dance (Mitchell 1956). Gluckman’s method of analysis consisted in isolating the central elements of the bridge-opening ceremony and then connecting each of them to the wider social context. Mitchell’s choice of the same methodology led him to adopt an ethnographic practice decidedly distant from the close focus on the “local” that had long characterized anthropology. Indeed, it is the researcher’s oblique gaze moving across a broad panorama that proves useful in grasping the stratifications condensed in a cultural phenomenon apparently confined.

In fact, the phenomena of social and cultural change always lead far from the place and time in

which they are observed. For example, people who move from one place to another, from a rural area to an urban one, take with them cultural and linguistic features which, as new social relations are established, reorganize and rearrange themselves. Apparent to the ethnographer's gaze – which is necessarily restricted to a brief period and particular places – is a seemingly stable situation which conceals its internal and external articulations.

One way for overcoming, at least partly, this limitation of the ethnographic gaze, is to focus on the social actor and on the social networks that radiate from him/her. As Fillitz again writes,

For fieldwork this new method allowed to move away from the “archetype” fieldwork as envisaged by Malinowski. There were no more pre-conceived social boundedness and taken for granted ideas of locality or society.

For Fillitz, the field is very far from the classic notion of the anthropological tradition, and becomes a highly articulated notion made up of networks, spaces of exhibition, and flows of relations:

While “constructing the field”, using Amit's characteristic book title (2000), I nevertheless did in no way conceive any closed or bounded spatial entity. The field of the biennial of Dakar rather turned out as a body of complex networks centred on this global event, but with transnational connections into art worlds in Africa, and global ones into the global art world.

In her description of the dramatic character of her “field” Michela Fusaschi raises a number of issues of great importance at the level of both epistemology and text construction.

On recalling Geertz's well-known recommendation that the anthropologist: “n'étudie pas les villages, mais plutôt il enquête dans les villages”, Michela Fusaschi nevertheless points out that

[...] avec la mondialisation, il semblerait que ces lieux n'existent plus, ou mieux que les natifs n'existent plus, bien que toute la connaissance dérivée par la proximité avec les acteurs sociaux continue de façonner la vision analytique de l'anthropologie.

Once again we are faced with the problem of understanding how to construct ethnography. Thomas Fillitz presents this problem in terms of his personal “ethnographic film”. How can one imagine field research, given that the tie between the field as a key notion in anthropology and as a distinct and empirically identifiable place in which to

conduct research, no longer exists (if it ever did)?

But there nevertheless exist people as social actors projected into a multiplicity of places real and imaginary. Ethnography concerns itself with this multidimensionality. Michela Fusaschi writes:

L'ethnographie aujourd'hui ne se contente pas de dépasser le local, mais le local montre à quels niveaux elle se compose des processus transnationaux qui relient une multitude de sites, et d'acteurs sociaux, à travers le globe dont une autre investigation devient possible, [...] même sous forme de branchements.

It therefore becomes « un exercice multi-dimensionnelle, une coproduction du fait social et d'imagination sociologique ».

The discourses that surround the post-genocide are manifold. They become “thick” given the multiplicity of actors involved, and given the profundity of the words – and of the silences:

C'est là que trouve son espace la recherche ethnographique et la réflexion anthropologique, car il est crucial se faufiler dans la densité et la complexité des récits, faites des mots et des silences qui font, eux-mêmes, partie des mémoires.

The emergence of anthropological knowledge from ethnographic practice through a variety of implications and ongoing linkages is the topic addressed by Ferdinando Fava. Implication and the emergent linkage – separate but not distinct dimensions of the knowledge device in which the operability of the former is tightly connected to the constitution of the latter – are proposed as the keys with which to disentangle the complexity of ethnographic practice:

[...] l'implicazione e il legame, come lette alla luce di un dispositivo formulato in itinere nella mia ricerca al quartiere Zen di Palermo, restituiscono invece la relazione sul campo al tempo e allo spazio storici dei rapporti sociali vissuti e la costituiscono mediazione necessaria per comprenderli “da dentro” e nel presente del loro accadere.

The ethnographer is thus embedded in the places that s/he must physically traverse and in the times of that passage. These are filled with his/her intentionality – this being a contingent, relative, contextual, and methodologically irrational intentionality.

Ogni antropologo quando arriva sul campo, per intenderci, è sempre per questo un po' James

Cook quando approda alle Hawaii, è sempre un Lono senza saperlo, e senza che quest'attribuzione dipenda in qualche modo da una sua scelta.

However, Ferdinando Fava adds, intentionality is not enough. He recalls the rhetorical expedient used by Clifford Geertz to transform for his readers his fieldwork into a knowledge device and, therefore, a writing tool:

[...] a ben vedere, le azioni che declinano il ricercare, e cioè lo stabilire contatti, l'intervistare persone, il frequentare case, sempre presentate nei metodi come attività mentali strategiche, con verbi sempre declinati all'infinito, sono invece, e questa è la chiave centrale della mia rilettura, costituite da gesti che sono atti sociali, atti in cui l'antropologo riconosce altri come agenti sociali e come tale da loro è riconosciuto, come individui cioè che agiscono in modo autonomo, intenzionale e la cui intenzione è reciprocamente riconosciuta.

The field discussed and analysed by Fava is, therefore, not delineated as a geographical place nor as a text, «ma prima di tutto come un'unità psicologica e relazionale».

It is perhaps a unit of this kind that Nigel Rapport describes when examining «the way in which “classiness”, as an aspect of identity and social relations, is conceptualised and spoken about and enacted in a large Scottish hospital».

The anthropologist's role remains almost on the margins, in the background, while the foreground is occupied by people who emerge also as researchers of themselves, so to speak:

My work as an anthropologist is here to demonstrate the porters' own 'anthropological' expertise: they are methodologists of their own understandings, experts in their own intelligent lives and self conscious actors in social spaces.

In this case, the field appears as a discursive space within which a class awareness is expressed. Hence, and in my opinion this is the central point of Rapport's essay, it is not the porters' position in the institution, as the last wheels on the wagon, so to speak, which allocates them to a social category. Rather, it is their linguistic actions, their discursive actions as class actions reflecting and impacting on a much wider domain of the porters' experience in the hospital – an ambit which extends indexically beyond the restricted context of the institution, and which relates to a deeper existential dimension – that create and recreate the class membership.

[...] in contrast to an assignation of class as concerning relations of production and as deriving from location in a (hierarchical) mode of production, the porters adduce class or – ‘classiness’ – in ‘class acts’.

In particular, Rapport's choice of focusing on one person, Mick Hanrahan, makes the analysis even more efficacious when it leads the reader beyond the particular towards a much broader perspective:

For in Mick is to be espied 'Everyman' or 'Anyone', a human actor who finds himself in common discourses of status differentiations and boundedness but who animates those discourses with his own original and possibly uncommon sense [...] (Rapport 2012). The anthropologist's 'field' is of necessity narrow and particular – he or she can only witness so much – and yet what is witnessed can be deemed to give onto a universal perspective.

The essay by Paolo Favero is constructed around the field of the research, on the basis of an idea of “being there” which makes evident, in my view, the limits of the conception of the field as a “laboratory” in which to observe a culture. Favero writes:

In the 'field' I hung around, I interviewed, I danced, I photographed, I drank, I watched TV, I read the newspapers. Despite its obvious irrelevant playfulness, this sentence does indeed fully describe my own way of being in the field (in particular during the first months of fieldwork). In order to be able to understand my interlocutors I had, in fact, to enter their rhythm of life.

This means freeing one's ethnographic practice from the classic observational apparatus, and understanding the field (or, perhaps better, rejecting the field) as nothing more than the rhythm of life, the style, of the people with whom one is dealing. After all, the idea that the field must be something other is a cumbersome legacy of academic training, of that pre-understanding which always accompanies the ethnographer, and which induces Favero to admit his initial fear that he was wasting his time:

At the beginning, however, I found this a fairly annoying experience. I felt that I was spending time in useless activities that were not providing me with 'material' able to live up to the standards of what I considered to be a thick ethnography. I was in fact passing my days immersed in endless sessions of gossiping, in commenting at people passing by on the street, in deciding where

to go for coffee or pakoras. And I was spending the nights watching Western action movies wishing that at least the film was a Bollywood blockbuster (which would have made the experience so much more ethnographic!). The notes that I wrote during my first months of fieldwork do testify to my sense of frustration.

The sensation of not producing material useful for the research, of wasting enormous amounts of time (valuable time because the ethnographer does not have a limitless supply of it) smoking, drinking coffee, and engaging in pointless conversations is a common experience. To provide an example, Ulf Hannerz speaks of it when recalling the hours spent watching television – time wasted, he thought – together with his local interlocutors in the black neighbourhood of Washington (see Hannerz 2010). For that matter, the anthropological literature is replete with annotations of this kind. I myself remember very well the sense of frustration that constantly accompanied me on my interminable hikes among the Toraja hills, often under torrential rain, from one village to another in search of the most traditional, most ‘other’, places, at least according to my informant. These hikes inevitably ended on the platform under a Tongkonan conversing (or trying to converse with the mediation of English), drinking coffee, and smoking dreadful local cigarettes with which I was very well supplied and which my interlocutors greatly appreciated. My sense of uselessness culminated when I was invited to the village’s newly-opened videopub:

Dopo l’intensa conversazione antropologica, di cui ingenuamente io mi esalto, il mio nuovo amico mi propone di andare al nuovo “pub” di Rantepao, dove c’è il karaoke. Ovviamente non vedo l’ora di entrarci. Qui conosco Paola, ragazza bionda di Cremona, innamorata di un Toraja (che avrà un futuro come consulente antropologico) e beviamo birra Bintang insieme. Non posso domandarmi, allora come adesso, che senso avesse la mia presenza in quel posto, in mezzo a dei ragazzotti discendenti di una tribù di indomabili cacciatore di teste, concentrati sul testo che scorreva sul video di una canzone idiota, a imitazione dei loro coetanei giapponesi, malesi e occidentali, con davanti dei boccali di birra, e con una ragazza italiana di cui uno di loro s’inorgoglia palesemente e molto comprensibilmente (Matera 2004: 73-74).

However, it is also true, as Favero writes, that ethnography also involves something similar to aimless loitering or dawdling, at least until a goal emerges from rummaging through the intentions of

others. In this regard:

[...] notions of slowness and aimlessness can be powerful companions to our ethnographic practice. They may allow us to discover new things in our fields while bringing us also closer to our interlocutors. Such a notion, I believe, is particularly important in the current historical moment, one characterized by ever increasing pushes towards faster, more productive, goal-oriented, market- and policy-friendly research projects and study programs. A “slow and aimless ethnography” can function as a fair antidote to such tendencies and bring anthropology in touch again with its own roots.

Here returns the notion of randomness, that “of finding something while looking for something else”, the “serendipity” which, according to Ulf Hannerz, is an essential ingredient of ethnography and which is what makes it possible to turn experience into knowledge.

In other words, the serendipitous encounter with signs and objects inhabiting the space in which we conduct our research can provide us with precious insights into a field that we have otherwise explored through interviews, conversations, and other type of data.

This perspective well matches the idea put forth by Francesco Pompeo. In his paper he suggests that the ethnographic research is a critical theoretical practice. This is, he recalls quoting Lisa Malki, also an ethical practice and a game of improvisation. Hence, Pompeo argues, ethnographic research cannot be enclosed within prefigured schemas as a preselected “field” to observe and from which to collect “ethnographic data”:

[...] this ethnography followed a multidimensional and multi-temporal approach, gathering a various typology of sources (declarations, official documents, newspapers), concentrating on intensive participant observation conducted mostly in the two electoral campaigns for the adjunct foreign councillor (2004, 2006) and continued over a time-span of five years on a series of meetings with the various protagonists (winners and losers), collecting discussions and repeating interviews after a lapse of time.

The long timing of ethnography must consequently also deal with a sort of changing field that continuously takes new forms and enlarges or narrows its boundaries.

In sum, doing and writing ethnography appears as a practice of experience and incorporation which is accomplished, according to Geertz's classic definition, through "thick description". What constitutes "thickness" is a question that traverses decades of methodological and theoretical inquiry. But one thing has remained constant: the commitment to reality. Ethnography is a realist genre. It recounts true things; it recounts things that the ethnographer has experienced; it recounts things that have happened in a particular place, in the "field", despite its epistemological status is not really clear. The field, however, as the foregoing discussion has sought to show, can no longer be obstinately understood as the absolute of anthropology. The study and practical understanding of cultural diversity may move in many directions, yet the "field" in its classical meaning is no more able to make up the identity of the discipline.

That said, it should be specified that the deconstruction of the concept of "field" so important for anthropology should not be understood as pure and simple destruction. "Fieldwork" is still essential for acquiring a certain type of knowledge, detailed and first-hand, on specific "where", people, and stories that are socially and culturally, as well as politically and economically, marginal and "voiceless" (Spivak 1988; also Gupta, Ferguson 1997). To be sure, the "field" can no longer be a myth or a fetish to flourish in claiming disciplinary specificity, because it is no longer a valid criterion. The fact remains that the classic idea of "field" has already been challenged, devalued, and re-thought in numerous ethnographic practices. This process is necessary to meet the demands of the present.

What type of training is acquired by and characterizes someone who has undergone the long and heroic ritual of initiation in the "field"? A problematic answer is provided by Ulf Hannerz. In classic field sites, writes Hannerz, ethnographers find:

[...] little communities of enduring face-to-face relationships and a very limited division of labour. In such places a large proportion of knowledge and experience may quite naturally come to be extensively shared – that is, uniformly distributed. Ongoing life is so redundant that much of the reproduction of culture occurs without much deliberate effort, more or less as a by-product of the daily round of activity and commentary. Field workers may well take their leave of such places, their task accomplished, with much ethnography, yet little specific concern with the nature of cultural process (Hannerz 1996: 37).

Does this mean that, in order to study how cul-

ture works, anthropologists may also make their field into their "back yards"?

On the other hand, indeed, metaphorically opposed to "exotic" fieldwork is work in cities, industrialized areas, or tourism sites (see Augé 1999), and today the ethnographic analysis of online communities (see Wilson, Peterson 2002), which more than a few "orthodox" anthropologists scornfully dismiss as "not being ethnography" (see Hannerz 2010). All this confirms the persistence of the archetypal and never thoroughly discussed notion. The field is the criterion which establishes the difference between "true" anthropologists and the others. This idea forgets that Claude Lévi-Strauss, the most celebrated of anthropologists, spent only a few months in the field during his career. But what is most surprising about the orthodox conception is that those who support it do not understand that they are not defending the specificity of the discipline, on the contrary they are weakening it. What distinguishes anthropology is more concretely the manner in which it formulates research questions and conceptually defines its objects, not a practical mode of research (a technique) (Marcus, Okley 2007; Ingold 2007; Hannerz 2010).

Certainly, the specific intellectual style of our discipline also derives from its long tradition of work in the field, but it extends beyond the field.

At stake here is the epistemological consistency of a global ethnography: can ethnography be anything but micro and a-historical? (see Gellner 2012). As I have already stated, the Clifford Geertz's idea that anthropology *is* ethnography (see, for the opposite, Ingold 2007) does not fit with the awareness of the broader world beyond the field. The world is broader in terms of space (parochial facts, even minute details, which emerge locally, in the field, nevertheless lead elsewhere) and in terms of time (fieldwork is only a brief phase in a much longer time-span which has a past, a present, and a future). This does not remove validity from ethnography. Work in the field based on face-to-face personal interaction is still one of the main ways to anthropology. But the world is much larger than the field, and the "parochial facts" from which artisanally to draw "broad principles" may be very diverse. It is not just a matter of local/global scale, or of mobility, or of travelling cultures, as if ethnography should methodologically adjust itself to an enlarging and globalizing world adopting, for example, a multi-site research methodology and a global research program (Falzon 2009; Hannerz 2003, 2010). The point, with regard to the notion of field and to the epistemology of fieldwork, is a bit more complicated. It suggests, as recently argued by David Gellner,

[...] that anthropologists must learn to live with uncomfortable but necessary antinomies (in the Kantian sense) between their face-to-face methods and the global issues they wish to address, and between their commitment to holism (with its associated dangers of methodological nationalism and/or ethnic groupism) on the one side, and the necessity of encompassing within their purview flux, movement, and change, on the other. Whether anthropologists couch their response to globalisation in terms of multi-sited ethnography (a methodological stance), global ethnography (a research programme), or in some other way, these antinomies cannot be avoided and should be embraced (Gellner 2012: 1).

And, in more general terms, that the classical “field-work” is not (any more) the only method of research. Even less is it the absolute of anthropology.

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