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ETHNOGRAPHY IN/OF THE WORLD SYSTEM: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography

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ABSTRACT

This review surveys an emergent methodological trend in anthropological research that concerns the adaptation of long-standing modes of ethnographic practices to more complex objects of study. Ethnography moves from its conventional single-site location, contextualized by macro-constructions of a larger social order, such as the capitalist world system, to multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the "local" and the "global," the "lifeworld" and the "system." Resulting ethnographies are therefore both in and out of the world system. The anxieties to which this methodological shift gives rise are considered in terms of testing the limits of ethnography, attenuating the power of fieldwork, and losing the perspective of the subaltern. The emergence of multi-sited ethnography is located within new spheres of interdisciplinary work, including media studies, science and technology studies, and cultural studies broadly. Several "tracking" strategies that shape multi-sited ethnographic research are considered. The review concludes with observations about the reflexive persona of the ethnographer as "circumstantial activist" in which methodological discussions about multi-sited research in anthropology are now being developed.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1980s, I specified two modes in which ethnographic research was embedding itself within the context of an historic and contemporary world

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system of capitalist political economy (56, 57). The most common mode preserves the intensively-focused-upon single site of ethnographic observation and participation while developing by other means and methods the world system context. Examples of these other methods include working in archives and adapting the work of macrotheorists and other kinds of scholars as a mode of contextualizing portraiture in terms of which the predicaments of local subjects are described and analyzed. In this mode, a vital literature continues to appear on the historic (colonial) and contemporary incorporation of peoples as working classes or on the apparent reduction of local cultures by the macroprocesses associated with capitalist political economy in the many forms it has taken (e.g. 10, 11, 31, 70, 74, 100). Such ethnography has produced refined examinations of resistance and accommodation—a concern with the dynamics of encapsulation, focused on the relationships, language, and objects of encounter and response from the perspectives of local and cosmopolitan groups and persons who, although in different relative power positions, experience a process of being mutually displaced from what has counted as culture for each of them. This mode has shown that the heart of contemporary ethnographic analysis is not in the reclamation of some previous cultural state or its subtle preservation despite changes, but rather in the new cultural forms to which changes in colonial subaltern situations have given rise.

The other, much less common mode of ethnographic research self-consciously embedded in a world system, now often associated with the wave of intellectual capital labeled postmodern, moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation. It develops instead a strategy or design of research that acknowledges macrotheoretical concepts and narratives of the world system but does not rely on them for the contextual architecture framing a set of subjects. This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity that destabilize the distinction, for example, between lifeworld and system (49), by which much ethnography has been conceived. Just as this mode investigates and ethnographically constructs the lifeworlds of variously situated subjects, it also ethnographically constructs aspects of the system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among sites.

This second, still emergent mode of ethnography, upon which I focus in this review, may begin in the world system, but because of the way it evolves its object of study, this mode comes circumstantially to be of the world system as well. In particular, I focus on the various mapping strategies evident in this mode of ethnography and on the challenges that it poses for the assumptions

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and expectations embedded in the ethnographic method itself. Of course, the intellectual capital of so-called postmodernism has provided ideas and concepts for the emergence of multi-sited ethnography, but more importantly it arises in response to empirical changes in the world and therefore to transformed locations of cultural production (see especially 47). Empirically following the thread of cultural process itself impels the move toward multi-sited ethnography.

Research in anthropology that has embedded ethnographic subjects of study within contexts of a world system, historical political economies of colonialism, market regimes, state formation, and nation-building has developed explicitly within genres of Marxist anthropology (e.g. 16), anthropology and political economy (e.g. 79), and anthropology and history (e.g. 11, 79). Although some contemporary exemplars of multi-sited ethnography have developed within these traditional genres, many of the most striking examples have emerged in arenas of work that have not been identified with these typically world system–based contexts. These studies arise instead from anthropology's participation in a number of interdisciplinary (in fact, ideologically antidisciplinary) arenas that have evolved since the 1980s, such as media studies, feminist studies, science and technology studies, various strands of cultural studies, and the theory, culture, and society group (see 23, 50). Precisely because such interdisciplinary arenas do not share a clearly bounded object of study, distinct disciplinary perspectives that participate in them tend to be challenged. For ethnography this means that the world system is not the theoretically constituted holistic frame that gives context to the contemporary study of peoples or local subjects closely observed by ethnographers, but it becomes, in a piecemeal way, integral to and embedded in discontinuous, multi-sited objects of study. Cultural logics so much sought after in anthropology are always multiply produced, and any ethnographic account of these logics finds that they are at least partly constituted within sites of the so-called system (i.e. modern interlocking institutions of media, markets, states, industries, universities—the worlds of elites, experts, and middle classes). Strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships are thus at the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research.

Shifts in macro-perspectives of the world system since the 1970s have accommodated well the trends of ethnography described here. Wallerstein's world system initiative (97) revived historically embedded social science generally. It provided a grand systemic narrative of world history that invited itself to be filled in and debated through the production of regional and micro-geographic social histories and ethnographies. In 1982, Wolf (101) provided an articulation of the specifically anthropological version of the grand world system narrative, which preserved, albeit on a comparative scale, the model of

the ethnographic research project as single-site probing of local situations and peoples.

Successor views of the world system in the 1980s were pushed both by new sets of intellectual influences that operated against working within the frame of closed, though dynamic, systems narratives of macro-social processes and by the reflective awareness throughout the academy of massive changes afoot in the post–World War II international regimes of political economy. For those across disciplines interested in placing their specific projects of research in the unfolding of new arrangements for which past historical narratives were not fully adequate, a firm sense of a world system framework was replaced by various accounts of dissolution and fragmentation, as well as new processes—captured in concepts like post-Fordism (48), time-space compression (48), flexible specialization (48), the end of organized capitalism (51), and most recently, globalization (23, 44, 84) and transnationalism (39a,b)—none of which could be fully understood in terms of earlier macro-models of the capitalist world system. Even from within the heart of neoclassical economics, there are eloquent (and not altogether pessimistic) statements about the contemporary predicament of the loss of a firm systemic grasp of contemporary political economy. For example, as Robert Solow, the MIT Nobel laureate said in 1991, "There is not some glorious theoretical synthesis of capitalism that you can write down in a book and follow. You have to grope your way" (86a). What does such groping mean for the ethnographer?

For ethnographers interested in contemporary local changes in culture and society, single-sited research can no longer be easily located in a world system perspective. This perspective has become fragmented, indeed, "local" at its very core. With the collapse, then, of the easy distinction between system and lifeworld (49) as the mode for situating and designing ethnographic research on the contemporary world, the only alternatives have been to use various successor works of scholarship on global changes in political economy as the framing for single-site studies that are fully defined and contextualized in terms of those mostly nonethnographic works, or to pursue the more open-ended and speculative course of constructing subjects by simultaneously constructing the discontinuous contexts in which they act and are acted upon. The distinction between lifeworlds of subjects and the system does not hold, and the point of ethnography within the purview of its always local, close-up perspective is to discover new paths of connection and association by which traditional ethnographic concerns with agency, symbols, and everyday practices can continue to be expressed on a differently configured spatial canvas (see 56).

At stake here are conventional views and commitments to ethnographic method, which in recent times have not been discussed very much in methodological terms. Rather, novelty in method has been embedded in a discourse of

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reflexive self-presentation in contemporary ethnography in which the emphasis is on ethics, commitment, and activism. The pure, scaffold-like methodological implication of the way that multi-sited ethnography is devised in more committed language might seem to be mechanical and smack of older forms of positivism and of the disengaged positioning characteristic of value-free social science. The selection of space and sites of investigation emerge inseparably from the highly politicized way that the problem of investigation and then writing is cognized. Still, for conventional ethnography as it has been practiced in anthropology, the most interesting issues concerning emergent multi-site studies are most clearly understood in methodological terms (see especially 54a), so I have adopted such a methodological focus in this review. In the final section, however, I consider the reflexive activist persona through which this mode of ethnographic research actually articulates and designs methodological questions and research designs.

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METHODOLOGICAL ANXIETIES

Among anthropologists, the move toward multi-sited ethnography might give rise to three sets of methodological anxieties: a concern about testing the limits of ethnography, a concern about attenuating the power of fieldwork, and a concern about the loss of the subaltern.

Testing the Limits of Ethnography

Ethnography is predicated upon attention to the everyday, an intimate knowledge of face-to-face communities and groups. The idea that ethnography might expand from its committed localism to represent a system much better apprehended by abstract models and aggregate statistics seems antithetical to its very nature and thus beyond its limits. Although multi-sited ethnography is an exercise in mapping terrain, its goal is not holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal of the world system as a totality. Rather, it claims that any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site mise-en-scene of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales, rather than the conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of study. For ethnography, then, there is no global in the local-global contrast now so frequently evoked. The global is an emergent dimension of arguing about the connection among sites in a multi-sited ethnography. Thus, the multi-sited ethnography is content to stipulate some sort of total world system as long as the terms of any particular macro-construct of that system are not allowed to stand for the context of ethnographic work that becomes opportunistically constituted by the path or trajectory it takes in its design of sites.

Attenuating the Power of Fieldwork

The issue then arises of whether multi-sited ethnography is possible without attenuating the kinds of knowledges and competencies that are expected from fieldwork. In other words, is multi-site fieldwork practical? One response is that the field broadly conceived and encompassed in the fieldwork experience of most standard ethnographic projects indeed already crosses many potentially related sites of work, but as research evolves, principles of selection operate to bound the effective field in line with long-standing disciplinary perceptions about what the object of study should be. Thus, fieldwork as traditionally perceived and practiced is already itself potentially multi-sited.

Furthermore, standard cultural history (e.g. 7, 38a) is very much multi-sited, but unlike in anthropology, this feature of research is unproblematic. This undoubtedly has something to so with the fragmentary, reconstructive nature of historical method, in which the composition and probing of the relationships of dispersed materials are basic. It is perhaps anthropologists' appreciation of the difficulty of doing intensive ethnography at any site and the satisfaction that comes from such work in the past when it is done well that would give them pause when the ethnographer becomes mobile and still claims to have done good fieldwork.

Indeed, something of the mystique and reality of conventional fieldwork is lost in the move toward multi-sited ethnography. But not all sites are treated by a uniform set of fieldwork practices of the same intensity. Multi-sited ethnographies inevitably are the product of knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities. To do ethnographic research, for example, on the social grounds that produce a particular discourse of policy requires different practices and opportunities than does fieldwork among the situated communities such policy affects (see especially 22). To bring these sites into the same frame of study and to posit their relationships on the basis of first-hand ethnographic research in both is the important contribution of this kind of ethnography, regardless of the variability of the quality and accessibility of that research at different sites.

Many factors thus control for the quality of fieldwork in multi-sited research. The point is that in such research a certain valorized conception of fieldwork and what it offers wherever it is conducted threatens to be qualified, displaced, or decentered in the conduct of multi-sited ethnography. Still, what is not lost but remains essential to multi-sited research is the function of translation from one cultural idiom or language to another. This function is enhanced since it is no longer practiced in the primary, dualistic "them-us" frame of conventional ethnography but requires considerably more nuancing and shading as the practice of translation connects the several sites that the research explores along unexpected and even dissonant fractures of social location. Indeed, the persuasiveness of the broader field that any such ethnog-

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raphy maps and constructs is in its capacity to make connections through translations and tracings among distinctive discourses from site to site.

In this enhanced challenge of translation, literal language learning remains as important as it has been in preparing for traditional fieldwork. Just as "knowing the language" guarantees the integrity of traditional fieldwork and gives the bounded field—e.g. a people, an ethnic group, a community—its most important coherence as a culture, this skill is as important in multi-sited fieldwork and with even more exactitude. It is perhaps no accident that exemplars thus far of multi-sited fieldwork have been developed in monolingual (largely Anglo-American) contexts in which fine-grained knowledge of the language is unproblematic for native English speakers. Yet, if such ethnography is to flourish in arenas that anthropology has defined as emblematic interests, it will soon have to become as multilingual as it is multi-sited. In this sense, it conforms to (and often exceeds) the most exacting and substantive demands of traditional fieldwork.

The Loss of the Subaltern

It is not just any situated subjects that ethnography concerned with the world system focuses upon, but in this context, it habitually focuses upon subaltern subjects, those positioned by systemic domination (ultimately traceable to capitalist and colonialist political economy in its variety of forms). Although multi-sited ethnography may not necessarily forsake the perspective of the subaltern, it is bound to shift the focus of attention to other domains of cultural production and ultimately to challenge this frequently privileged positioning of ethnographic perspective. In the frame of science studies, Haraway is eloquent on this point: "A commitment to mobile positioning and to passionate detachment is dependent on the impossibility of innocent 'identity' politics and epistemologies as strategies for seeing from the standpoints of the subjugated in order to see well. One cannot 'be' either a cell or molecule—or a woman, colonized person, labourer, and so on—if one intends to see and see from these positions critically..." (46:192).

In yielding the ethnographic centering on the subaltern point of view, one is also decentering the resistance and accommodation framework that has organized a considerable body of valuable research (see 82) for the sake of a reconfigured space of multiple sites of cultural production in which questions of resistance, although not forgotten, are often subordinated to different sorts of questions about the shape of systemic processes themselves and complicities with these processes among variously positioned subjects.

So, it is a mistake to understand multi-sited ethnography, as it sometimes has been, as merely adding perspectives peripherally to the usual subaltern focus—e.g. adding perspectives on elites and institutions, or studying "up" (68) for mere completeness. Rather, this kind of ethnography maps a new

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object of study in which previous situating narratives like that of resistance and accommodation become qualified by expanding what is ethnographically "in the picture" of research both as it evolves in the field and as it is eventually written up.

Nor is multi-sited ethnography merely a different kind of controlled comparison, long a part of anthropological practice, as it has also sometimes been understood, although it does represent a revival of comparative study in anthropology. Conventional controlled comparison in anthropology is indeed multi-sited, but it operates on a linear spatial plane, whether the context is a region, a broader culture area, or the world system (see e.g. 31, 85); comparisons are generated for homogeneously conceived conceptual units (e.g. peoples, communities, locales), and such comparisons usually are developed from distinctly bounded periods or separate projects of fieldwork.

In projects of multi-sited ethnographic research, de facto comparative dimensions develop instead as a function of the fractured, discontinuous plane of movement and discovery among sites as one maps an object of study and needs to posit logics of relationship, translation, and association among these sites. Thus, in multi-sited ethnography, comparison emerges from putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, complexly connected real-world sites of investigation. The object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated, so any ethnography of such an object will have a comparative dimension that is integral to it, in the form of juxtapositions of phenomena that conventionally have appeared to be (or conceptually have been kept) "worlds apart." Comparison reenters the very act of ethnographic specification by a research design of juxtapositions in which the global is collapsed into and made an integral part of parallel, related local situations rather than something monolithic or external to them. This move toward comparison embedded in the multi-sited ethnography stimulates accounts of cultures composed in a landscape for which there is as yet no developed theoretical conception or descriptive model.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ARENAS AND NEW OBJECTS OF STUDY

There are several inspirations for multi-sited ethnography within the high theoretical capital associated with postmodernism: One might think, for example, of Foucault's power/knowledge and heterotopia (18), Deleuze & Guattari's rhizome (13), Derrida's dissemination (15), and Lyotard's juxtaposition by "blocking together" (78). These concepts anticipate many of the contemporary social and cultural conditions with which ethnographers and other scholars are trying to come to terms in shaping their objects of study in the absence

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of reliable holistic models of macroprocess for contextualizing referents of research, such as "the world system," "capitalism," "the state," "the nation," etc. However, such high theoretical capital usually is not the most proximate source for the terms by which multi-sited ethnographic research is thought through and conceived. Instead, multi-sited ethnography is intellectually constructed in terms of the specific constructions and discourses appearing within a number of highly self-conscious interdisciplinary arenas that use the diverse high theoretical capital that inspires postmodernism to reconfigure the conditions for the study of contemporary cultures and societies. This section briefly samples three such milieus in which objects of study have been evoked appropriate for composite, multi-method, mobile works of scholarship, including specifically multi-sited ethnography.

Unfortunately, there are many more concepts and visions for doing multi-sited ethnography than there are achieved exemplars (see next section). There is no doubt, however, that within the various interdisciplinary arenas, the following concepts for reconfigured objects of study come not from detached theoretical exercises, but from vital and active research efforts in progress, the forms of whose written and published results are yet to be established fully.

Media studies has been one important arena in which multi-sited ethnographic research has emerged. Distinct genres of research have appeared on production (especially in television and film industries), on the one hand, and on the reception of such productions, on the other. These two functions have been encompassed and related to each other within the frame of individual projects of research, thus making even more complex the trajectory of modes of ethnographic research that had already tended to be multi-sited in their construction of objects of study (77).

In anthropology, there has been a shift from older interests in ethnographic film toward a more encompassing terrain for the study of indigenous media [Ginsburg's writings have been key in this shift (35–37)]. This change has been stimulated by ethnographic study and participation in contemporary indigenous peoples' movements within and across nation-states. The control of means of mass communication and the activist role of indigenous peoples as media producers in these movements have reconfigured the space in which the ethnography of many of anthropology's traditional subjects can effectively be done; they also have made this space inherently multi-sited (see e.g. 96). The above-noted merging of production and reception sites in media studies has reinforced this tendency in the design of ethnographic research on specifically indigenous media.

The social and cultural study of science and technology (see Franklin, this volume) is another major arena in which genres of multi-sited ethnographic research have established their importance. Theorists such as Latour (52, 53) and Haraway (45, 46) have been crucially important in pushing the ethno-

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graphic dimensions of this field beyond pioneering lab studies to more complex (and multi-sited) social and cultural time-spaces. Haraway's cyborg (45) has been an especially influential construct in stimulating field researchers to think unconventionally about the juxtaposed sites that constitute their objects of study (17).

In anthropological work within the field of cultural studies of science and technology, the tendency toward multi-sited research is most prevalent in the following topical areas: the study of issues concerning reproduction and reproductive technologies (originating in an important domain of feminist research in medical anthropology) (38); epidemiological studies in medical anthropology (4a); studies of new modes of electronic communication such as the Internet (see e.g. 19, 61); and studies concerned with environmentalism and toxic disasters (e.g. 54, 88, 102). Another area is the study of the emergence of biotechnology and "big" science projects like the human genome project [of particular interest here is Rabinow's (76) work on the discovery and commodification of the polymerase chain reaction, especially related to the multi-sited style of his earlier work on French modernity (75)]. The title of a recent survey of biotechnology, *Gene Dreams, Wall Street, Academia, and the Rise of Biotechnology* (93), captures the methodological tendency toward multi-sited objects of study.

Amid the diffuse inspirations and influences of the broad interdisciplinary arena of cultural studies in the United States, the collection edited by Grossberg et al (41) surveys the possibilities and limits of this remarkable remaking of the early and equally diffuse discussions of postmodernism during the 1970s and 1980s. Within this diffuse area of cultural studies, the Public Culture project deserves special mention because it addresses the long-standing concerns of anthropology and area studies. It was originated by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge and developed through the independent Center for Transnational Cultural Studies in Chicago (8), with the journal *Public Culture* as its major publication. This project has constituted a major point of intersection for many diverse strands of cultural studies, broadly conceived around issues of the rethinking of ideas of culture (especially questions of trans- and cross-cultural production) in the face of contemporary world system changes. Appadurai's widely read paper (4) on the global cultural economy has provided a complex multi-sited vision for research in this transnational domain that defies older practices of "locating" culture(s) in place(s).

Theoretically rethinking concepts of space and place in ethnographic research (43, 47), for which the work of cultural geographers and sociologists (30, 86) has been a reinforcing inspiration, has stimulated the opening of established genres of anthropological research to multi-sited constructions of ethnographic research designs. For example, migration studies have become part of a much richer body of work on mobile and contingently settled popula-

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tions, across borders, in exile, and in diasporas (e.g. 9, 33, 71). This work, concerned theoretically with the construction of identities in global-local frames, merges with the methods and spaces constructed by media studies (e.g. 1, 69).

Development studies are similarly being reconceived. Important critiques by Ferguson (25) and Escobar (20) of older development agencies and paradigms have been followed by a much more diverse sense of the field in which any study of development must now be evolved. For example, Escobar's study of a region in Colombia (21) draws the intersections among social movements, older development approaches, and the powerful global environmentalist doctrine of biodiversity. Again, redrawing the boundaries of topics of study here inevitably causes overlap with the terrains being established by other interdisciplinary arenas such as media studies and science and technology studies. But the most interesting and specific manifestations of these reconfigurations of perspective in overlapping interdisciplinary arenas are in the modes of constructing multi-sited spaces of investigation within individual projects of research, to which we now turn.

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MODES OF CONSTRUCTION

Powerful conceptual visions of multi-sited spaces for ethnographic research that have been especially influential in anthropology, such as Haraway's construct of the cyborg (45) and Appadurai's idea of the global cultural economy with its variety of "scapes" (4), do not also function as guides for designing the research that would exemplify and fulfill such visions. This requires a more literal discussion of methodological issues, such as how to construct the multi-sited space through which the ethnographer traverses.

Such explicitly methodological discussions are rare. An interesting exception is Strathern's (89) highly theoretical discussion of rethinking problems of relationality and connectivity in light of influential ideas within science and technology studies deriving from chaos theory (39) as well as from Haraway's notion of the cyborg. Despite the abstract character of Strathern's work, she remains close to issues of how ethnographic research is to be designed.

Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography. Indeed, such multi-sited ethnography is a revival of a sophisticated practice of constructivism, one of the most interesting and fertile practices of representation and investigation by the Russian avant-garde of momentous social change just before and after their revolution. Constructivists viewed the artist as an engineer whose task was to construct useful objects,

much like a factory worker, while actively participating in the building of a new society. Film-making, especially the work of Vertov (e.g. "The Man with the Movie Camera"), was one of the most creative and de facto ethnographic media through which constructivism (72) was produced. From a methodological perspective, Vertov's work is an excellent inspiration for multi-sited ethnography.

Multi-sited ethnographies define their objects of study through several different modes or techniques. These techniques might be understood as practices of construction through (preplanned or opportunistic) movement and of tracing within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it.

Follow the People

This technique is perhaps the most obvious and conventional mode of materializing a multi-sited ethnography. Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* is the archetypal account (55). The exchange or circulation of objects or the extension in space of particular cultural complexes such as ritual cycles and pilgrimages may be rationales for such ethnography, but the procedure is to follow and stay with the movements of a particular group of initial subjects. Migration studies are perhaps the most common contemporary research genre of this basic mode of multi-sited ethnography. Within this genre, a recent paper by Rouse (80) [but see also the statement by Gupta & Ferguson (42) as well as their edited collection (43)] is notable and often cited for moving migration studies (e.g. 40) into the terrain of diaspora studies, which has arisen as one of the key genres of cultural studies. Rouse follows his Mexican subjects across borders and sites in the conventional mode of migration studies, but in the spirit of contemporary, self-consciously multi-sited ethnography, he materializes a new object of study, a sense of a diasporic world independent of the mere movement of subjects from one place to another.

Willis's study (99), and Foley's study (29) of a school in Texas, inspired by the former, is a foreshortened version of "following the people" in that their strategic significance as single-site research with multiple sites evoked is their "off-stage" knowledge, so to speak, of what happens to their subjects in the other sites. The sense of "system" in their work arises from the connection between ethnographic portraits of their subjects and the posited relationship of these portraits to the fates of these same subjects in other locations.

Follow the Thing

This mode of constructing the multi-sited space of research involves tracing the circulation through different contexts of a manifestly material object of study (at least as initially conceived), such as commodities, gifts, money,

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works of art, and intellectual property. This is perhaps the most common approach to the ethnographic study of processes in the capitalist world system. Indeed, this technique is at the heart of Wallerstein's method for fine-grained study of process in the world system (97:4):

> The concept of commodity chain is central to our understanding of the processes of the capitalist world-economy.... Take any consumable product, say clothing. It is manufactured. The manufacturing process minimally involves material inputs, machinery, and labor. Material inputs are either manufactured or produced in some way. Machinery is manufactured. And labor must be recruited either locally or by immigration, and must be fed.... We may continue to trace each "box" further back in terms of its material inputs, machinery, land, labor. The totality constitutes a commodity chain.

Wallerstein's commodity chain is hardly laid out with a specifically ethnographic sensibility, but it is clearly a blueprint appropriate for multi-sited research.

In anthropology, Mintz's culture history of sugar (66) is an exemplar of the "follow the thing" technique, but also within a conventional political economy framework that depends on a master historical narrative of the workings of colonialism and capitalism. However, the most important and influential statement of this technique for multi-sited research on the circulation of things is Appadurai's introduction to his collection, *The Social Life of Things* (3, see also 12). In tracing the shifting status of things as commodities, gifts, and resources in their circulations through different contexts, Appadurai presumes very little about the governance of a controlling narrative of macroprocess in capitalist political economy but allows the sense of system to emerge ethnographically and speculatively by following paths of circulation. Although there are no ethnographies in the genre traditionally associated with studies of contemporary capitalist political economy that literally take a thing-oriented approach, an impressive ethnographic literature on consumption and commodities has appeared, which if not multi-sited in actual research design, is produced in the speculative, open-ended spirit of tracing things in and through contexts (see especially 65, 98).

The most explicit experimentation with multi-sited research using this technique seems to have emerged in studies of contemporary worlds of art and aesthetics (see especially 63). Notable examples include Myers's study (67) of the circulation of Pintupi acrylic paintings in Western art worlds, Savigliano's study of Tango (81a), Steiner's study (87) of the transit of African curios into Western art markets, along with Taylor & Barbash's film (92) based on Steiner's study, Silverman's study of taste in Reagan's America (83) across three intensively explored sites, and Feld's mapping (24) of "world music" and "world beat."

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Finally, among some of the most influential, self-consciously multi-sited work in the arena of science and technology studies, the "follow the thing" mode of constructing the space of investigation has been prominent. Latour's work (52, 53) exemplifies this mode, albeit less so than does Haraway's, which has as much a metaphorical as a material sense of the things she traces. Latour's study (53) of the triumph of Pasteur's biology in France provocatively places, with a claim of equivalence, microbes, machines, and humans in various locations on the same plane or map of investigation.

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Follow the Metaphor

When the thing traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, then the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors guides the design of ethnography. This mode involves trying to trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media. Haraway's influential studies work primarily through this mode of constructing the object of study. In anthropology, the most fully achieved multi-sited ethnography in this mode (and in a sense, the most fully achieved and rationalized multi-site ethnography, whatever mode of construction, thus far) is Martin's *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture From the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (64). Her initial interest is in ways of thinking about the body's immune system at various locations in American society—in the mass media, "on the street," in the treatment of AIDS, among alternative practitioners, and among scientists. She is interested in the variety of distinct discourses and registers concerning the immune system and in the ethnographic characteristics of their social locations. She uses a variety of methods and modes of participation for each location she probes—some in more depth than others.

Martin notes a pivotal point in her research: "One of the clearest moments of 'implosion' in my fieldwork, when elements from different research contexts seemed to collapse into one another with great force, occurred in a graduate course I was taking in immunology..." (64:91). With an ear for metaphor, Martin makes the association between the trope of flexibility so prominent in scientific conceptions of the immune system and the regime of flexible specialization so salient in late twentieth-century capitalism. She is then led to a fascinating exploration of complexity theory in which the trope of flexibility seems to be most systematically thought out, to theories and practices of corporate management, and to new ideologies of work and how they are inculcated in training programs in which she participates. Her provocative argument about an emergent form of post-Darwinist subjectivity in the United States depends for its persuasiveness on the multi-sited ethnographic space she has tracked by working through discovered metaphorical associations. This mode of constructing multi-sited research is thus especially potent for suturing

locations of cultural production that had not been obviously connected and, consequently, for creating empirically argued new envisionings of social landscapes.

Follow the Plot, Story, or Allegory

There are stories or narratives told in the frame of single-site fieldwork that might themselves serve as an heuristic for the fieldworker constructing multi-sited ethnographic research. This has been a routine technique in the disciplinary history of Levi-Straussian myth analysis within so-called traditional societies. In the framework of modernity, the character of the stories that people tell as myth in their everyday situations is not as important to fieldworkers tracking processes and associations within the world system as is their own situated sense of social landscapes. Reading for the plot and then testing this against the reality of ethnographic investigation that constructs its sites according to a compelling narrative is an interesting, virtually untried mode of constructing multi-sited research. However, Brooks's reading for the plot (6) in classic Freudian case studies as a way of developing innovative re-envisionings of relationships in Victorian society is suggestive of the way that plots in ethnographically found stories and narratives might be used to diversify the space of an object of study in fieldwork (58).

Perhaps the one genre of work where this technique is now being used is the renewed interest among anthropologists and others in social memory. Boyarin's recent collection (5) on the remapping of memory concerns social struggles over alternative visions about the definition of collective reality. Processes of remembering and forgetting produce precisely those kinds of narratives, plots, and allegories that threaten to reconfigure in often disturbing ways versions (myths, in fact) that serve state and institutional orders. In this way, such narratives and plots are a rich source of connections, associations, and suggested relationships for shaping multi-sited objects of research.

Follow the Life or Biography

The life history, a particularly favored form of ethnographic data in recent years, is a special case of following the plot. How to produce and develop life histories as ethnography has been the subject of much reflection, but the use of biographical narrative as a means of designing multi-sited research rarely has been considered. Fischer has produced one of the few discussions (26) of the use of life history in this way, and his work with Abedi (28) is a partial implementation of a strategy of developing more systematic analysis, generalized from the story of a particular individual's life [see also his recent work (27) on scientists' autobiographies as documents that suggest more general ways to materialize rich and diverse cultural formations within the history and practices of various sciences].

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Life histories reveal juxtapositions of social contexts through a succession of narrated individual experiences that may be obscured in the structural study of processes as such. They are potential guides to the delineation of ethnographic spaces within systems shaped by categorical distinctions that may make these spaces otherwise invisible. These spaces are not necessarily subaltern spaces (although they may be most clearly revealed in subaltern life histories), but they are shaped by unexpected or novel associations among sites and social contexts suggested by life history accounts.

Follow the Conflict

Finally, following the parties to conflicts defines another mode for generating a multi-sited terrain in ethnographic research. In small-scale societies, this has been an established technique ("the extended case method") in the anthropology of law. In the more complex public spheres of contemporary societies, this technique is a much more central, organizing principle for multi-sited ethnography. Beyond the context of the anthropology of law, most notable contested issues in contemporary society involve simultaneously spheres of everyday life, legal institutions, and mass media. Ethnographic study of these issues thus requires multi-sited construction, perhaps more obviously than do any of the other above modes. The collections edited by Sarat & Kearns (81) and the Amherst Seminar on Law and Society (2) are excellent samplings of work that is inherently multi-sited. Ginsburg's study (34) of the abortion controversy in a small community and Gaines's study (32) of conflict over the legal status of cultural productions as copyrighted exemplify how law- and media-focused topics of ethnographic research ramify quickly into multi-sited terrains of investigation.

The Strategically Situated (Single-Site) Ethnography

As with Paul Willis's now classic study (99) of English working-class boys at school, some ethnography may not move around literally but may nonetheless embed itself in a multi-sited context. This is different than assuming or constructing a world system context.

The sense of the system beyond the particular site of research remains contingent and not assumed. Indeed, what goes on within a particular locale in which research is conducted is often calibrated with its implication for what goes on in another related locale, or other locales, even though the other locales may not be within the frame of the research design or resulting ethnography (e.g. in Willis's work the particular kind of interest that he develops in the boys at school, on which he focuses solely, is guided by his knowledge of what happens to them on the factory floor).

This strategically situated ethnography might be thought of as a foreshortened multi-sited project and should be distinguished from the single-site

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ethnography that examines its local subjects' articulations primarily as subalterns to a dominating capitalist or colonial system. The strategically situated ethnography attempts to understand something broadly about the system in ethnographic terms as much as it does its local subjects: It is only local circumstantially, thus situating itself in a context or field quite differently than does other single-site ethnography.

The consideration of this foreshortened version of the multi-sited project gives us the opportunity to ask what sorts of local knowledges are distinctively probed within the sites of any multi-sited ethnography. If not the resistance and accommodation frame alone for studying subjects' articulation to larger systems, then what? The key question is perhaps: What among locally probed subjects is iconic with or parallel to the identifiably similar or same phenomenon within the idioms and terms of another related or "worlds apart" site? Answering this question involves the work of comparative translation and tracing among sites, which I suggested were basic to the methodology of multi-sited ethnography. Within a single site, the crucial issue concerns the detectable system-awareness in the everyday consciousness and actions of subjects' lives. This is not an abstract theoretical awareness such as a social scientist might seek, but a sensed, partially articulated awareness of specific other sites and agents to which particular subjects have (not always tangible) relationships. In Willis's study, it is how much the boys manifest in their talk a "knowingness" about the very specific system and set of relations in which they are caught as labor. In the more fractured, discontinuous sites of Martin's study (64), it is lay notions "on the street," so to speak, of the body's immune system, compared to notions of the immune system in the lab, compared to ideas of flexibility in the corporate boardroom. In my study of the dynastic rich (62), it is how the abstract management of wealth elsewhere subtly enters the daily lives of prominent families. In the vision of the novelist DeLillo (14), it is getting at the "white noise" in any setting that makes the ethnographic probing of either multi-sited or strategically situated research distinctive.

In iconically identifying a cultural phenomenon in one site that is reproduced elsewhere, a number of conceptual discussions are guides to how to see or ethnographically probe a "sensibility" for the system among situated subjects. Taussig's essays (90) under the governing notion of the "nervous system" are suggestive here, as is his ethnographically embedded investigation (91) of Benjamin's "mimetic faculty." Pietz's (73) discussion of Marx's notion of fetishism in the theory of capitalism makes this important concept usable as another way of thinking about the system-sensitive dimensions of the everyday articulated thoughts and actions of ethnographic subjects. Studies of the phenomenology of the ethnographically situated awareness among subjects of doubled or multiply constructed selfhood in contexts of new forms of electronic communication (95) and the inheritance of great wealth (62) provide

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clues to the ethnographic registering of a multi-sited sensibility within any particular site. Tsing's recent ethnography (94) might also be understood as a bold attempt to establish a new way of seeing the broader registers of rich materials arising from fieldwork in an out-of-the-way place. Finally, a primary goal of the *Late Editions* series of annuals (59–61) is to expose, under different themes, the varieties of *fin-de-siècle* consciousness and sensibilities embedded in different sites as they are articulated by interlocutors in experiments with the interview or conversation format, employed by anthropologists and other scholars who return to sites of previous work.

The most important form of local knowledge in which the multi-sited ethnographer is interested is that which parallels the ethnographer's own interest—in mapping itself. Sorting out the relationships of the local to the global is a salient and pervasive form of local knowledge that remains to be recognized and discovered in the embedded idioms and discourses of any contemporary site that can be defined by its relationship to the world system. In this cognitive and intellectual identification between the investigator and variously situated subjects in the emergent field of multi-sited research, reflexivity is most powerfully defined as a dimension of method, serving to displace or recontextualize the sort of literal methodological discussion that I have provided above. Haraway's discussion of positioning (46) is perhaps the most eloquent statement of the reflexive context and significance of multi-sited research. In contemporary multi-sited research projects moving between public and private spheres of activity, from official to subaltern contexts, the ethnographer is bound to encounter discourses that overlap with his or her own. In any contemporary field of work, there are always others within who know (or want to know) what the ethnographer knows, albeit from a different subject position, or who want to know what the ethnographer wants to know. Such ambivalent identifications, or perceived identifications, immediately locate the ethnographer within the terrain being mapped and reconfigure any kind of methodological discussion that presumes a perspective from above or "nowhere."

In practice, multi-sited fieldwork is thus always conducted with a keen awareness of being within the landscape, and as the landscape changes across sites, the identity of the ethnographer requires renegotiation. Only in the writing of ethnography, as an effect of a particular mode of publication itself, is the privilege and authority of the anthropologist unambiguously reassumed, even when the publication gives an account of the changing identities of the fieldworker in the multi-sited field.

The virtue of Haraway's discussion of positioning is that it argues persuasively for the objectivity (rather than the often presumed subjectivism) that arises from such a scrupulous, methodological practice of reflexivity. However, the qualification or effacement of the traditional privileged self-identification as ethnographer that seems inevitable in multi-sited research in favor of

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a constantly mobile, recalibrating practice of positioning in terms of the ethnographer's shifting affinities for, affiliations with, as well as alienations from, those with whom he or she interacts at different sites constitutes a distinctly different sense of "doing research."

ETHNOGRAPHER AS CIRCUMSTANTIAL ACTIVIST

It is appropriate in conclusion to come full circle and to place the literal methodological concerns developed in this review in terms of a particular ethos of self-perception commonly evidenced in multi-sited research out of the just-mentioned experience of positioning. The conventional "how-to" methodological questions of social science seem to be thoroughly embedded in or merged with the political-ethical discourse of self-identification developed by the ethnographer in multi-sited research. The movement among sites (and levels of society) lends a character of activism to such an investigation. This is not (necessarily) the traditional self-defined activist role claimed by the left-liberal scholar for his or her work. That is, it is not the activism claimed in relation to affiliation with a particular social movement outside academia or the domain of research, nor is it the academic claim to an imagined vanguard role for a particular style of writing or scholarship with reference to a posited ongoing politics in a society or culture at a specific historic moment. Rather, it is activism quite specific and circumstantial to the conditions of doing multi-sited research itself. It is a playing out in practice of the feminist slogan of the political as personal, but in this case it is the political as synonymous with the professional persona and, within the latter, what used to be discussed in a clinical way as the methodological.

In conducting multi-sited research, one finds oneself with all sorts of cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments. These conflicts are resolved, perhaps ambivalently, not by refuge in being a detached anthropological scholar, but in being a sort of ethnographer-activist, renegotiating identities in different sites as one learns more about a slice of the world system. For example, in Martin's *Flexible Bodies* (64), she is an AIDS volunteer at one site, a medical student at another, and a corporate trainee at a third. Politically committed though she is at the start of her research, ethnographer though she is throughout it, the identity or persona that gives a certain unity to her movement through such disjointed space is the circumstantial activism involved in working in such a variety of sites, where the politics and ethics of working in any one reflects on work in the others.

In certain sites, one seems to be working with, and in others one seems to be working against, changing sets of subjects. This condition of shifting personal positions in relation to one's subjects and other active discourses in a field that overlap with one's own generates a definite sense of doing more than

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just ethnography, and it is this quality that provides a sense of being an activist for and against positioning in even the most self-perceived apolitical fieldworker.

Finally, the circumstantial commitments that arise in the mobility of multi-sited fieldwork provide a kind of psychological substitute for the reassuring sense of "being there," of participant observation in traditional single-site fieldwork. One often affiliates with literal activists in the space of multi-sited research, and given anthropology's past preference for focusing on subaltern or marginal subjects, such activists are often surrogates for one's "people" of traditional research. The emerging and circumstantial sense of activism that develops among ethnographers in a multi-sited space and their close personal affiliations with cultural producers (e.g. artists, filmmakers, organizers), who themselves move across various sites of activity, thus preserve for ethnographers engaged in multi-sited research an essential link with the traditional practice of participant observation, single-site ethnography in the peripatetic, translative mapping of brave new worlds.

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